

Dedication

To my mother Bella Roos and her deceased husband Lou:

The spiritual keystones of my life

To my deceased father Solly Zeve and his wife Mary:

From whom I received my Jewish foundation

To my friends:

You've been roofs over my head in inclement weather

To the rabbis, ballet masters and tutors of love:

You've been the sheetrock that formed my walls

To the literary world of agents, editors and publishers:

You helped me nail it

To the rebar of romantic relationships:

Those who strengthened my underpinnings

To the girders of goodwill from people everywhere:

You helped me raise my frame a little higher each day

And with special thanks to my Teacher:

She gave me the time, loving devotion and guidance

To build a schoolhouse within

Where She's teaching me about

Self-love

Nine Truths About Self-Love

(1)

You only get one great love in a lifetime: your own
All the rest are for practice

(2)

Loving another person is hard
But loving yourself is even harder
Both are better to have lost than never to have had at all

(3)

To love others you must give of yourself compassionately
To love yourself you must give to yourself passionately

(4)

Self-love is a fire:
Thoughts of self-love are illuminating
But the warmth of self-love has to be felt to be fully real

(5)

To know myself makes it possible to love you
But to love my self makes it possible to *like* you

(6)

You can't give anyone anything you don't yet have

(7)

I wanted someone to else love me
To do the hard work I didn't want to have to do for myself

(8)

I love myself, therefore I am

(9)

I am a spiritual container
Wisdom, self-love and generosity are my contents

Table #1 Self-Love

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|--|---------------|------------|------------|
| The Pursuit of Joy | | | |
| A D U L T | Guilt | Other-Love | Loyalty |
| | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| | | | |
| A D O L E S C E N T | Humiliation | Sorrow | Admiration |
| | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| | | | |
| C H I L D | Shame | Anger | Acceptance |
| | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| | | | |
| I N F A N T | Embarrassment | Fear | Tolerance |
| | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| | | | |
| The Pursuit of Happiness | | | |

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Introduction to Self-Love

The knowledge it takes to succeed in life goes beyond a mere collection of facts. Facts alone lead only to friction. A computer holds facts in a form called “data.” It can even cross reference data to convey knowledge. But only a human being can achieve wisdom. Wisdom, not knowledge, will lead to peace on earth because wisdom demands something no machine will ever be able to duplicate. Wisdom requires self-love.

The difference between garden-variety “love” and *the wisdom of self-love* is exemplified in the story of Adam and Eve who ate the forbidden fruit of good and evil from the Tree of Knowledge. We’ve all eaten from that tree, but wisdom will lead you to conclude that the fruit of that tree was green when it was first picked. Wisdom is knowledge that’s had time to ripen.

“Good” needs time to develop into love. Love is ruby-red, ripe goodness. Being good because someone told you to do so always has a bit of a bitter aftertaste. Being good for *goodness* sake comes only over time and with maturity. You can’t tell someone that the sweetness in doing good for others will lead to “self-love.” They have to discover that for themselves.

“Evil” has to sicken you with the realization that there’s a side to freedom (autonomy) that can unleash utter horror. Only then will you appreciate the wisdom that comes from the knowledge you derived from making mistakes, correcting and atoning for them.

Evil was first introduced in the Creation Story of the Hebrew Bible as a simple “error of judgment.” God could have stopped Adam and Eve from knowing evil, but She let it happen so we could learn that by correcting our mistakes we can become a little wiser than we were before. (She certainly had no reason to get Her nose so bent out of shape over one lousy, little fruit that was probably still green.)

The seeds of the fruits of good and evil, replanted generation after generation, have blossomed into today’s gratitude to God who is our Source of all love and wisdom. We know that when we’re willing to till the soil and prune the tree of knowledge that grows in our soul, we find that the eden of spiritual awakening is, and always was, within. The Hebrew Bible becomes an extended metaphor for the way we were made and a stepping-stone to the other belief systems of the Western world.

The seat of love has historically been referred to as the “heart,” and the seat of wisdom, the “head.” In a general sense, when we observe our thoughts and feelings, we find we’re not far removed from

our religious ancestors, Adam and Eve. The only difference is that *our* lives are consumed with millions of lessons in learning to differentiate good from bad, while theirs was a story about just one.

The word “paradise” may actually stem from the Hebrew word, “*pardes*,” which means “orchard.” Our lives are an orchard of experiences. Eden not only exists all around us in the experiences we pick and choose that teach us more each day about good and evil until we become connoisseurs of the love and wisdom derived from our experiences; Eden grows our awareness of our self from within. This wakes us up to our conscience, which is our guide.

Eden is that little plot of precious land, given to us by God, called our “soul.” Eden is reflected out from within onto this place we share called “reality.” Eden grew out of Genesis to become “Israel,” our Jewish land of milk and honey. Israel is the outer place we come from as a chosen people that signifies an inner space every human being is free to journey to.

The fruits of good and evil lie in each of us, but knowledge of our “self” is the result of everything we learn, whether we choose to learn it or are forced to. Self-knowledge isn’t low hanging fruit, by any means. The sweetest knowledge of all is always hanging on a branch just above our head, budding, blossoming and blooming in, what’s called, the “imagination.” It’s a branch easily reached by children who climb themselves like a tree, fearlessly, to play. Your imagination is a branch you may want to revisit more often as the result of reading this book.

Until you were old enough to consciously choose to know yourself, you weren’t aware of the most forbidden of all fruits. It wasn’t sex. Nor was it disobedience of authority. You’ve eaten them, so you already know... The most forbidden fruit was always “self-love” because self-love requires you to branch out of your comfort zone using only the aid of your imagination.

Before you got up the nerve to pick “you,” the orchards of experiences were only around you. It may have sometimes felt you had to defy authority just to reach up to try something new and mysteriously different. Knowing you and loving this incredibly inaccessible person was a mystery you had to find the courage to choose.

A part of you has always allowed you to pursue self-knowledge. But another, darker side of yourself may have felt banished from your own eden, forced to eat from other people’s trees. It was when you cursed yourself for allowing *others’* consciences to

act as *your* guide that you always returned to your own tree, hungrier than ever for knowledge of your love.

Deep in your heart, you always knew you weren't totally at ease with only what you'd learned about the world through the eyes of others. Deep within, something called to you to learn to appreciate your self.

"Religion" is the search for *God's* love. More than 3,000 years of organized religion has brought humanity through the bondage of paganism experienced by the Hebrews in Egypt through the Holocaust of European Jewry caused by "Christians" and the assault on Israel by Islam today.

But today, self-love brings the harvest season to everyone through our common "spirituality." Self-love gives us a personal reason for the Fall. In the autumn of a woman's year here on earth, a golden light mysteriously appears from the setting sun that casts long, twisted shadows she's never seen before. A soulful gal feels a chill in the air as this inner light inches closer toward her horizon, darkness and the end of light, as she knows it.

This autumn light reminds her that her four seasons are almost at an end. As the leaves of youth begin to turn from green, to red, to brown, a woman is slowly laid bare before herself. And yearning to love the wisdom she's gleaned may fill her with an odd fear that may make her tremble from the chill in this late, autumn air.

With wisdom she can correct mistakes about who she thought she was and who she turned out to be. But with *self-love* she can feel good about herself despite the fact that each day grows a little shorter. To treat herself tomorrow with more dignity than she did today, she may want to learn about the wisdom in God having created her just the way she is.

More than I wanted to love myself, I wanted the world to know how terribly I'd hurt myself. But I couldn't find a voice for that pain and suffering in my career. I couldn't say how I really felt in bed at night in the arms of the ones I'd loved. I couldn't even find the words I needed through helping others. Nothing and no one was able to teach me how to teach others to avoid self-hate. I wasn't blind. I wasn't deaf. I was dumb. I couldn't utter the words I needed. I was forbidden fruit unto myself.

God only knows what She was thinking in creating woman in Her image. Only She who guides our conscience as it staggers blindly forward in the dark can tell us what's out there that we can't see. Only She holds the answer to the question "why me?" Everyone is in God's heart, and we know Her heart is all loving. But those who think they

can get into Her head may be unwise in the way they try to do so. Their conscience may be unclean.

I identified only as the victim in the Creation Story, the fruit. I don't love every man and woman I meet, and I have an aversion to snakes. But I've markedly improved my ability to describe the injustices I've perpetrated against me. I'm not forbidden fruit unto myself any longer. I know what I want to say. "I hurt inside." I feel picked. I feel separate. I feel alone.

I know what it feels like to be detached from my Source. I know what it feels like to feel mortally wounded by man's pitifully narrow-minded perception of God. I know the outcomes of good and evil from the *inside* in, as well as from the *outside* in.

I'm the product of a woman and a man who were persecuted for being Jewish during the Second World War. But God created me as a "fruit" who was persecuted for another reason. I had to learn what it felt like to be disconnected from my roots. I had to find the strength to grab hold of the Rock with new roots that go deeper than the darkness in straight men's hearts, down to the soil in my own soul.

I didn't fall naturally from God's grace. I was ripped away from it; hastily consumed by an indifferent world; used; evacuated; and discarded with disgust. There are many out there who now have good things to say about fruits like me, but that doesn't change the fact that *I'm* still in pain.

Good and evil had to ripen in me slowly, just as it did for the characters in the Hebrew Testament who came after Adam and Eve. To learn to love myself, I had to go through unspeakable fear, anger and sorrow at being me. I no longer feel that awesome revulsion of me at my core. But self-hate is always tempting me back to the way I was...

To mature wisely, I had to go through decades of guilt: the embarrassment, shame and humiliation of not knowing why I felt so bad about me. I know now it wasn't because I love men, but because I couldn't love myself any better than I could love men.

I hope this book will help you appreciate yourself and the Eden of the Hebrew Bible lost to fools through bickering and malice. I hope you'll look up through the leaves of that awesome tree growing in your soul and see the sun shining down from above, shedding love through you and onto the ground of your being. I hope you plant seeds of self-love in your garden. I hope you prune you. I hope you watch your love blossom and fruit into wisdom that you'll share with others. I hope your roots will grasp the Rock and that you'll turn this world into an orchard of self-discovery for all to witness you enjoy.

Israel is the land of milk and honey because the “milk” of life is “love,” and “wisdom,” “honey.” But if you aren’t familiar with the Western tradition that’s rooted in the Hebrew Bible, you may not appreciate the glorious tree God planted on earth: Judaism; the grafts of Christianity and Islam that share our roots; and the delightfully different fruits that blossom from each branch.

You’re surely growing day-by-day like a tree, even if your nature isn’t always apparent to you. Self-love is blossoming within you at this very minute. Perhaps you smell the pungent aroma of the buds of your own good and evil intentions. Perhaps you anticipate the love and wisdom that will blossom in your tomorrows.

Spring draws everyone effortlessly toward summer, but the autumn comes quickly before the year is done. I hope you’re looking forward to this day’s harvest of:

The Wisdom of Self-Love

Barry Emanuel Zeve
San Francisco, CA
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Class Clown in the School of Self-Love

My parents didn't have the wisdom to teach me to love myself. In fact, they gave me the distinct impression I only needed other people to love me. They had no idea how wisdom is derived, or I'm sure they would have told me. They made me feel guilty for the least little thing I did, but that only made me want to hide my mistakes rather than admit and correct them.

Life is a school of self-love. My parents brought me to school and for that I'm thankful. But it took a lot of hard work on my part to walk away from my seat with the class clowns at the back of the class who were all consumed with good and evil. I had a lot of mistakes to correct and forgive myself for and a lot of goodness to watch blossom into love before I could say I'd earned a seat in the front row.

My parents taught me that "pride" cometh before the fall, and that's simply not so. "Ignorance" does. All the physical, emotional and spiritual spills I've taken in life were initiated by self-ignorance, not my pride. Pride feels like soaring on currents of air, high above the ground. Pride is the feeling you get when you pass a class with a good grade. It was self-ignorance that made me feel like a failure. It was self-ignorance that always made me want to give up.

My parents told me hatred is the opposite of love, without explaining to me that self-ignorance leads to self-hate. True, they taught me to appreciate my education, but they omitted to teach me that hatred of other people's ignorance would illuminate me to my own. I was in a spiritual catch-22 most of my life. I couldn't love me; I could only hate others. It was admitting my ignorance of me that turned out to be the only way out of self-hate.

My parents trained me to love them and my siblings. And my culture taught me to love the stranger regardless of his strange ways. But nobody told me *why* it was important to love myself. And they certainly gave me no clue as to *how*...

Nobody told me that *not* loving myself was arrogant. I had to find out the hard way that I not only deserved my love more than anyone else does. I *require* it.

I had to discover for myself that there are three rewards for expressing love: (1) *thankfulness* to others; (2) *appreciation* of myself; and (3) *gratitude* to God.

I had to discover for myself that I shouldn't only be grateful to God or thankful to others without also appreciating myself for being able to do so. I shouldn't give love to others without consciously loving my self for having desired to do so.

Gifting others with my love without crediting me for loving them made me jealous. I wanted what I was dispensing. I wanted what other people got: my love.

“Ignorance” comes from the verb “to ignore.” I was ignorant because I ignored myself. I glided through the skies of romantic love for fourteen years with a special guy who taught me many of the fine details about being thankful to others that my parents had overlooked teaching me. And, unconsciously, in the process, I appreciated myself for all that I’d been willing and able to learn from him.

But *he* couldn’t appreciate *me* for being me. Nobody could. I’m sure he’d been thankful overall that I’d been in his life. (I envied him that.) But I wanted something I gave him that *I* hadn’t given *me*, and I couldn’t put that into words.

When romantic love no longer kept me soaring high - when I fell to earth with a thud - I couldn’t understand what had caused everything to fall apart. I questioned my ability to love anyone, when it was my ignorance of self-love I should have examined.

When he and I fell out of love with one another, we both came down with a bang, but *I* landed an emotional wreck, while *he* landed a physical wreck with AIDS. We both ended up dying, but only I was able to be figuratively reborn. He literally died. I had to carry on by contemplating what our relationship had given me.

My ignorance of self-love had been the cause of the demise of my relationship with him. He’d been a very good man who died without coming to understand his love for himself. I believe now that AIDS was a devastating disease given to us by God even though it ravaged our community because so many men were *so* capable of loving so many, but we weren’t as knowledgeable in those days about the blessings of self-love.

In the 17th Century, Isaac Newton unlocked the laws of aerodynamics through his discovery of gravity, and later scientists were able to apply his principles to mechanical flight. But the art of self-love isn’t nearly as well understood as the science of aerodynamics. There are principles behind the invisible forces of self-love that can teach us how to fly effortlessly through *inner space*. Within ourselves lies the greatest of all spiritual frontiers, one we’ve hardly begun to explore.

I corrected my previous mistake of omission by learning to put my faith in myself before I try to put any more faith in others. I taught myself to trust *me*. I proved to myself that I was the soul mate I’d be spending a lifetime learning to enjoy. When I demonstrated love and

devotion for *me*, I found plenty left over for the next, someone special to come into my life.

I've since been blessed with a second life partner who's a *conscious* classmate in the school of self-love. But I don't repeat my previous mistake by asking him do the hard work of loving me *for* me.

My previous suffering in life had been caused by "looking for love in all the wrong places." (Johnny Lee) My life became so much more meaningful once I began to look for love from me. And my life became truly meaningful when I could look at all my experiences with others as lessons intended to teach me how to more deeply love my self. All my successes and failures in my past became clues that informed me about "my story," the great "mystery" that gives life spiritual meaning.

Because I'd been taught that love exists *between* people, not *within* them, I was a "fool" in the classic sense. My parents' generation had been given a curriculum in the school of life that was vastly different from mine. My generation couldn't rely on only what our parents knew to get us through our day in the sun. The meaning of life is always being enlarged and improved upon. We're all born fools in the school of self-love using the curriculum of our tutors to make sense of our own classes that are so vastly different from theirs. (Today's generation will make the same claim.)

I'd begun the subject of love by stretching my wings in anticipation of flying high on the airstreams of passion for one special someone. And my Judeo-Christian culture promised to carry me to even higher heights with the added emphasis on compassion for all people. I had no idea that loving myself before I took off would make it so much easier for me to demonstrate passion and compassion while figuratively in midair.

Self-love isn't "narcissistic." Narcissus (the character from the Greek myth) confused himself with someone else. If he'd realized it was himself he'd been staring at, he wouldn't have fallen in the lake and drowned.

We all confuse ourselves with others when we're young. Our imagination can be very powerful, but what it perceives shouldn't be based on what our eyes see, but on what our ears hear. Therefore, when looking in the mirror, question what you see, and then listen carefully to the answer you hear from within. Don't drown in glee or sorrow at what you see in the glass.

Self-love will wake you up to your narcissism and self-hate. It's only when you love yourself deep down inside that you can look at your face and see the face of a stranger you can judge impartially. If

you can't see a stranger when you look in the mirror, you're taking a part of yourself for granted. You're not serious enough yet about loving you.

You're going to be measured by how well you treat strangers out in this world, so look closely at the guy you see in your reflection. He's stranger than you might think. You may not know everything about him. The more you trigger your curiosity about "him," the more self-love you'll surely glean.

My problem was that I was embarrassed by my exterior. I couldn't look past my physical appearance to appreciate my potential for greater strength of character. I got caught up in the look of me in eyeglasses as a child with coke bottle lenses. I got caught up with the blemishes of adolescence that left my skin rough and aged. I was never young and pretty in my eyes.

I became my own worst enemy because I never considered marrying me, for better or worse, in sickness or in health, and until death when I'd part from my body. Is it any wonder my relationship to my first partner didn't last since I wasn't even able to commit to a life-long relationship with my self? I was a self-fulfilling prophesy without a prophet. I was a name in the making. I was green, unripened. I wasn't just embarrassed by what I looked like; I was ashamed of myself for feeling that way about me. I was petty. I was small. I couldn't love me just the way I was.

If life is a school, I was the class clown who didn't even know it. I was seated in the back row thinking I wasn't hot and therefore had no reason to feel sexy. I'd been told that with my brains and maturity, I could accomplish whatever I wanted. But what I wanted was to screw like a bunny. I wanted people to like me for what I looked like. Sadly, I didn't have the brains or maturity to figure out how to talk to myself about my dreams, let alone achieve them.

I didn't like me the way I was, but I couldn't critique myself for fear of hurting me even further. I was soft inside. My parents had never taught me how to like myself. I couldn't admit that to myself, but I could see in the way *they* treated *themselves* that the apple hadn't fallen far from the tree. I entered the adult world without esteem for my container because my contents were lacking, not because I was ugly.

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A Spiritual Education

1. Life is a School of Self-Love

Life is a school of self-love I was enrolled in at birth and will graduate at the end of my life. Every minute of every day, I'm in spiritual instruction learning how to love myself more intimately and deeply. The whole world is my classroom.

Every person on earth is also a student of self-love; in fact, everyone is my tutor in that they mirror my own curriculum for me if I use my imagination to perceive their message for me at every moment of my life.

And, although it's sometimes challenging for me to accept my class assignments and homework humbly, God is my one and only Teacher. She holds my entire school syllabus in Her hands.

When tested by those around me or by circumstances beyond my control, the Teacher grades me for the *attitude* I hold in addition to the *answers* I choose. The better my *answer* to the problem, the higher the grade I receive in work habits; the better my *attitude*, the higher my grade in cooperation.

Life isn't a school in which my success is not only measured by *what* I do. *How* I do it is equally important. You can't just give the right *answer*. You have to show your work. You have to use your whole body, heart and soul, to answer life's questions.

In the school of self-love, others will get a better grade than you if they demonstrate a more cooperative nature and a sounder approach to problem solving through teamwork, whether or not you might think you have the right answer.

Those who work *efficiently* with others will make money and achieve power. Those able to *cooperate* with the classmates in their study group hold the key to social success. Those who see the spiritual side of life will advance their belief in God.

But what about those few who search for *the wisdom of self-love*? *How* can we hope to get everything out of life if we yearn for more than the love and money that comes from the outside in? How can we learn from those around us to be more efficient, cooperative and spiritual within ourselves?

The more you watch other students' work habits and their ability to cooperate with one another, the less you're going to obsess on what you look like externally, and the more you're going to think about how you look internally. In the school of self-love, if you become concerned with your spiritual development from the inside *in*,

you'll choose subjects in your class schedule that are worthy of your spiritual education.

What's most important are metaphors that run your life. The more you know what you believe in, the more successfully you'll feel guided through your education in being yourself. It's those who don't know what they believe about themselves through metaphoric expression and how their beliefs affect their education who end up in the Counselor's office in trouble of one sort or another. That, or they ditch class entirely, ending up out on the quad playing games with other fools like themselves.

If they skip the metaphor of life as a school altogether and run around out in the halls not doing much of anything except disturbing those in class dutifully learning to be themselves, they'll get just what they deserve, too: low marks on test days.

Life begins as a school in learning to love others, but once you pass the elementary school basics in independence, and achieve a high school diploma in interdependence, you're ready for the university of life where you'll be given high-level assignments in making a conscious effort to love yourself at all times. You'll become *self*-dependent.

All the religions of the world are really just spiritual fraternities created by the Teacher to help their members graduate the university of self-love with honors. These fraternities were never intended to compete unfairly with one another, as they still do. But competition for grades is fierce if you think there are only a limited number of good students who'll be rewarded in the afterlife for their efforts. And cheating is rampant because so many people think there are limited seats in the front row. People become cruel and competitive when they don't know what they're doing or why they're doing it.

The woman's movement, although not a religion, per se, is the world's first spiritual sorority. Its alumni are remarkable examples of today's tutors of self-love who focus a great deal of their attention on work habits in the subject matter they're enrolled in, often through their rolls of being a daughter, sister, wife or mother. Women and children aren't the only beneficiaries of the skills of work habits and cooperation promoted by the women's movement. We all are.

The Teacher is available for student conferences during Her office hours, traditionally scheduled for the Sabbath. But students at all levels in the school of self-love are advised to avail themselves of spiritual guidance and individual instruction with Her at a time of their choosing. The Teacher is available for personal conferences around

the clock, but also concurrent with lab work with others, and certainly while struggling with homework while alone.

Thanks to many years of spiritual instruction, I completed my general, spiritual, educational requirements by getting ahead out in the world. My work habits were satisfactory, although I have to admit now that I didn't always get along with others to my satisfaction.

I made enough money over time to consider myself comfortable, but there's so much more I'm interested in, in life than parading around my outstanding grades in work habits. Money is only one measure of a successful, spiritual education.

I always had the impression that my schoolmates seemed to understand the importance of collaboration and teamwork more than I did. I felt distant and separate from them, as though I wasn't really a member of any team. But that's probably because I was so competitive myself. Competitive people aren't known for achieving high grades in cooperation. They prefer to work things out on our own.

I wanted to major in something really special and unusual in life, something that others weren't doing. I wasn't interested in just getting through the school of life looking good. I wanted to become somebody I could admire. But the longer I attended the school of life, the less I seemed to be able to find anything I could do that no one else could do as well. And that made me wonder why I was even here.

I finally discovered that the only thing I could ever hope to become an expert in was being myself. That was the one major in this school that *I* could choose that nobody else could do anywhere nearly as well as me. I finally realized that all the subjects I was enrolled in and all the effort I'd made to be cooperative and effective were advancing me in my major, learning to love myself.

It turned out that all the tests of life are graded on a curve, but they're not graded on a curve with our classmates. As a competitive person, I hadn't realized that. I've since learned that we're graded on a curve on which we have to judge ourselves in relation to *our* past performance. It isn't necessary to compare ourselves to anybody else. We only need to compare ourselves to whom we were the day before.

I should never have compared myself to others and copied their answers on my life tests, thinking the Teacher couldn't see what I was doing. I should only have compared my answers each day to what I'd thought was right the day before. When my progress isn't visible to me, I'm just wasting my time in class.

I used to complain that the Teacher graded other people more leniently than me. Their happiness was a constant reminder to me of my own sorrow and frustrations. And then "spite" became the impetus

for many of the actions I took and beliefs I held. I wanted to wipe the smile off other people's faces. I wanted them to feel as bad as I did. I just didn't know myself well enough to realize it

I also didn't realize that my classmates' success was merely inferring how good I should feel about their success. The higher the class curve, the more each of us ends up learning about our self.

By biting off their nose I was only spiting my face. The unhappiness I caused others, even just in my own mind, made me unhappy as well. That weighed me down with guilt I hid from myself. It caused a moral imbalance that was easier for others to see in me than for me to see in myself.

Working toward my Ph.D. in self-love taught me to make everyone into my spiritual study partner whether they knew it or not. It's not what others accomplish or don't accomplish that's meaningful to me, but how I feel about their efforts.

Sometimes I still find it difficult to work with others, but I always try to bring my overarching *self*-serving thoughts and feelings to consciousness, even if people don't always deserve to know about my secret school, in my judgment. I give of fully of myself whether they like it or not, so that I'm proud of myself. Pleasing or displeasing them isn't on my agenda.

The Teacher pairs me up with every person I'm with and with every principle I uphold, whether I happen to like the lesson, or not. Even if others are against me, I'm always willing to be cooperative so long as they don't make their arguments personal. But once they start to blame me for my personality, I know that my sexual orientation and religion aren't far behind...

Once they bend my Jewish nose out of shape or make fun of my limp wrist, I draw the line. Just because Jesus may have had to suffer because he was a gay-Jew, doesn't mean I'm going to get up on the cross with Him. He may have chosen to use the sixth Commandment to kill them with kindness (and that was very Christian of Him), but that's not my style. Self-love doesn't make me a patsy.

I do my best to do my spiritual homework every day; take life's spot quizzes on Friday nights; and prepare for my final exam by scrutinizing myself in weekly increments as thoroughly as I can. Life everyone else, I hope to graduate life magna cum laud, but I have no idea what tomorrow will bring.

Honoring myself for my efforts in the school of self-love doesn't mean I have to wait until the day I die to give myself a compliment. It also doesn't mean I have to wait until I'm on my

deathbed to shower compliments on others in honor of the ways they've modeled self-love rather than self-indulgence.

I didn't begin my studies on earth consciously devoted to the goal of loving myself. I played hooky from spiritual school a lot in my past. And because I was goofing off in the hall or out on the quad instead of coming to class, I missed many important assignments and tests I had to make up later.

But the lessons didn't stop coming even though I chose not to consciously come to class to learn about me. My homework assignments piled up on my desk until I was ready to come to class and claim them. I may have been behind my peers in self-awareness, but I knew I had promise, even if I didn't show it.

There's inner work to do every day at home alone with only the Teacher to talk to. And if I don't spend time balancing my thoughts and feelings in my conscience while with others, I come away from being with them feeling guilty, spiritually imbalanced and a little empty inside. If I don't work at learning a little more about myself, at least in the morning before I get up out of bed or at night before I go to sleep, I feel a little off all day.

My head had once concluded that the pursuit of happiness came only through my interactions with the world around me. And my heart made the same mistake by falling in love with outer reality as though that was all there is. I was seduced by the world into believing that outer *place* was all that mattered, when, in truth, inner *space* was just as important to my spiritual education.

My head and heart hadn't learned how to team-teach me when I was young. My thoughts and feelings had only been oriented toward pleasing others. I didn't spend my time being thoughtful to me or feeling pleased about myself. "I" didn't count because "I" didn't matter. I wasn't who I wanted to please. I only wanted to please others.

As a child, when I learned to tie my shoes, I remember the glee when I finally succeeded in teaching each hand to do its job automatically, in cooperation with the other. I was in awe when I could look at both hands and all ten fingers conducting themselves independently to the silent song of the task. But unlike my hands, my head and heart hadn't been consciously trained to work in unison on my behalf for my greater good. My thoughts and feelings weren't in harmony with one another. They were on automatic pilot.

When I was a young man, I was called to the pursuit of a career in ballet. The joy I got from dancing was indescribable. But I pursued dance without knowledge of a grace and poise that comes through

something greater than physical movement. My ballet masters didn't include instruction on the importance of social poise and emotional grace through dance. And so, I learned to dance more with my head than my heart. I was trained to be a technician, not an artist. I wasn't alluring when I danced because I wasn't fully alive.

I could work with the invisible force of gravity to achieve the illusion of physical flight, but without the gut-level, intuitive voice of self-love, self-ignorance or arrogance always knocked me off my feet. None of the physical strength I achieved gave me the spiritual strength I needed to become a memorable performer. I could dance well enough with my partners on stage, but I didn't know about the *pas de deux* I could have had with my self, the dance of head and heart to the mysterious music coming from my soul. My arms and legs could move rhythmically, but my heart couldn't sing the song of life. I could sculpt air gracefully, but I was frozen stiff inside, floating in a pitch black, inner vacuum.

If I knew then what I know now, I could have loved me for a lifetime. If I'd experienced God's participation in my life from the start, I think I'd have made the same decisions, but I'd have made them with greater peace of mind.

In 1970 at the age of eighteen, I took my first foray into the world of sex. And when my physical innocence with men was behind me, in some ways, I was still as awkward and socially klutzy as I'd been before. I had good reason to continue to feel as frightened as I'd been when I was a virgin because I could subconsciously see that feelings don't change just because you've learned to do something new. What I needed were experiences that were deep and meaningful, not just new and different.

My sex life continued into adulthood as a series of leaps at achieving love from which I always seemed to land with a thud. There was no one better suited than me to go to, to teach me how to love myself, but I was the last person on earth I wanted to ask for help. There was a ballet master in my heart and a choreographer in my soul telling me where to turn and what steps to take to improve the depth of my performance. But I wouldn't listen to them. I wanted intimacy with others; I wasn't ready for intimacy with myself.

I wasn't happy when I was young and alone. When I was by myself I always seemed to feel I was in bad company. I wouldn't listen to that whispering voice of intuition that emanated out from my soul. And so I wasn't spiritually teachable. I was headstrong and weak-hearted. I thought a spiritual relationship with myself was nonsense.

Because I had no idea how to go about *loving* me, I *indulged* myself with autonomy rather than freedom. But as a result, much of the curiosity and excitement I'd felt as a child began to ooze out of me. My head knew that loving me was a wise thing to do, but my heart didn't want to get involved. I was afraid to admit to myself that I was unfamiliar with me. I was the stranger spoken about so often in the Bible, but who believes in the Bible?

Unbeknownst to me, I was enrolled in Special Ed. classes in the school of self-love. I was in the proverbial school of hard knocks. I was taking the short bus to spiritual school, and didn't even know it.

I was spiritually slow. I thought I'd make a fool of myself if I majored in me. Even though I had the courage to become a professional ballet dancer, there was a lawyer in my head and an accountant in my heart. I was rule bound, living life by the numbers. I couldn't throw away the rules or stop counting. But in retrospect, I'm grateful to God that I don't want to change the way I was. I'm glad now for every diploma and degree hanging on my inner wall.

I may have been locked up twice for losing my mind, but I'm not sorry I went crazy. I'm not sorry I needed special ed. classes in spirituality. And I'm not sorry I'm not sorry. I was incorrigible and stubborn, and I'm still that way. I'm just resolved now. I now see why it turned out the way it did.

2. The Classroom

The earth is a one-room schoolhouse where we're enrolled in learning whatever we elect to know in addition to certain core curriculum classes determined by our Teacher. The pessimist in me thinks we'll all soon be sent home, that class will be dismissed. We've ruined our schoolhouse to the point of no return. And yet the optimist within feels the Teacher is teaching us how to steward the planet and we'll emerge from this test with greater love for the earth thanks to the environmental coursework we're being given.

In my early thirties, I completed a Bachelor's degree in English and became a junior high school English teacher. I took that job with just two years of sobriety from drugs and alcohol abuse, and I was terrified of the tests that lay before me teaching junior high school in East L.A.

I didn't mind the idea of *teaching* kids, but I didn't much like the idea of *learning* from them. I thought I'd learned more than enough from kids when I'd been one, and I didn't cherish the idea of learning any more from them as an adult. Based on my previous

experiences, parents and kids were the two kinds of people I particularly didn't want to have anything to do with. I was later shocked to discover that the Teacher enrolled me in Her class teaching public school English.

As I was preparing my classroom that summery, September day before the first day of my first year as an English teacher, I had a memorable moment looking at the student desks in my classroom from the point of view of a student of self-love rather than a teacher of English. The desks had been deeply carved into, gouged with pencils and pens, and the underside, carpeted with chewing gum. I suddenly realized the kids who'd sat at them had been sculpting their frustrations and resentments into the wood of those desks for years. I saw my future, English classroom as a microcosm of the planet, gouged by disrespect for the environment and coated with contempt for learning.

The desks around me were as abused and in need of repair as my world within. My future students just took out their frustrations on desks, while I'd taken mine out on my liver with drugs and alcohol. I realized I'd disrespected a part of my self one way, while those students who'd ruined school property had done it another. We were all acting out our contempt of ourselves on the world.

I now know that every student of self-love must begin the cleanup campaign in his inner classroom and then make his way out into the world from there. I was a student of life in my thirties who had to repair the desk I sat at inside. Alcohol was just the chewing gum I'd collected on an unseen side of me and drugs were the gouges I'd carved into my mind. Why God chose *me* to be a teacher, I had no idea.

As a student of life on planet earth, my first tutors growing up had been my mother and father, and my first "homeroom" of learning was their home. They prepared lessons in cleanliness and neatness of their home that they insisted I study and then recreate for myself. They forbade destructive behavior of their things, but they weren't enlightened enough to tell me that their rules mirrored a harmful emotional attitude they wanted me to avoid inflicting on myself.

In their house, anger was the color red, which they outlawed from my emotional palette when painting my feelings in their presence. I could paint for them in yellow (fear) or blue (sorrow), but I was forbidden from using red before their eyes. White (happy) and black (guilty) were also allowed. But I had to save up all my red until I left their academy of learning.

Later, I learned from my friends how to paint the town *red*. I became quite the artist who could graffiti the world *red* with thoughts and feeling where and when my parents wouldn't know what I was doing. I turned myself into a life canvas filled it with unintelligible scribbles in *red* ink. So when I became a teacher who was given a *red* pen to use on my student's essays, I intuitively knew to be cautious how I used it.

When I began primary school as a kid, myself, I kept my desk as clean and organized as my room at home. I treated other people's things as well as I'd been taught to treat my parents' things. That was the way my parents taught me to demonstrated love for every learning environment, not just theirs.

When I was a child, I lived in an inner eden of my own making. My parents' home was my sentimental paradise emotionally coated with shades of blue. There, I consumed life, eating up everything they taught me like blue fruit - unripe, ripe or rotten – it didn't matter much to me; I was hungry to learn about sadness. Every experience left me with a raw feeling inside that was enticing and bittersweet. I loved to feel all the shades of blue and white (beginning with self-pity and ending with self-sorrow). I hated to feel yellow and black (frightened and guilt ridden). I was a rainbow in the making, but my parents didn't include many of the colors and shades I needed to complete the full, spiritual course in "hope." I was a box of crayons with some of the colors removed for my wellbeing.

In puberty, when I reached up for the purple plum of sexual experience, I realized my mother wasn't emotionally colorblind. She could see the complex feelings that accompanied my thoughts about sex. And I became embarrassed by my emotional transparency. I wanted to hide my feelings from her. I wanted to learn more about the goodness of sensuous pleasures as far away as possible from her probing eyes. I wanted to keep my rainbow of feelings a secret.

When hair sprouted like unwanted weeds in unexpected places and I became mysteriously intrigued and excited about men, I became particular about what I learned; from whom; how; where; and when. I saw a mystery and emotional purpose in privacy I'd never considered before. I saw that there was a story below the intellectual floor given to me by my parents, a basement where matters of the heart were created in a room without windows. And I yearned to find my way down to the foundation below the first floor.

I can vividly remember first touching myself as though I were forbidden, purple fruit, and hearing the silent, first words come out of the mouth of my serpent. It told me about a power I never knew I had

or could ever have previously dreamt of. But once my virginity was behind me, my very definition of goodness began to change. I was banished from the paradise of childhood and the feelings of innocent, childish delights. I wanted only to make up for the time I'd lost in childhood by learning everything I could about all the pleasurable sensations my body could elicit.

I ran away from the childhood classroom of knowledge in my mother's house. The world became my classroom instead, and men's bodies, my laboratories of love. I didn't want to delve any more deeply into the Ultimate Authority. I was more interest in the power I got from making love squirt out of me like a fountain. I wanted to grab ahold of the nozzle of love like a straw, bring it to my lips and suck it with elation. I tried to consume my love whole. I tried to ingest all I had to offer others.

My boyish eyes were opened to the delights of manly pleasures in puberty. Thinking about being sexually satisfied was the only major in my school life at that time. I became the world's most ardent pupil of the mysteries of love - in my imagination. There I taught myself how to *make* love, but I neglected to teach myself how to *disseminate* it.

I was juvenile. I was young. I was puberty personified. And after having graffiti-ed my inner world beyond recognition with unintelligible red marks, I became a professional ballet dancer to express my glee. After a brief career in dance, odd jobs and a mental breakdown, I became an English teacher. I was expected to teach youngsters how to think critically, use the English language effectively and vote responsibly. And I did.

3. The Teacher

If life was a school, I should have guessed that God was the one and only Teacher. But an Ultimate Authority was a concept I wasn't even willing to entertain when I was a young man. I recoiled at the very concept of a "Teacher." I saw Her as synonymous with religious, thought control.

My parents had grown up as Jews in Europe in the 1920s and '30s, and had survived the totalitarianism and savagery of Europe of the 1940s. My father claimed God had abandoned the Jews without reason; my mother claimed God was a monster if such a horror as the Holocaust could have happened at all. He scorned the *gentiles* for abandoning the Jews; she scorned *God* for abandoning the gentiles.

And I scorned the two of them for even considering a discussion of God's plan as something they actually took seriously.

My parents' European, patriarchic upbringing and their strict philosophy on child rearing had unconsciously taught me to abhor authority of any sort. Although they insisted on blind obedience to them, I solved that dilemma by giving them everything they asked for, but no more. I looked like any other good little boy on the outside, but deep, down inside, I was attracted to outlaws. Deep down inside I secretly wanted to break every one of the Commandments - and with gusto. And I did.

Perhaps because of my parents' experiences in the War, they were extremely sensitive to feelings of rejection. But their sensitivity was more about political desertion by their countrymen than by family and friends. They embraced the American culture because they'd felt so abandoned by their own.

I wasn't afraid of becoming a military deserter by moving abroad to avoid the war in Vietnam. I wasn't ill at ease about abandoning my country to oppose that war. I was born here and felt certain that what had happened to my parents could never happen here. I didn't think the problems in Vietnam were a threat to the Jews or America.

I worried more about not being accepted by my peers than by my government. Rejection and abandonment weren't political problems for me. They were social problems at that time.

When I was a youngster and my mother laughed at my lisp, I felt ridiculed, but I never would have dared ask her to stop making fun of me. They say my father turned into a ticking time bomb after his time in concentration camp. I often saw him explode with rage for no apparent reason, but I didn't have permission in his household to let him know verbally that his behavior frightened me.

My parents unconsciously gave themselves permission to express their ridicule and rage on their children, but they didn't give us permission to do the same with them. I felt abandoned emotionally with ridicule and scorn, and I later retaliated by recoiling from civil authority. (Until I could see my ridicule and scorn of myself, I wasn't much concerned by why I felt so bad about authority.)

Growing up, the kids at school bullied me, too. They tested my emotional mettle to see how much personal power I was willing to exert, but I simply couldn't stand up for myself. Because my parents wouldn't allow me to defend myself from them, they wired me to take abuse from everyone, to run away from all confrontation. They turned

me into a mouse. (It took six decades for me to see “Rocky” the flying squirrel in how I’d turned out.)

When I was a teenager I unconsciously felt like Vietnam, a nation going through a civil war that was being decimated by a foreign power that came in with the best intentions to try and help. I felt like I was under occupation from the outside and being eaten up from within. I felt forbidden from determining my own destiny and incapable of determining it for myself. It felt self-hating. And because that went unchecked, I became suicidal.

My parents were more American than I was, and I was born here! They lived with the belief that they could make a good home for themselves in this country. I lived under the assumption I couldn’t.

My country wasn’t their country. My promised land wasn’t theirs. I thought my holy land was somewhere else on earth. My promised land wasn’t a place I could imagine finding on this continent. My parents were religious refugees from the Holocaust, yet I was the one who felt like the wandering Jew.

After my unhappy experiences with earthly authority, the prospect of a Supreme Authority brought up insurmountable obstacles for me. I saw all power other than the newfound power of my penis as manipulative and malevolent. The very idea of having to submit to the power of authority frightened me. You’d have thought that a gay man would love to submit to the masculine authority of other men. But I didn’t. In the bedroom I submitted passively to *sexual* authority, but elsewhere I resorted to being sneaky and manipulative in order to avoid feeling in any way pinned down.

In adulthood I became emotionally claustrophobic. Anyone who tried to embrace me emotionally gave me the feeling I was being constrained. I dreamed about “love” in the romantic walks-at-the-beach sense of the word, but the feeling of unity with another man’s heart made me cringe. I only wanted to feel connected to another part of him...

There was no way I was going to buy into an Ultimate Authority when my idea of earthly authority was so confused with autonomy. And yet there was no way I was going to find a peaceful place for myself here on earth until I made peace with the legitimate authority of my community. I was stuck between an unbelievable heaven promoted by religious fanatics and an inner hell.

Because of my issues with authority, most of my jobs ended with a power struggle with bosses or colleagues, or both. As had been the case with my family at home and peers growing up at school, I felt my colleagues at work were testing me. I felt ridiculed and scorned

just to see if I could take it. And the only recourse I thought I had was to scurry away and hide.

As a young adult, I was naïve to the idea of personal power. I couldn't strengthen my relationship with myself because I couldn't conceive of me possessing "my" self. I could only make myself look smaller before others to give the impression I wasn't a threat to them. I wasn't demonstrating "humility" as many of them erroneously assumed. I was demonstrating "timidity."

I didn't respect myself for avoiding confrontations with others, but I had no idea the challenge stemmed from self-ignorance. I buried my feelings of personal power so deep in my heart that my mind told me all attempts at personal power were a form of civil disobedience. Inside, I was so angry with my self that you could say we weren't on speaking terms. Outside, I appeared weak and submissive. Deep down inside, I was secretly fuming. Outside, I was a two-pack a day smoker.

I couldn't see that the world was a harsh place where people used spite to achieve unfair advantage over one another. I wasn't ready to fight oppressive behaviors in society with the civil disobedience that the Sixties are so well known for. Some of my peers were only in college to become social revolutionaries. Some dropped out to join the "flower power" movement. Some even enlisted in the military and fought in Vietnam. I did none of the above; not because I was a pacifist or a revolutionary, but because I was out of touch with reality.

I chose to become a ballet dancer and went to Israel to express my struggle with the world through movement - without words. After two years there and three years in Holland, I came back. While studying ballet in New York City at American Ballet Theater School and Harkness School of Dance, I ended up in Bellevue Mental Hospital. The locked ward I was on became the stage where I did grands jetés down dimly lit empty corridors at night.

I lost my mind, which indirectly broke my heart. I judged myself as incapable of doing anything right or normal. I lost all hope of finding a way to the joyful, moral authority awaiting me in my own soul. Inside, I gave up. Life was just too hard for someone like me.

My parents' goals in child rearing had been well intentioned, but they unconsciously taught me to hide my most tender feelings rather than express them. Perhaps they only wanted to protect me from the cruelty of the world they'd had to endure in Nazi Europe, but I ended up unable to be honest, sincere or authentic. I hid my feelings from everyone. I especially went out of my way to hide them from myself. And I succeeded.

I had no idea I couldn't feel as deeply as others. I knew I was very sensitive, but I couldn't sense that I couldn't feel. My ability to feel had been altered. I was sick and didn't know it because there was so much I appeared to be doing just fine.

According to Marx, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." But as a child, I knew that my thumb was my opiate. It pacified me; it consoled me; it was all I had that made me feel whole when I felt broken. As a child, I put more trust in my thumb than in my parents or any Teacher of self-love. Regardless of how dirty my fingers were, I always felt my thumb was clean. It was the only part of me that felt "good."

But comfort isn't compassion, and the comfort of a thumb makes a very poor companion. I couldn't grow up and offer my thumb as comfort to others. I had to find other ways to give comfort, not only to them, but also to myself.

As an adolescent, I ingratiated myself to people by trying to buy their friendship with approval. I wanted my peers to accept my loyalty in exchange for liking me. But I never felt I could seal the deal. How can you be loyal to others if you can't be loyal to yourself?

At eighteen, I moved half way around the world to Israel to idealistically place my trust in my own people, far from the authority figures I'd been familiar with: kin, country and culture. But without practice in loving the strangers' ways, I was a dismal failure at liking Israelis any more than my American peers had liked me.

I could never figure out who was stranger, others or me. The more I tried to hide how strange I was to the Israelis, the less they liked me. Yet the more I let them see my strangeness, the more they encouraged me to live life authentically among them as I was. They were maddening!

As a young man living abroad, putting my trust in others (whether human or Supreme) seemed ludicrous. Because I couldn't trust myself, I held no hope in ever trusting anyone else. I didn't just *question* other people's love in those days; I *disdained* it.

I found drugs and approved of *them*. I gave *them* the power to control my life. I voted *them* into positions of loving authority in my life to dictate *their* desires on my behalf. I put my trust in drugs, letting them legislate my feelings *for* me. I relinquished my right to vote from within.

I let drugs take over my heart like the Nazis took over Germany, with quiet complacency. Drugs entered my life as innocently as the Weimar Republic that voted Hitler into office came into German politics. Drugs seduced me into believing they'd get

back the emotional power my parents had taken away from me. Drugs promised vengeance on all those who'd ridiculed and scorned me. Drugs offered me feelings of loyalty and love no human being had ever given me with such visceral realism.

If there was an Ultimate Authority, I had to presume She was as cruel and capricious as those who were apposed to me using opiates. If there was an Ultimate Authority, I couldn't see how She was helping me by getting me fired from jobs, arrested and involuntarily committed to mental institutions. But why would God allow drugs to win a sacred place in my heart and then start a war between my head and heart that would rage on for years without end?

To overthrow the totalitarianism of drugs and replace it with an inner democracy of self-love, my heart had to understand the complexity inherent in the conflict between "authority" and "autonomy." I had to admit *I* was responsible for putting a hitler in power within me. Nobody had forced me to be cruel and unkind to myself. I allowed that to happen because I couldn't bear any more ridicule and scorn; not from the world around me and not from the world within.

Before I took drugs, I'd hardly felt a thing. Drugs opened my heart to my head. Suddenly I realized what it felt like to feel. I'd never done so before. Drugs were like light to the blind or sound to the deaf. They awakened me to a whole new world.

My parents, like all Holocaust survivors, had been deeply disappointed by their countrymen during the Second World War. And the depth of their disappointment at the incomprehensibly low level of humanity of Europeans then had affected me. Even though they never talked about being disappointed with humanity, I know instinctively they were. And deep down inside, I wanted to recreate their disappointment. I wanted to be disappointed in myself to know their level of disappointment with life.

My parents probably wanted to protect me, not only from the horror they'd been through, but from the horrifying conclusions they'd come to. But the after-effects of the Second World War reverberate in me to this day. They were Holocaust survivors, but I'm also a holocaust survivor.

Disappointment with humanity must have figuratively hung like black drapes over every window in my parents' house when I was growing up. Their bitter disappointment with people dimmed the light in every room they walked into. It's as if they sucked light out of life wherever they went.

But how would I have known that the darkness they brought into my heart was intended to protect me from their disappointment with humanity? I copied their disappointment by draping black curtains over the walls in the basement of my heart. It didn't have any windows. It only had underground walls that faced sheer rock. Drugs pulled back the drapes in the underground room in my heart. Drugs cut through the walls and rock with the power of my imagination. Drugs let the first light in, albeit imaginary. I'm eternally grateful to drugs for a light they shone that doesn't literally exist.

I groped wildly for anything I could grab onto that would give me a sense of emotional light, and I found drugs could illuminate me. They brought a radiance and warmth into my heart I'd never known before. They warmed me from within. They made the rainbow Noah saw in Genesis real. I simply had no idea then that drugs could burn, too.

When men rejected me sexually in those days, the ensuing disappointment was so egregious that I did anything I could to get the suffering to stop. When bosses abused me, I felt humiliated about myself and inconsolable. I didn't just cringe with shame at my minor character defects that others brought to light; I was devastated by them.

I didn't want to be a perpetrator of disappointment like my parents, a walking shadow that caused darkness to descend into every room I entered. But there was no *real*, inner source of *spiritual* light in me. Drugs were my "solid" solace and alcohol, my "liquid," source of spirit. I had no idea that light also came in an invisible, non-toxic, spiritual form called "self-love."

My parents had disappointed me with disappointment, and I didn't believe in God. So I couldn't expect any better from Her. Without me on my side, there was no one left to help me. Sex? Nature? Religion? People? Get real! They all get tired fast when you're a drug addict/alcoholic.

I wanted to escape *further*, not be *found*. There seemed nothing artificial about the neon rainbow I saw when I was high. There seemed to be no way a real rainbow could compare to the artificial light drugs shined late at night into my soul when I was alone. Drugs were the sun and alcohol was the moon to me.

As a child growing up gay in a world of disapproving straights, I had good reason to be afraid I'd be betrayed if I told anyone my secret. Gay men were being beaten up and even killed if they acted on their feelings. Honesty about feelings was suicidal in those days. A

synthetic rainbow was a God-sent. It made it possible for me to “pass,” not look gay.

There had been no rational explanation for the prejudice my parents had experienced in Europe. But there was no reason for the prejudice against blacks and gays in America in those days, either. Victims are produced. They’re manmade. Victims are simulated fruit perpetrators pick on to teach others what will happen to *them* if they don’t do as they’re told.

When Prince Charming didn’t arrive by my late twenties to sweep me off my feet and assuage the emotional bruises of disappointment and desperation that had been building since childhood, I felt true love had let me down, too. When Cupid (who everyone claimed was such a skilled marksman) refused to shoot *me*, I got more than disappointed. I got angry. Then *I* saw red. Why not *me*? Why couldn’t *I* be a victim of other love, too?

In my thirties, I suddenly sensed a shaft of light shining down between the clouds onto a mysterious place within me. I got clean and sober; quit smoking; and stopped drinking coffee. I lost weight; gave up casual sex; completed my college education; and got a job as an English teacher - a second attempt at “my brilliant career” (1979 film based on the book by Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin (1879–1954), one of the major Australian writers of her time.) I took on volunteer work in the gay community on the weekends and taught aerobics every night after school. But as much as I tried to fit in to society, I still felt weird and different. Something was still missing, but I couldn’t put my finger on what it was.

The school of self-love brought me daily assignments in which I was being tested on matters of duty, matters of the mind. I became willing to pull *with* people instead of *against* them. But that only taught me what to *do* to get along in this world; how to obey authority to get my needs met. I still didn’t feel good about *being* me. I was conspiring with others for money in the hopes of finding love from the outside. And that disappointed me, too. I felt I’d turned into a sell-out just like everyone else.

As the result of learning to be more cooperative with others and submitting to societal demands, I found myself returned to the social decorum my mother had instilled in me as a child. Thanks to good manners, some of my *social insecurity* lifted. One kind of disappointment with me dissipated because I exercised courteous behavior towards others. My *mind* still didn’t understand what the point was, but my *heart* felt a little better. Acting like one of “them” wasn’t as morally egregious as I’d previously thought it would be.

But I still couldn't respect a Teacher who didn't literally show up to class, ask me questions and give simple, straightforward answers I could understand. I couldn't trust classmates who came to class without having done their homework and then trashed the classroom instead of taking a seat quietly, letting everyone see they were ready to learn. I wasn't used to an authority that didn't maintain the tight-fisted control my mother had had on me in her home.

I finally realized, I couldn't use a yardstick to measure the distance to the stars. I couldn't inhale the air on Venus to prove it's not breathable. I couldn't look out my window and see that the earth is round. These questions had to be answered indirectly. And so it is with some of the questions about life.

In truth, I was just spiritually young and very tender, an innocent toddler in the nursery school of self-love who had a lot to learn about himself. The lessons were just beginning. I was in my thirties, and I was just beginning to realize that I was a spiritual child of the universe. I wasn't grown up.

At the time, I hated children. I wanted reasonable, adult-like relationships with everyone. I didn't want to be talked down to or have to treat others with insincere expressions of condescension if I didn't find good reason to respect them.

When I was ten years old, my teacher in the fourth grade was Mrs. Shapiro, and I can still remember how deeply I loved her. Every day in her class was a joy. And on the last day of school, I left with the others, pretending to scream with delight as we ran out the door. But unlike everyone else who quickly left the school grounds, I hid behind Mrs. Shapiro's bungalow to return to her classroom once the others had disbursed. I needed to say goodbye to her alone.

Without many words in mind, I walked into her classroom for the last time. My tear-filled eyes thanked her for being the only model of authority I'd ever held in my heart sincerely. She was the first person in my life who *never* ridiculed or scorned me. I don't even know if she understood what it was I was trying to say, but I'll always remember her face that day.

My feelings for Mrs. Shapiro will remain in my heart for the rest of my life. She activated the *awe* of spiritual authority in me. No *reason* for doing my duty to others could ever compare with the *feelings* I felt for her. She was the first example I had of an authority figure I could listen to with love in my heart. She was the first mirror that reflected my image of myself. She was Michelangelo's God and I was his adam. I pointed my finger to her, and she pointed hers back to me.

Today, I only speak to the fourth grade teacher in everyone I meet. I'm no longer a spiritual child, but I'm old enough to know that love, not duty, makes the world go round. Only by loving the elementary school teacher in everyone I meet can I hope to express humility through my relationships.

In 1942, my mother managed to escape capture and death at the hands of the Nazis. She ran throughout Germany during the War without getting caught. She avoided everybody, a fugitive from injustice in a world gone mad. And somehow, she didn't die or kill herself in the process.

My father was a rich Lithuanian from an important Jewish family in a country that also despised the Jews. But he was the youngest of eight children and modern enough to recognize the importance of unions. In the 1930's, he marched with the workers of his family's cigarette factory in solidarity with their protest for better working conditions and pay. That was, in my opinion, one of the greatest deeds he ever did in his life. I believe God chose him to survive concentration camp so that I could see his farsighted regard for those less fortunate than him.

He was one of the 1% of the Jewish community in his day; rich, shrewd and connected enough to find a way to smuggle my half brother, half sister and my first cousin out of the Kaunas ghetto into Catholic orphanages. And in 1944 when the Nazis emptied the ghetto and sent him to Dachau Concentration Camp in southern Germany as a Jewish slave to work until he'd die of malnutrition and exhaustion, he held on through nine months of hell, helping others (including saving the life of one of his nephews) until the Americans liberated them.

Even though my mother scorned the idea of a spiritual Teacher who bestowed lessons of the heart upon all Her beloved pupils, her life was filled with awe and excitement at having children of her own. Even though she scorned the institutions of religion, I marvel now at her planting parsley seeds in the strip of soil between our driveway and our neighbor's, to show us how seeds can grow into food. Her enthusiasm for nature was infectious. I couldn't help myself in learning to love Mother Nature through my mother's nature.

My father never looked at life as a school, but if he had, he'd have railed at the Teacher for allowing hundreds of millions of failing students to continue with their spiritual education after the abysmal Final Solution they came up with to rid the world of their Jewish classmates. My father scorned God for giving the class clowns a second chance while graduating Her Jewish students early. My father

had challenges with Authority too. I wasn't the only one in my family who had a love affair with autonomy. I wasn't the only one who had trouble feeling red.

4. The Tutors

I searched within and, over time, found the voice of the child in me, abandoned and yearning to be cared for, yearning to be held and heard. He wanted affection and respect. I wanted to be understood by an older, wiser part of me. I was through being a big baby. I was through feeling like an orphan. I was ready to earn my trust and affection as a spiritual child of God who could parent himself.

Earlier, I'd rejected the psychological concept of the "inner child" because it had forced me to recall the darkness I'd endured as a child. I didn't want to go through those feelings of abandonment, betrayal and conspiracy again. I didn't want to admit the rage I'd felt for the injustices perpetrated upon me on the schoolyard of life growing up. And I certainly didn't want to think about the ways in which I hadn't met my own emotionally childlike needs during adulthood.

Because I'd taken the blows received in childhood to heart, I turned out emotionally black-and-blue as a grown up. And I thought those bruises would never heal. When I ran away from the memories of my youth, the child within me had no choice but to pacify himself with one thumb after another: drugs, sex, retail therapy, food. I was all-thumbs. And when those behaviors didn't succeed in taking the edge off my fear, anger and sorrow with numbing self-disregard, suicide seemed the only answer.

I lived like an orphan on the street. I did as I pleased. I achieved autonomy within, but I couldn't acknowledge the tender feelings of the child deep within me. Doing so would have required self-parenting. But I was a peter pan who *couldn't* grow up. Growing up would have required parenting, an inner Wendy. All I could say for myself was that I was proud of being able to figuratively flying.

There was no one within to love the inner child in me, and for the sake of my devotion to autonomy, I couldn't allow parental feelings for my inner child to come to consciousness. I thought that would have been a sellout to the "man," a moral offense I wouldn't permit myself to make.

I resisted mothering and fathering myself until I couldn't resist it any longer. I had so much anger against my Jewish, biological parents that I bit off my Jewish nose to spite my ecumenical face. No

Jew was going to tell me what to do! I saw a worldwide conspiracy on the part of Jews to control everything and everyone, and I wasn't going to let them do it to *me*.

I couldn't allow my inner parent to tell me what to do because I worried she'd give me hell. I was afraid of giving in to my own authority, but I couldn't say why.

For years, I floated on waves of superficial social discourse, always avoiding my rocky relationship with my self. I wasn't willing to embrace the art of self-love, and I certainly wasn't willing to look at my distrust of my "self," which I'd been projecting onto those around me. That's *really* why I couldn't trust anybody.

No one ever put into words what I needed to do for me in a way I could understand. No one spoke my language. My mystery and destiny lay at the bottom of an ocean of emotion, and I couldn't swim...

I blended in with the others in their tepid, shallow waters of social discourse. I pretended life was a sport engaged in for fun, a social, water polo game played on the surface. I played the game everyone was playing. But I finally decided I'd rather die than continue doing what I was doing...

I'd taken a stab at trying to dive beneath the waves of everyday fun-and-games using therapists and psychiatrists, but I always surfaced quickly. I always concluded it wasn't possible to trust them with the job of teaching me to trust myself. I didn't believe they could teach me to swim with my head under water.

I was really afraid of myself, and with good reason. I had to learn how to become grounded before I could learn to swim (even though, thanks to drugs, I thought I could fly). *Normal* people may not be able to understand that, but *abnormal* people can. Normal people claim nothing is "abnormal," but *we* know better.

I was an alien from another planet who had to explore the land on earth before I'd be ready to explore her seas. I had to straighten out my head before I could straighten out my heart. I had to learn to drive my thoughts before I could learn to swim through my feelings. I could see all that from the air. I just couldn't come down to earth yet and put it into words.

The torrential flood of disappointments with love and career choices that had rained down on me in early adulthood only added to my sense of futility and failure. I feared a psychic calamity would occur within akin to emotional flooding. My outer world was stressing me out in ways that forced me to concede that mental illness might someday drown me in my feelings regardless of where I went, what I

did, or with whom. I sensed that my outer world was conspiring to drag me down into an inner, emotional disaster from which I'd and never be able to come up for air, and I'd drown.

One earthquake after another struck beneath the oceans of my emotions. They created tidal waves of feelings that swelled within, which, only in their final minutes, I could feel coming toward my shore. But by then I could do nothing about it. Each time a torrential psychic surge headed toward my head, it flooded the ground of my being, and I went crazy.

I had no spiritual high ground to run to. I had no time to climb that tree of knowledge everyone was so fond of talking about. When the tsunamis hit the shore, they overwhelmed me like an act of God, impacting my outer environment while deluging me simultaneously within. I watched my mind get dragged out to sea. I watched me go round and round the whirlpools within. They had to lock me up for my own good.

There'd always been a strong undercurrent of depression in me, a riptide that frequently dragged me off my feet. But when my feelings deluged me down to the darkest parts of my heart, a place I'd never have gone to of my own free will, I couldn't tell anyone what was happening. I was drowning inside, and *no one* could save me.

Instead of learning to swim like a normal person with my head under water, God had decided I needed to learn how to dive. I was taken down into the depths of depression where the darkness of the deep isn't possible to describe to those who aren't called to go there.

My parents had been the first and foremost *swimming* coaches in the kiddie pool of my life. They'd held me as I learned to crawl through the simpler lessons of emotional training with my head raised high. They told me about the importance of discipline and determination as I pretended to swim while held in their strong arms. They kept me afloat emotionally with their encouragement and kindness.

But they also dunked me under unexpectedly with ridicule and shame. The War had crippled them in ways that made it impossible for them to do better than they had. They'd walked through a conflagration and watched as Six Million went up in smoke. They knew all about the fires of political frenzy and religious hatred that burned in every direction for thousands of miles. But they knew nothing about monsters of the deep...

As a young man, I had few emotional losses of my own, so I had little ability to feel the depth of what my parents had really lost in having survived the Holocaust. Stories about their hardships only

made me feel guilty about my inability to comfort them. I thought my mere presence would assuage all their pain and suffering. And when it didn't, I began to wonder what the point was in me having been born at all.

I couldn't dive down deep enough into me to feel the depths of *their* loss. The depth of their sorrow only made me angry and frustrated. It's impossible to empathize with a Holocaust survivor unless you've figuratively gone through a holocaust of your own.

Only by having been forced down to great emotional depth where I was under the terrible pressure that doesn't exist at the surface of everyday discourse did I experience the profundity of my humanity. My reticence to know and learn to love myself had to be ripped out of my hands. Because I couldn't *give* myself the kind of love I wanted, I had to *receive* it. I had to be humbled by *self-love* before I could understand my *parents'* love for me.

Only in losing my mind could I appreciate my parents' losses. Only once I'd been through a hell of my own, was I able to feel my parents' anguish without being overwhelmed by it. Only then did I know how to honor my father and mother's love for me.

Honoring them required that I first learn to honor myself. I had to move through the physical *embarrassment* of being male to get to the underlying shame of also being half female. And then I had to go through the *shame* of being a sexual human being to get to the *humiliation* before God. Only by exploring the three levels of guilt [physical (embarrassment), emotional (shame) and spiritual (humiliation)] could I find the honor in touching myself all over and enjoying my own touch.

The big stumbling block was sex. In order to feel sexually aroused I had to be aroused by another person. Arousing myself made me feel a little embarrassed. I did do it often anyway, but at a cost. I had to disconnect my heart from my actions to masturbate. By touching myself to create sexual sensations without priding myself for the experience I was having, I was treating myself like a stranger. I was growing more distant, not closer, to me.

Once I realized that sensuality with another person was a personal expression of sexuality, I overcame homophobia and fear of my own gender. I overcame the need for pornography and voyeurism. I removed the bondage of distance and self-hate on the physical level.

I should have learned to be *grateful* to my Teacher for giving me lessons on how to swim through such adversity. I should have been *thankful* to my parents for all the lessons they'd given me in loving others. But I couldn't do either without first *appreciating* myself. I

couldn't give anyone any appreciation because I hadn't yet received appreciation from myself. I had to learn how to appreciate me before I could be thankful to my parents and grateful to God.

Masturbation, watching porn and watching other people having sex was no way to appreciate myself. These behaviors turned you into a stranger. They distanced me from self-love.

My first suicide attempt was my first world war within, a war to end all wars. It disappointed me in me. My second suicide attempt was a second world war I couldn't help myself from starting even with awareness of what had happened to me before. This second world war within made me a prisoner in my own slave labor camp – much like what my father had been through. It turned me into a jewish fugitive who had to run away from nazis in my own inner germany - like my mother.

But the israel that emerged out of the hellfire I had to go through was a struggle with God that I now know “is-real.” Out of the horror I had to go through in exploring my self was born the hope of becoming a joy unto myself. It made me a queer Jew who could stand prouder than I could have otherwise.

It taught me to be thankful to those strangers who helped me retrieve my humanity. Then I was able to go beyond tolerating people to accepting them for having been brought into my life to bring me lessons that would teach me more about *the wisdom of self-love*.

Some of my tutors in life succeeded in demonstrating how to think clearly; others used their strength of character to model courage; some did good deeds for others, showing me that charity comes from the heart; some used their facial features to draw sketches of their thoughts for me to appreciate like artwork; others sculpted their emotions with their hands through thin air to convey in gesture what they weren't able to say in words. I was given many tutors who came with many gifts.

But nobody could love me *instead* of me. And nobody could tell me the ways I'd best be able to plant seeds in myself that would blossom and grow to be more self-loving. People showed me how *they* were in free fall, learning to love themselves on their way down; but it was up to me to fall for *me*.

My mother did her best to help me during those harsh years. But her self-esteem was extremely low. She'd been expelled from public school in Munich at the age of thirteen with the Nazi expulsion of all Jewish children from school. But she developed an *uncommon* sense that doesn't come from a formal education. And still, she wasn't able to see it in herself or proudly teach it to me.

Only in later life did she come to see how clever she'd been in outsmarting the Nazi murderers who'd killed her family and so many of our people. Only long after I'd climbed out of my own hell did she find a restless peace with her uncanny, and brilliant, survival skills. But the benefits of self-esteem hadn't yet taken root in her when I was young and brittle, so she couldn't share her achievement with me until long after I needed her support.

My father's family sent him to an expensive, private, German, finishing school to round off his education, but he had little appreciation for the formal education he was given. Perhaps he didn't think he'd need it to get ahead in life because of the privileged world he'd come from. He'd been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but it turned out that that spoon kept him from talking to me about things that would have been meaningful to me growing up.

Like my father, I never shirked physically hard work. I loved the feeling of using my body to get a job done. But he and I were both bad at making money. And with the superiority complex I inherited from him and the inferiority complex I got from my mother, I ended up doing many odd jobs that didn't pay well.

When he got to America, he wanted to be rich again, while I only ever wanted to be famous. He tried inventing products that would give him the financial success he'd once had. I went into dance in the hopes of achieving world admiration. We both failed. And we both shared a deep disappointment in ourselves although we couldn't talk about it with one another.

Rather than become the teacher my mother wanted me to become or the entrepreneur my father hoped for, I chose to give up a university scholarship to become a ballet dancer. In defiance of both my parents, I chose a career that didn't require a formal education and practically guaranteed a life of poverty and odd jobs to scrape together a living.

I loved the human body. I was devoted to self-discovery through the art of movement. I just didn't have the kind of figure I needed to get others to pay to see me move on stage. Only later in life, as I came to cherish the aging body I was in, did I begin *to begin* to appreciate my body as the container of a mysterious contents that I'd been collecting over a lifetime.

As a young man, the world of the arts held a mystery that was more important to me than dutifully dedicating my life to my parents' wishes. I wasn't passionate enough about matters of the mind or the pocketbook. I wanted to be creative. And so there was nothing my

parents could do but scratch their heads and wonder where they'd gone wrong...

Ironically, after my brief ballet career ended, I then became an English teacher (which pleased my mother) and later, a businessman (which pleased my father). And by bringing the artistic values I'd learned from dance with me into my subsequent careers, I discovered there could be artistry in any endeavor. I could put my heart into everything I did if I could find *my* way to love myself in the process.

My father swallowed three gold coins when he realized the Nazis were about to find him in his hiding place in the ghetto in Kaunas, Lithuania. And with these coins he was able to bribe the Nazis at Dachau (Germany) into changing his classification from "Jew" to "Russian Political Dissident." This bought him a kitchen job in concentration camp that not only saved his life; he was then able to secure food for his nephew, a youngster of sixteen, who'd have perished without my father's help.

What my father had learned from the murder of his family that he always tried to impress upon me was that money *can* make the difference between life and death. I think his desire for me to be rich was his way of telling me he wanted me to survive and thrive despite all the forces of evil that conspired against the Jews in his day.

In 1941, at the age of nineteen, my mother went to the Gestapo headquarters in Munich, Germany to beg the Nazis to let her join her mother on the same transport to concentration camp that she was scheduled for. The Gestapo could have killed or raped my mother on the spot, but she took the chance because she so loved her mother that she couldn't bear the thought of being separated from her.

The Gestapo refused her request and let her go home, not wishing to make trouble so soon before they emptied Munich of all its Jews. And she cried all the way home at her *misfortune*... A few nights later, after my grandmother was taken to concentration camp, the allies bombed their apartment building, and when my mother came out of the shelter, seeing her home destroyed, she made an impulsive decision to tear off the yellow "J" on her coat and burn her identity card that listed her as a Jew. She decided to become a fugitive from Nazi "law" and take her chances.

Although she wanted me to be *academically* educated to make up for what she hadn't achieved herself *scholastically*, *experience* taught her the importance of courage in life. Loyalty and courage were virtues she modeled, although she was far too humble to see it; too poorly educated to agree to it; and too innocent to talk about it. What

she impressed upon me silently was that the courage to love conquers all.

English was a foreign language my parents put all their efforts into mastering, but because I could speak it far more fluently than them, I thought I was smarter than they were. But even though they didn't have the ability to express the depth of their feelings in a foreign language, they still had the capacity to *feel* deeply. And the more deeply I learned to plummet my own feelings, the more deeply I could experience the nuanced feelings in them.

I knew I couldn't compare my holocaust to their Holocaust. I just knew we shared something beneath the details of our circumstances that was more real than anyone would ever be able to imagine. In my twenties while going through the worst stage of my mental illness, I could still remember their earlier challenge when they were still married to put food on the table and a roof over my head. I didn't realize that I was learning to feel the depths of their existential angst even as I was going crazy.

In truth, they felt differently, not any less deeply. All wounds heal slowly, and all wounds hurt as they're healing. I simply had to go through the lessons the Teacher gave me and wait until later to ask Her "Why?"

My mother expressed her internal, spiritual, purification process throughout her life by cleaning the house, and my father expressed his through making merry. But cleaning and joking around weren't yet important traits for me to try to consciously emulate. When I was going crazy, I assumed my parents were more broken inside than me and in far greater need of spiritual cleansing.

I'd expected my parents to *tell* me who they were, and what they stood for, not make me guess or figure it out for myself. They never said what the secret of their survival had been; they never told me why they believed what they believed; they never admitted to me how sick the War had left them; and how in need they were of healing.

They lived the mystery of their being without putting it into words. I had to intuit from the fervor in the way my mother cleaned and the exaggerated jokes my father told that every breath they took was with undying love and devotion to the memory of their murdered parents and the life of the European Jews that the Nazis had also exterminated.

It never occurred to me to look at my parents for clues to the architectural blueprints of *my* spiritual abode. I looked at what I thought was the lean-to of love they built to shelter me in their hearts and had no idea it would become so precious to me later in life. I

wasn't ready to accept their spiritual, architectural contribution to the temple of love I dreamed of one day building for my boyfriend and me. I thought I could create that rendering without anyone's help.

I was spiritually homeless and shivering inside most of my life, but I lived under the illusion that I was spiritually well accommodated and warm just because I could pay my rent on time. But I was far more exposed to the elements within me than I ever wanted to admit. Most of my life passed right by without me suspecting that life was a mysterious secret I shared with my parents that I'd have to discover for myself.

All your tutors in the school of self-love become meaningful when you realize the part your parents played in training you to love yourself. Your parents were your first tutors, specially chosen by the Teacher, even if they're the last two people on earth you'd guess now know anything about self-love. You may have once thought they were created with the sole purpose of taking care of you, but they may struggle today in their own way to achieve the same self-love you do.

5. The School Year

When I was a youngster, I saw nothing to be learned from the emotional storms that coalesced in my parents inner worlds that then rolled in over my horizon. The lightening and thunder they produced that caused such sorrow to pour down in me forced me to build an arc in late childhood inside just to survive their rage. Their cold anger seemed to rain in on me for years until, in late adolescence, independence from them broke through the clouds inside me with unexpected sunshine. And when I got away from them, a rainbow appeared, and I got a chance to dry out. But when I finally reached a place where I felt emotionally grounded, I figuratively did what Noah had done. I grew a vineyard and got drunk...

The tempests from my father's temper had thundered so violently and lasted so long (much longer than 40 days and nights). But his lightening never illuminated him to me. It only terrified me. It shocked me into fear and submission. Rarely in early childhood did I feel treated to behaviors that made me feel mild, summer days and sunny, summer feelings by either of my parents.

In youth, happiness began and ended as mysteriously as the weather, as if my feelings were forces caused by elements outside my control. People had the power to make me feel one way or another, and I didn't believe I could do anything about it. If I was having a gray day, it never occurred to me that it was me who was the cloud

blocking me from the light. I saw others as sunshine or clouds in *my* skies. I saw everyone as heavenly bodies with mysterious forces that determined how my day would look.

When I was a child, I wasn't taught to think about how I felt. Nobody then thought feelings were the basis for sincerity or that sincerity was an important part of authenticity. Nobody told me I couldn't be totally honest with myself if I was insincere and inauthentic. So I basked in the limelight of factual successes. I was proud of what I knew and could do. I had no clue how to feel better about myself, or the importance of my feelings in being fully honest with myself.

I couldn't compliment myself for a job well done. I couldn't console myself when I felt sad. I couldn't promise to do better than had been done to me. I couldn't even talk to myself about the way I was treating me. The world was a bagel and I was the hole at the center. Man can't live without bread, alone.

I was living in a bubble without a sense of my own mortality. I was living in a castle without a sense of what lay beyond the moat. I was well protected by the bubble and well defended by my castle walls. But there was a price to pay for my insularity. The only one who could get to me was gOD. And every little thing He did to pierce my defenses was seen as a breach. His methods weren't helping. They only scared me more.

I saw myself as an artist, but I couldn't paint my anger –red; my fear – yellow; and my sorrow - blue. I wasn't able to mix my feelings on the palette in my heart and brush my emotions on the canvas of the world within me. There was no rainbow of hope in me, so there were no emotions to *speak* of.

I stared at the white canvas within wondering what others were doing and why I couldn't understand what people were trying to say to me. Nothing touched me. I was white and innocent, and everything around me was black and worldly. As I grew older, my feelings melded on the palette in my heart into a muddy mess. The world around me looked dark brown, or at its best gray or beige.

I wasn't aware that I had the emotional color I needed to paint a rainbow within. I didn't know I could witness myself creating emotional canvases for others like works of art. I lived somewhere *over* the rainbow, not under it where I could see it for what it was. I lived in a *fantasy*. I knew nothing of making *dreams* come true.

Although I grew up in sunny California, my heart was a tempestuous kansas, even after I got clean and sober and got on medication for mental illness. Tornados of self-doubt often appeared

on my horizon without a moment's notice. Floods deluged me regularly, and I could do nothing about them, but watch. I couldn't affect my inner weather or prepare for it. I just had to weather one emotional storm or flood after another without the shelter of the metaphor of life as a school of self-love.

I think most people saw how much pain I was in, but there was nothing they could do about it, either. Most of them were kind to me, but they didn't have advice that helped. Either they suggested using religious insurance policies to cover my losses or they just lowered their head and pushed through my hot air, doing the best they could to get through it without breaking a sweat.

It took 20 years for me to complete the lessons of infancy and the terrible twos in the school of self-love. Like a very young child, I was learning an enormous amount about myself at that time, but I didn't yet have the experience to know how to apply it or even talk about it. I could still only love *others*. I could only offer *them* umbrellas of sympathy or rainbow flags of hope. I wasn't fully enrolled in the nursery school of self-love.

It took more than 40 years before I could paint self-portraits within in the primary, emotional colors: red, yellow and blue. But at least I could, at long last, say I was an emotional artist learning my craft. At least I could say that color was coming into my black-and-white world.

It took more than 50 years before I could paint my country red (angry), white (loving) and blue (sad). Patriotism was beyond me until I could take the colors of our flag personally. I was still a guest at the American table. I didn't feel like family.

Each spiritual year of self-love has mysterious seasons with reasons that go beyond any science found in the mind. Although I once wished only for summers of love, there was contentment to be gleaned from my winters of discontent. Growing happens slowly.

Every feeling has a shade of meaning if you're willing to watch yourself as you paint with it. Ask yourself what a particularly favorite, emotional tint says about you, and you'll learn how you feel for your *self*. In the end, that will be far more important than how you feel about others.

6. Grades

Life offers grades - rewards for achievements - incentives to study more and work harder at being you. But I told myself that I didn't care about the grades, that I was too mature to need grades to

motivate me to learn about myself. (In truth, I didn't have enough self-esteem to feel comfortable feeling graded by myself, or the Teacher.)

When I was a kid, I wanted to get the highest grade in the class, and if I couldn't get the highest, I wanted to be as close to the top of the grading scale as possible. Grades were the only way I had to compare myself to others. I had to do better than everyone else just to feel O.K. about myself. I got good grades more to keep my insecurities under control than because I loved learning.

Rewards for attributes other than intellectual brilliance, such as friendship, loyalty, kindness and even peace of mind, didn't interest me because I intuitively knew I'd have failed those classes in those days. In those days, I didn't care if others had more than me, looked better or had more friends so long as I could consider myself smarter than them, and therefore more important in accordance with the values I'd been raised with.

I should have told myself I was better than "that," not better than "them." I should have compared my behavior to theirs, but, instead, I compared my being. Because I couldn't yet separate my contents from my container, I compared my body and my brains to others'. I didn't include my heart and soul.

I used my mind to compete with everyone instead of using it to *stop* competing with them. People told me they admired my intelligence, but I used my mind to achieve a sense of superiority over others. *And* I even developed great skill in concealing that superiority from them. But I couldn't conceal my sense of superiority from myself. I was conceited.

My good grades in school gave others the impression I was industrious, focused and disciplined about everything. And I was. But I was also egotistical, arrogant, stubborn and frightened. But I hid these vices so well that *I* couldn't even see them. I wanted to be loved as much as the next guy, but I didn't have a clue to how much I was getting in my own way. Deep inside I was unhappy.

Good grades in school and financial success later in life are material rewards for one kind of hard work and discipline. But working hard for material rewards without teaching me how to work hard for emotional rewards wasn't wise of my parents. They couldn't see how much my scholastic rewards depended on doing my emotional homework.

I ended up dropping out of college in the first trimester because I didn't have the *emotional* skills to be there, not because I wasn't *smart* enough. But I also didn't have the courage to tell my parents that they hadn't prepared me for college by giving me the emotional

tools I'd need for success. A college education is 2% intelligence and 98% emotional fortitude. It turned out I wasn't "good" enough to go to college straight out of high school. I needed experience out in the world to make up for the emotional tools I was missing.

Spirituality is dependent on first getting your emotional house in order. The road from your head to your soul should take you through your heart. It's not *all* about being smart or a true believer. In fact, it's much more important to be heartfelt.

I started out as a Dorothy in Kansas who ended up on the other side of the rainbow. I was a little girl who was sore at the little world I was in. But once on my adventure in life, I just wanted to get back to my past and the faces I was familiar with. My world didn't look so hopeless and grey once I was far away from it.

I looking for a wizard who'd know how to get me back where I belonged in the form of boyfriends. But as it turned out, there was a glinda inside me who had the right answer all along.

I met a scarecrow along the way and grasped the fact that I needed brains if I was going to get where I wanted to go. I chanced across a tin man in me, understood how rusty I was emotionally and perceived how great a need I had for a heart. I heard my own roar at the most inopportune of times and realized I'd always be cowardly if I didn't find the courage to seek out my self. I finally found the wizard within, but he was an imposter. He couldn't help me go back where I came from.

In going on the journey of "becoming" to become a loyal friend to all the parts of me, I needed evidence that *I* could like me. There was a wicked witch within me who was my enemy, and I had to discover how to cleanse myself of her. It didn't take faith in God to get me out of my predicaments. It took faith in my selves. I needed friends badly, and the only place to make them was within.

A high paying job, a shiny car, a fashionable zip code, a vacation abroad, and a boyfriend – these had been the only rewards I sought. But inner peace and self-acceptance were parallel paths on the journey that I needed to explore as well. Material success and a handsome man in my arms were rewards in the school of self-love that would only endure if I could also internalize them as inner wealth and emotional richness.

I needed an appetite that made me hungry to know. I needed a thirst that made me thirsty to love. I needed to starve myself in some ways in order to build up an appetite in other ways. I needed food for thought, not frequent trips to the kitchen. I needed to become a

heavyweight spiritually, a buddha barry, a symbol of inner greed and desire.

In my youth, I gave more attention to how thin and cute I could look on the outside without realizing that I was compensating for how fat and ugly I secretly felt deep down inside. I pursued material rewards with a voracious appetite, striking them off my list of things to get one by one. I had no other list. Inside I was famished.

I wanted to be taller; I wanted a penis that was longer; I wanted a wallet that bulged bigger in my back pocket. It should have been no surprise to me that I always came away feeling short, small and poor. But I was short because I compared myself to others; I was small because I couldn't reveal to me who I was so jealous of; and I was poor because I didn't see how rich I was slowly becoming. It was no wonder I identified with the wicked, old witch in the "Wizard of Oz" who wanted power and control over Dorothy.

I was an ugly duckling all my life pursuing the course of becoming a beautiful swan. It wasn't until I was well into my sixties that I realized my body had lost its grace and beauty, but my soul was beautiful. It was only when I saw how gracious I was toward others that I realized life is deeper than it looks.

Mental illness made me pursue a rabbit down a rabbit hole into the weird world below the ground of everyday reality. In youth, I become an alice in a wonderland experience all my own. I ate up the lies of Madison Avenue to grow bigger and drank in the promises of charlatans and fools to shrink in size. There was nothing spiritually nutritious in what they offered. They only made my ego vacillate wildly out of control.

With psychiatric medication, I became a gulliver facing a similar confrontation on a voyage to lilliput, where I saw myself as a giant among men, and in blefuscu, where I felt as tiny as a mouse compared to titans. I was on 19th Century journeys that only made me acutely aware of how out of touch I was with the time in which I lived.

I told myself I was willing to do anything to know me. I said I'd explore any feeling if it would help me understand myself. But that simply wasn't true. Thoughts that brought up feelings of embarrassment, shame and humiliation were too difficult for me then to entertain. I didn't want to feel guilty. I rationalized guilt away with blame or reasons.

Like Beethoven, I ended up shaking my fist at the Teacher, demanding to know why such difficult lessons in life should come to someone like me. I insisted She explain Her reasoning. I insisted on knowing *why* I was enrolled in the spiritual curriculum She'd chosen

for me *before* I entered each class rather than *after* I passed the final exam. I suffered through assignments in life not of my choosing. Some of my circumstances were obviously beyond my control, but learning from every experience wasn't consciously a part of my plan.

It was only when I looked at self-love as my goal in life that my frustrations with my curriculum slowly lifted. I'd been unfaithful to *me* long before any family member or lover had betrayed me. I'd been forced into a "Three Stooges" comedy routine with me, myself and I. My life was slapstick shtick on the inside. I was a B&W comedy routine that got stuck in the 1950's, and I couldn't get out.

The gay community tried to convince me that I was "fabulous." But I couldn't take their view to heart. Self-love doesn't mean "fabulous." I was a member of a community that was trying to teach the world to see gay people as divine. And yet, in those days, the religious institutions were all against us.

My head was consumed with survival; my heart with romantic love; and the inclination to do "evil" was no problem at all because I didn't believe my thoughts and feelings would ever get me into trouble...

As a Jewish member of the Abrahamic traditions, I knew my spiritual descendants had naively picked the fruits of good and evil from The Tree of Knowledge. So why not go back and pick the most forbidden fruit of all, me? Why not go from good and evil to self-love and wisdom? Would God and country begrudge me putting my curiosity about me before Them? Why not use the Hebrew Testament to better myself?

As a little boy, my mother had rewarded me with verbal compliments; or she'd simply smile, her glistening eyes turning an even brighter blue when I did something right. Those were her good grades that laid the groundwork for my future rewards for some time to come. I wanted to please my mother.

But she came from a European tradition that never spared the rod for fear of spoiling the child. When I didn't do what I was told, her face would fall in shock and disapproval, and her eyes would turn a military, dark blue. Such visual cues were deeply penetrating. And when I failed her tests, she wasn't shy about augmenting my emotional suffering with physical punishment. My first lessons in reward and punishment came from a mother whose identity was rooted in Teutonic culture. I may be American born, but I'm an old-fashioned European beneath the surface.

I was frustrated as a child, but I didn't even know the meaning of the word. "Frustration" isn't even a feeling. It's a physical

sensation. It's the sensation of being pulled in two opposing directions at once. When your thoughts go one way and your feelings another, you experience the sensation of frustration. (A nun on a bus in Jerusalem once told me that in 1970.)

My mother was my primary connection to the experience of becoming human, but I thought she was also the world's worse student of self-love. Her self-esteem couldn't have been lower, and her insistence on being right when it came to child rearing couldn't have been higher. She was young and inexperienced when I was born, but her sense of success as my first tutor was so important to her that she told herself she'd already passed the final exam in becoming the world's greatest mother. Her lessons were, not only, not spot on; they were sometimes dead wrong. She was human. She was only my tutor, not my Teacher.

I passed all those crazy tests she administered in that little schoolhouse she ran in her home and got a good, basic education in self-discipline and duty to others. But her core curriculum in the school of self-love turned out to be vastly different from my own needs to excel in life.

She'd been enrolled in survival skill classes in Nazi Germany that I never had to take. Even her major in life was vastly different from mine; I had no interest in having children; I had no interest in being the belle of the ball or a concert violinist like her.

My mother was schooled in a European Age of Manners, an old-fashioned way of living that focused only on what other people thought of her. She was very frightened of anyone who disapproved of her. (She knew what Christian disapproval of Jews looked like. Therefore she was extremely "polite" to everyone.)

I never considered the difference between "polite" and "courteous." There was an emotional difference at the core of each of these behaviors I hadn't understood. My mother had taught me only how to be polite. "Politeness" is motivated by fear, while "courtesy" is motivated by real respect.

Despite surviving a period in Jewish history when Jews were hunted and killed like animals, their body used to make soap and their skin used as lampshades – I had to remember that other people's opinions of my mother would always matter very much to her. She'd had to concern herself with survival. "Politeness" would always be a survival skill, while "courtesy" would remain a luxury she couldn't always afford.

She tried to drill good manners into me with such force that there was nothing I could do but rebel against the overwhelming

importance other people played in her life. I may have been the child of a German-Jew, but I was also a red-blooded American, born to a different generation and on a very different shore. There was no way I could conform to what I saw as her antiquated, European mannerisms without some sort of explanation to go with it.

When my father was liberated from concentration camp, he was a rich widower with three children. (He was able to recover some of his family's money from Swiss bank accounts and was able to collect his children from the Catholic orphanages he'd smuggled them into from the ghetto.) But because he had no experience in earning money or raising children, he was quickly separated from his material fortune through foolish business endeavors and from the love of his children through foolish fatherly practices that were outdated in the modern world.

He arrived in America rich, and ended up poor, moving in the opposite, financial direction of most of his immigrant peers. He loved being rich, but had no talent for making money. He loved being a father, but had no emotional gift for raising children. And so his family's money and his children's love slipped through his fingers. (A fool can also be easily parted from his emotions.)

Despite an unhappy marriage, my mother took her job as stepmother to my father's other children very seriously. She didn't divorce him until the last of those three children were married and out of the house. When I was six years old and my sister was four, my mother took *her* two small children to California where she supported our little family on a secretary's salary without financial support from my father until he married a rich widow many years later.

I have no doubt that the most important spiritual classes in my mother's curriculum were "children." She put all her attention to raising us, even the adopted children in her family who weren't biologically her own. Her devotion to all five of my father's offspring became the model for "devotion" I copied in finally raising myself up with self-love.

I came from a family of "C" spiritual students who just barely passed their lessons in *self-love*. They loved others to the best of their ability and left their own love for themselves at the door. So I had to make *myself* aware of the study habits I'd picked up from them that were good and bad for me. I couldn't blame anyone else for the poor grades I received in loving myself. I had to accept my previous grades and move on.

And so, when I met my former partner, it felt like a reward for a test I'd passed with flying colors. I didn't have to be by myself any

longer. Every vacation we spent abroad seemed like a reward for an A+ on a midterm we took. Buying our house on a hill felt like a gift for an exam we'd sailed through. It was if we were magically being rewarded for something we hadn't worked hard to attain. "Other" love came easily to us. Even money poured in. But it turned out love and money had come too easily...

Before he and I found one another, nothing had frightened me more than me. I couldn't be alone for long periods of time; I couldn't cry at all; embarrassment, shame and humiliation, the three aspects of guilt, made me feel "exposed," not "naked" in the sense of unencumbered or honest. But my former partner tried to help me get comfortable in the company of strangers even though I wasn't yet comfortable in my own skin.

My grades in the school of self-love had been recorded in the Teacher's roll book long before I was ever aware of the lessons I'd learned and tests I'd passed. By the time I was aware of why I was here on earth, my curriculum was, in many ways, set by circumstances beyond my control. I had to make do with the classes I was given, and endeavor to improve the grades I'd already received. I'd used up all my electives.

7. Curriculum

I felt as though my parents programmed me during my childhood like a computer with limited knowledge of the "mac" they were working on. Their understanding of human hardware (my body) and my heart (my software) were limited by the spiritual age they were born into. Their strict upbringing made me feel like a keyboard they pounded, trying to input information without fully understanding the sensitivity of the instrument they were operating. But despite their lack of upbringing skills, they succeeded in uploading many valuable files on how to live a good life, although many of those I could only open later in life when I had more knowledge about self-programming.

My resentments toward my parents came from all the ways I was contaminated with viruses and bugs that I thought I'd never be able to get out of my operating system. But I also erroneously believed that my peers were better programmed, and therefore better prepared for life than I. Both turned out to be false once I got a look at myself on the big screen.

I thought of myself as the only human being locked in a spiritual machine without a clue how to use it. I looked at the complexity of my being, concluded I could never learn to operate

someone as complicated as me, and came away feeling stupid and dejected.

In continuing the analogy of myself to a computer, parts of me were just *frozen*, and I couldn't find the glitch in my programming that had caused it. I couldn't find a way to access the technology of the workings of my heart. I could only understand the world rationally. I knew my feelings were there within, but I couldn't customize them to my liking.

My parents had taught me what they could with the emotional skills they'd amassed from their generation, but they communicated their desires as though I were a radio; they broadcast their feelings, not realizing I could communicate mine back to them. I was, in fact, as interactive as a computer, but they tuned me like a receiver. And that was spiritually damaging to a child of the television era.

There was no operating manual I could consult to figure out what to do about it. Granted my parents didn't know better. Others tried to tell me that I simply had to work harder to upgrade my spiritual skills myself, but they couldn't tell me how to do so. There were no *spiritual* geeks in those days.

I should have realized then that the generation after mine might someday judge "us" as simplistic and outdated, too. "New and improved" could be said of every generation. At the time, *we* knew we'd discovered something unbelievably new and improved about the meaning of life. We just didn't quite know what it was or how to express it without defiance of our parents.

So, as frustrating as it was to crash emotionally as often as I did, it was my job to find out why and fix it. I needed to become the spiritual I.T. administrator of my life before Bill Gates ever gave me an apparatus with which to express myself in writing.

I was overly defiant in some ways and overly obedient in others. My conscience couldn't weigh my thoughts against my feelings accurately because my feelings were all over the place.

But there was no one else who was going to get inside and fix me *for* me because there was nothing broken. I was just a device I didn't yet know how to fully operate. I needed to get a peek at the operating manual. I needed an instruction book I had to write myself. I could have called it, "Humans for Dummies."

Because of the late age in which I entered the school of self-love, my spiritual education had begun unconsciously with me treating myself in youth as though I was a simple household appliance: a telephone, a TV, a fridge. I unconsciously used me without appreciating how I worked. I had no idea how magnificent a creation I

was. I was a member of a species that had created tools making it possible to talk to people who weren't in the same room; watch people in a box tell stories; and keep food cold or frozen in a closet.

It was no surprise I fell into the trap of letting others treat me socially, sexually and professionally like a machine that was there for their benefit. I had as cavalier an attitude toward myself as my parents had had toward me. I gave myself to others too eagerly. They used me, broke me, and then they gave me back to me feeling broken. I wasn't broken. I was only scratched up on the outside and bruised. Inside I could still operate.

But I had to build an *emotional* firewall at a time before there were even computers. I had to insulate myself from those who wanted to tamper with my operating system. And I did. But the firewall was so effective that it kept everyone out, including me. It stopped me from needing to feel entirely.

I was Mr. Spock. But my mother was the Vulcan, the sophisticated, futuristic, biological machine with the pointed ears from the distant planet. I didn't learn about women until I was in my sixties. My father was the human being in their relationship. And I was the half-breed who had to find a way to live in the world of men... This was my personal journey into my inner space where no other man could claim to have gone before.

My Teacher may have donated the hardware, but my mother was the first and foremost developer of my software. She uploaded many of the programs into me that would run me for most of my life. I cut and pasted many of the ways she thought into me. I not only copied her feelings, beliefs and behaviors; I copied her thinking patterns. But I couldn't admit it to anyone. I didn't want to look like an alien from another planet after I'd already been locked up in mental wards. So I did the opposite of what she did just to mask how similar she and I really were.

I was bugged; I was corrupted; I was down. *I* was the glitch in my system, and I was the last person on earth I thought of going to, to repair my programming. All I could do was blame my mother and try to do the opposite of what she did. I couldn't stand feeling anything she, too, felt. I didn't want to feel like there was a woman in me, especially not my mother! That seemed like I was breaking the worst of all the taboos.

If $(x + y) = 1$, I really didn't want to be either variable if it meant having to live with either of my parents inside me for the rest of my life. I wanted to be $>x + >y$.

I was particularly disgusted by the thought of being like my parents once I learned about sex. If $(x + y) = 1$ then my mother was “x”, my father was “y”, and I was “1”. And even though many are introduced to this equation using “birds” and “bees” instead of algebraic variables, I think this became the underlying reason why I’ve always hated math...

Therefore, helping others reprogram their inner software was my first assignment in the spiritual elementary school of self-love. Helping others become humans *doing* was a prerequisite assignment in becoming a human *being*. Helping others helped me see how difficult it would be to accept my parents as the prototypes for creating my own inner parent for my inner child. Helping others helped me accept myself as “1” $(x + y)$ in a world of many others. Helping others was the first way I humbled myself to loving all the Teacher’s good and bad little apples.

8. Class Work

I was a good student in public school growing up. It was rare I’d stare out the classroom window and not listen to the teacher. I did my homework, and came to class prepared. If I didn’t understand the lesson being taught, I asked questions, and then I studied diligently for the test.

My intellectual I.Q. was high, but my E.Q. (emotional quotient) was low. I had no idea what was the matter with me because I couldn’t separate my thoughts from my feelings. That would have required that I talk to myself. And in those day, talking to yourself was unacceptable.

All the outer evidence was there to substantiate the claim that I was brilliant, but within I felt *stupid*, as though I lived life in a *stupor*. I could manage facts and figures, but people *scared* me. They *angered* me. They *saddened* me. And I couldn’t figure out what to do about all that. I was extremely sensitized when I was around human beings.

It felt inside like I lived at the North Pole socially. Most of the time my heart felt like frozen tundra. My inner sky was gray, and half the time my mood was abysmally dark. I was in a bad place and didn’t think there was anything I could do about it. The weather within was miserable. I was miserable. And I didn’t think there was anywhere I could go to find a sunnier disposition.

I pretended to be in a tropical paradise when I was around others. I wanted people to believe there was never a cloud in my inner skies. I didn’t want to hurt them with my icy insides, but I was also

terrified of ridicule for being so afraid. I couldn't warm up to others because I couldn't warm up to the idea of me being so cold and harsh to myself.

With an inner light that shined so weakly, my internal climate was inhospitable to much in the way of an inner life. I lived with arctic winds within that separated me from others and made me feel as though civilization were thousands of miles out of my reach. I was emotionally cold with myself, so how could I not appear distant and artificially pleasant to others? I was polite. I was well mannered, but only my mother would have been proud of me.

Summer came after school when I was home alone. I'd put on classical music and dance madly around the house. Spring came consciously into my heart as a junior in high school when I took up knitting. I studied ballet secretly as a senior, but not in a studio. I had a school classmate teach me privately at home, making her swear not to tell a soul what I was doing...

I couldn't change how I felt. I couldn't wish myself into the sun belt of fun and games where everyone seemed to be vacationing year round. I had to be emotionally realistic about how I felt about myself. I lived where I lived because I was born there. I couldn't help myself.

My parents lived in a soviet-style flat of emotional isolation in a siberia that I felt trapped in. They were on the top floor of an edifice of all the past generations on both sides of their families, each generation a concrete story built upon the next. I was figuratively perched on the roof of a bunker-like structure built by my ancestors and exposed to siberian storms of apathy I could do nothing about. Where I lived, there was nothing but bleak disregard in every direction. My body may have lived in L.A., but my inner world was still back on the steppes of Russia where I believed I could do nothing about the way it was. I wasn't just trapped inside myself; I was trapped in an ancestral snare from which I knew there was no escape.

My parents' ceiling would become my floor, so I had no choice but to build my story upon theirs. They were the architects with the blueprint that would determine the length and width of my narrative. Only the heights I could reach in life were up to me.

My classwork in the school of self-love began with accepting my geographic *inner* location. Once I could see where I was coming from, I felt more confident about where I could and couldn't go to do something about it. The winds of change could blow me in any direction. I could go further north and become more cynical and disassociated from this world. I could go south in defiance of my

attitude. I could go west toward the setting sun and do something in the time I had on earth. Or I could go east toward God.

I didn't have to move to any particular place out in the world to see where I was at inside. If I wanted to live in a warmer, inner clime to enjoy a better attitude, I only had to see my inner world as round; go past my horizon; and discover a whole inner world waiting for me.

Inner light has two qualities, illumination and warmth. Illumination is wisdom (head). Warmth is love (heart). To learn about self-love requires self-illumination and warmth. Your inner sun is shining regardless of the time of day. You just have to learn to live with the many clouds that will affect your mood. Wherever you go inside, you'll eventually have to deal with rain. It's only when sorrow is rare that you can embrace it with joy.

9. Homework

Homework in the school of life is the work you do by yourself, usually at home, but not necessarily so. Any thoughts and feelings you have by yourself with yourself is homework. Any interactions you have with others is classwork. And then there's prayer, office hours alone with the Teacher...

In general, most people are very engaged in classwork, but they don't want to have to do any homework. Most people are nursery school, kindergarten or grade school students of life who have no need to converse with the Teacher about their grades. They don't even want to converse with themselves unless they absolutely have to...

In general, people discuss every assignment from the Teacher with one another without considering Her presence. They discuss other people's assignments with one another (gossip), but they don't talk much about their own lessons with themselves. Homework isn't usually discussed in public. Homework is private.

Your work habits and cooperation grades with others are really based upon on *how* you do your homework and *whether* you do your homework. If you don't study life on your own, it's going to be apparent to others. If you come to class without having done your homework, everyone will know.

Everything that happens in life is a spiritual assignment graded by the Teacher, whether you tear up the test in anger because you didn't like the grade or save it to study for the next test. Even your test grades are pretty obvious to everyone...

Doing well on *all* God's assignments in life just isn't possible. You can't study for a test in a class if you don't realize you're enrolled

in it. You can't come to any of your classes if you don't know you're in school. And you can't do well on assignments once you're there, ready to learn, if you don't do your homework.

Sometimes life is really about improving your work habits and cooperation with *yourself* and not worrying too much about the subject matter you're being tested on in the world around you. A good attitude and an honest approach to everything you do is the best way to get through life. But sometimes, your intuition will tell you what you need to do, and you may not be able to put that into words because you're not on speaking terms with yourself. That's where more self-knowledge is necessary in order to learn how to turn up the volume on your intuition.

Doing your homework develops your relationship with your self. Talking to yourself about what you're thinking about is your "home" work. Asking yourself what you're feeling is "home" work. Noticing your urges, sensations and impulses is "home" work. If you're spending your time at home not doing all of this, your work habits need improvement.

Making mistakes is important in its own right because nothing teaches humility and patience better than making mistakes. Apologizing to yourself for every mistake you make teaches you to love the learning process regardless of the grade. Apologizing to yourself for your mistakes is the greatest way to begin the lessons of self-love anew, regardless of all the previous grades recorded in the Teacher's roll book.

At those moments when I feel frustrated with my efforts, but can apologize to me for the low grade I was given, it's as if I'm whispering to myself as though to a dear friend that I'm still curious about being me. It's not always the outcome, but the endeavor to learn that counts. It's not the grade I get, but the curiosity I build that makes the classes I'm enrolled in worth seeing through to the end.

When I forget that the purpose of life is learning to feel fabulous about myself, I forget that *failing* isn't half as painful as *fearing*. Failing and fearing *me* can be so easily avoided with a simple apology to myself at a timely moment.

The homework of life can only be done with a good attitude if I feel at home within myself. I have to be comfortable in my own skin to feel a sense of coming home whenever and wherever I happen to be out in the world. I couldn't even begin to do my homework in the school of self-love until I'd built a home where I felt comfortable, safe and warm inside. Compliments and apologies to myself are the best ways to make myself at home in my inner home.

When I was in the throes of mental illness, I could see nothing good about any assignment out in the world. I pretended to be a Ph.D. candidate who was entirely consumed with study on his own. I thought of myself as having graduated all the previous levels of learning. I imagined I was way ahead of the pack. Everything was “home” work. I never came out of my “home” to go to “class.” Unfortunately, I was living in a hovel, not a home. I was doing *hovel* work, not *homework*.

Mental illness pushed me out of the light of the world into the darkness within where fear and anxiety kept me locked up behind a garden wall. I felt like forbidden fruit trying to ripen in an endless night. I was green. I was a bitter and sour. I was in an imaginary eden of my own making. I was in the dark behind a garden wall. There was no Teacher coming to visit me. There were no other students. I couldn’t escape my metaphor to describe it. I was living within it.

The moment-to-moment assignments in the school of self-love were so beguiling that I preferred to play hooky altogether than get out and be with people and feel that I was in life’s classroom. I zoned out rather than live life through consciously learning to enlighten myself to both my worlds. I traveled through the inner, siberian winter of discontent on automatic pilot, trudging unconsciously through inner ice and cold, one foot painfully thrust in front of the other. There was no middle east in me. There was no Israel beyond my horizon. I was alone and in bad company.

I lived under the illusion that my attendance record at life’s school in the here-and-now was a secret. I didn’t think anyone could really tell what my spiritual grades looked like. I only showed up to school in those moments when I knew I was going to be tested by others. And even then, I made it look like I was emotionally and spiritually in the tropics, even though my heart and soul were shivering and blue.

I lived life as though forgiveness was my Teacher’s homework, not mine. I wanted *Her* to beg forgiveness of *me* for what She’d allowed to happen to the Six Million. I didn’t realize She didn’t put me here on earth to ask for *my* forgiveness. It’s my assignment to learn to forgive myself. Of course, I was willing to forgive others their trespasses if I could, but how could I if I couldn’t first forgive myself?

Most of my life, I was a forbidden fruit I refused to pick. Knowledge of my potential for self-love and wisdom didn’t interest me. There was a voice within that tempted me to pick me, but I thought I knew better than to listen to it. I relied instead on doing what others told me to do to get “a head,” when what I needed was to get a “heart.”

I needed to learn to become obedient to me more than I needed to become knowledgeable about the world around me. I needed to find my place in my inner world more than I needed to seek popularity in the world around me. I needed to *grow* more than I needed to *succeed*.

My assignments in *the wisdom of self-love* were, for the longest time, too great for me to imagine. So I excused myself from class. I had no interest in loving myself and spending all my time studying me. I really wanted to become an expert on other people, outer places and expensive things. Every time I tried to love me, I found myself getting distracted by someone or something. Studying me was still an “elective” in my life. I didn’t matter to my overall GPA because “I” wasn’t my major.

When my relationship with my partner of fourteen years ended in early middle age (50), I was afraid my embarrassment of my body, shame of my character and humiliation in just “being” would be exposed for the world to see. I didn’t want others to know that I’d trusted someone else more than me and had gotten burned by him. I didn’t want to admit out loud that he’d betrayed me by having sex with an ex-boyfriend. I sensed there’d been a betrayal in my life much greater than his, but I couldn’t yet perceive it. I didn’t want to feel guilty about having lost *other* love because I knew nothing yet of *self-love*. I couldn’t yet see the *forest* because I couldn’t yet see that I was a *tree* (of knowledge).

Instead of resolving to strengthen my ability to trust myself, I concluded I had to distrust others all the more. I couldn’t apologize to me for having betrayed myself by playing hooky in the school of self-love; I didn’t want to have to face self-doubt with difficult and personal questions. I preferred to appear to be another victim of *other* love rather than see myself as a student of self-love in the midst of a great lesson that would bring me to class with a whole different attitude about my life.

It didn’t occur to me that the demise of that relationship was a harbinger of a new relationship with myself I was just beginning to explore. It didn’t occur to me that learning more about myself was the only sensible way to avoid betrayal by others in the future. And because I never planned to develop a personal relationship with the Teacher, it didn’t occur to me that it would be best if I had a secure relationship with myself in place before trying to get “spiritual.”

I was a seed germinating in the darkness of the permafrost within me, and I was growing quickly up through the snow and ice in my heart toward a mysterious light. I was pushing through the darkness of disappointment, but I could only assume my Teacher was

there with me. I couldn't perceive Her presence. This was the first trip on my journey of self-love in which I imagined I wasn't going through life alone. This was my spiritual germination, the breaking through of my shell in a siberian springtime.

From the surface I was just a blade of grass. But however cold and inhospitable it felt like within, I still wanted to live to see more of God's light. I still dreamed about growing into a great tree in a forest.

Self-doubt flowed into my chest like ice water when my partner broke my heart. Doubts and distrust engulfed me with a feeling of frigidity. The frost surrounding the seed in me slowly melted, but then I had to push through the ice water and frozen ground that kept me from the surface of consciousness where the sun shined.

When I'd left my mother's home at the age of seventeen, in my haste to run away from my family, I ran away from the pursuit of myself as well. In my haste to embrace my future, I rejected my past. But my Teacher brought strangers into my life that mirrored my mother's who taught me to relate to *their* authority in place of *hers*.

My experiences prior to conscious understanding of the importance of self-love had caused me to scheme against myself to get me through life. I fulfilled my expectations to community and culture with bribes inside in order to receive the rewards everyone told me I was "entitled" to. But in doing my duty to others without loving myself, I stole away that which I held most precious, my dream of self-esteem.

We make promises to teach us the importance of keeping them. We make promises to people for practice. I had to learn to fulfill my promises to others before I could keep my promises to myself. Promises to people are opportunities from the Teacher to show us that are words matter.

If our word isn't good, God has to change Her entire plan for the universe. She depends on us to keep our word, and when we don't, we disappoint Her. And when we disappoint Her, She makes sure that we learn what that disappointment feels like. We go through experiences in which we end up disappointing ourselves.

Faith in yourself is like a muscle you need to strengthen day-by-day to make your word convincing. Spirituality has to be achieved by bench-pressing self-esteem until it doesn't feel heavy any more. All your promises to others are weights that build your spiritual strength over time. And that will eventually give you the resilience you need to keep your promises to yourself.

My Teacher is also my Trainer and Coach. So doing my spiritual homework is no different from doing physical exercise for the

sheer pleasure of improving my relationship with my body. The team spirit that comes with the excitement of learning to move in a coordinated fashion with others is a mirror of the team spirit you could be having with your self.

10. Tests

Being “tested” isn’t just an embedded extension of the metaphor of life as a school. Being “tested” is the underlying cause for my dread of disapproval from the Teacher. Every aspect of bad luck in my life always felt like a horrible grade on some test I never knew was coming that I was unprepared for.

The very idea that God would test me began to perturb me over time. I didn’t want to be tested on how I was doing, especially when I didn’t know a test was in the works. I didn’t want to think I was being *forced* to love anyone, least of all me, and life on earth. Wasn’t it enough that I was just scraping through without hurting anyone?

So when quizzes came to me through the other students in class, I refused to have a good attitude about being tested, on principle. I didn’t want to have to ace quizzes with loving-kindness toward people I felt were only out to get what they wanted.

I expressed my crabby and mean-spirited attitude earnestly to all without realizing people had their own inner crabs and spirits to deal with. I thought it better to be brutally honest than disingenuously kind. That was my idea of leading a morally “clean” life. And there was some truth in seeing myself as a victim of circumstances beyond my control, since the Teacher had given me a seat next to certain “questionable” people to begin with.

When God confronted Adam in Eden after he ate the forbidden fruit, he blamed “THAT WOMAN YOU GAVE ME.” [Genesis 3:12] He blamed the two of Them. And I’m no different. I blamed God, mankind and the time in which I live for many of the problems I had to face. They weren’t challenges I’d created for myself.

My spiritual ancestors are no different from yours. Human nature is a human problem, not a Jewish problem, even if this story comes out of the Old Testament. I know that I’m partially to blame for the way my life has turned out, even if I claim to identify as the fruit in the Creation Story, and not the perpetrators of the crime.

A good defense is still a defense. It’s not necessarily a sign of innocence. We’re all human beings with something inside of us that we can’t account for. Call it “guilt.” Call it *Jewish* guilt. Call it Catholic guilt. Call it catholic guilt. The fact is, it’s universal. There

isn't a baby born anywhere on the planet who's exempt from this metaphor.

Even though I'm not an Old Testament kind of guy, more of a Dorothy in Oz than a rabbinic scholar, I, too, took the red, felt heart stuffed with rags given to me by the wizard. At the time, I needed the gift of his heart more than I needed to sew one together of my own. I stuffed my chest with many people's "heart felt" sentiments until there wasn't any place in there for my own.

Until I was ready to commend myself for all the goodness I brought into my world. I wasn't able to raise my self-esteem. Learning to compliment myself for every little thing I accomplished was a monumental task. Prior, if I said it, it wasn't worth listening to. If I saw it, it wasn't worth noticing. If I felt it, it wasn't worth feeling...

Like the tin man, I had plenty of armor, but no clue how to weld a way into it to add a heartfelt touch of my own. I'd ostensibly protected myself from *others*, but I couldn't get into the vacuum in my chest because I was unwittingly protecting myself from *me*. It was *my* disapproval of me I couldn't bear. It was *my* approval of me I couldn't give myself.

I had to discipline myself to overcome the emotional bad habits I'd accrued. My head had to look at the claims my heart was making. I had to find good reason to appreciate my tough love. My Teacher gave me challenges to my body and my life moving out from my body to make that happen, but it was up to me whether I was going to do the homework that would prepare me for Her next test question for moral regard of myself.

For years, I produced "MeTube" videos in my inner, home theatre in which the characters that came to mind were doing irresponsible things to me. I had to avoid car crashes, disgruntle police, clever thieves and bloodthirsty terrorists. While my friends were painting the *town* red, I was painting my inner world red. I was creating one reason after another for me to be angry about something that was only happening virtually. And although I always created a reason for feeling angry, it was purely self-manufactured.

I was always on *red* alert. I was always in a bad mood. When you're gay, Jewish, a nerd, a ballet dancer, an English teacher, short and with bad skin – you're going to look for a mood to match your body and the world immediately around it.

I was both "beauty" and the "beast." I was a princess locked in a castle of flesh, who was adored by a beast. I could see how attractive I was deep down inside (beauty), even though I looked horrifying to

myself on the outside (beast). I was one person on the outside and another within.

I was a princess who didn't want to have to live locked up for a lifetime with someone I'd been given no choice in the matter of choosing. And I was a beast who didn't want to let the best of me leave. A part of me had to learn about the liberty to let myself be loved. And a part of me had to learn to communicate my intentions without terrifying me.

The fable of the "Beauty and the Beast" test was intended to teach me that I was a match for myself made in heaven. It wasn't about a male/female relationship, but about the relationship between the "x" and "y" in every man. I'd been introduced to that story in childhood. I just didn't realize it was just one more 19th Century romantic notion that had been sitting inside on in spiritual school for decades waiting for me to take it personally.

I'd projected my attractiveness and repulsion of me onto the world instead. I'd cared more about what others thought of me than solve the beauty/beast problem from within. I worried more about the world commending me and appreciating the humanity in me than me. I wasn't ready to admit I was both attractive and repulsive to myself.

The spot quizzes of life in youth turn into long, grueling exams by adulthood. When you feel like a *victim* of self-love instead of its *beneficiary*, everyone looks like a perpetrator. Even your friends begin to look a little like frenemies. It's hard to see your friends as purveyors of lessons intended to help you learn to love your self all the more, and it's hard to see your enemies as potential friends.

I was shy growing up, but what I didn't know then was that my shyness was really just *test anxiety*. I didn't want to be tested by others because I didn't want to have to look at my spiritual grades in loving myself. I'd been taught that humility required that I hide my pride.

The "seven deadly sins" are wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony. And they truly are debilitating when practiced on others. But when you practice them on yourself, they look a little different. It can be helpful to get *angry* with yourself when you need a little tough love. It makes sense to be *greedy* to know and love yourself. Internal *laziness* may keep you calm inside and free from heart attacks and strokes. Gays will tell you that we can't live without our *pride*. *Lust* for your own passion and compassion makes you come alive. *Envy* of all that's locked inside you that you have to earn to learn about is to your advantage. And seeing yourself as forbidden fruit that you can't get enough of is the essence of *gluttony*.

As an English teacher I saw the frustration of my students in the gouged out holes and graffiti of their desks. But when I tried to force them to pay closer attention to their feelings, I was unsuccessful. They weren't able to face self-denial by force. And I couldn't blame them because I couldn't either. I didn't know how to make *them* feel whole any more than I knew how to make *me* feel whole.

It has to be voluntary. You have to come to class in the school of self-love because you're genuinely curious to discover what you don't know.

11. Tuition

By the time I was six, my older, half-siblings had left home, and my mother, having completed the job she promised herself in raising my father's children from his first marriage, felt she was free to leave him. At a time when women were expected to forgive and forget anything their husbands did wrong, she rewrote the rules. She didn't forgive him for not supporting the family; she didn't forgive him for his rage-aholic moods; or for his condescending attitude toward her. She saw he wasn't the kind of male model she wanted for her children and came up with a new plan. She moved my sister and me to California. There, she was able to divorce him after one year's residency and raise the two of us on her own.

It was 1958, and she started her new, little family on a secretary's salary of \$100 a month *before* taxes. She didn't want the help of a man in raising us. She promised herself not to remarry until my sister and me were fully grown and out of the house.

Such was the tuition my mother paid in the 1960's to live her life the way she wanted to. As a gay man who reached adulthood in the 1970's, I paid tuition of sorts myself. But both my mother and me were far ahead of our classmates. We may have had to pay a little extra to do as we pleased, but it was worth it.

Because my father didn't pay child support until he remarried many years later when my sister and I were already teenagers, she and I grew up accustomed to life without the "standard" luxuries of other white Americans in those days. (For instance, I got my first bike when I was twelve, and it was used.) We never felt poor. We just didn't have much money. For the first few years of life without a father, my mother bought our clothes from thrift stores and tailored them to fit us. My sister and I went to schools where I sometimes had to hold my bladder for hours until I got home, not to risk getting beaten up in the boys' bathroom. But that didn't stop me from doing my schoolwork or

getting good grades. The bullies could only intimidate me physically and emotionally. I wouldn't allow anyone to intimidate me intellectually.

As a child with buck teeth, glasses and a potbelly, I had no reason to feel *vain*, but I had every reason to feel *conceited*. My mother saved up enough money to buy me braces and contact lenses when I was in my teens. I lost the weight when I started to dance and built muscle from the ballet classes. My pimples went away in my twenties. Then, like an ugly duckling that suddenly turned into a beautiful swan, I found reasons to be *vain*. But by my mid-twenties, when I was ravaged by mental illness, I lost all reason to be *conceited*.

Because I didn't learn how to use my smarts to outwit the bullies within, I felt intimidated by others until well into middle age. It took decades for me to get up the courage to clean up the schoolyard inside of me and get all those brats to class. There were thugs and bullies in my heart ready to bounce on any good feeling I had for myself. The free-for-all in public school growing up had followed me within. I internalized my youth and then dragged it through adulthood with me.

My mother had great strength of character, but she couldn't admire herself. She had internalized her youth, and she was dragging it through her adult years, too. I had bullies inside me; she had nazis inside her. We both saw ourselves burdened by life instead of turning our past around to see all the reasons we had to be proud of how we'd survived our separate childhoods.

She was so bitter and resentful at times about the least little thing. And because of her bad moods, I, too, developed the tendency of overlooking *her* achievements. I figured if she couldn't see them, why should I have to look for them for her?

She paid the rent, put food on the table; gave us clothes, piano lessons and the luxury of living in an apartment building with a pool. She scrimped and saved to meet all our family's needs, and a secretary's salary.

But her bitter tone of voice indicated how great a grudge she bore at having to earn a living without a husband to help support us. I had no choice but to conclude I was a financial burden and an emotional weight around her neck. That only made me want to get out of her house all the faster.

Only when I left home and my physical wellbeing became my own burden to bear did I see that my bitterness at having to care for *me* emerged out of the emotional template my mother had set. I left

home at eighteen not realizing I'd packed her inner nazis in with my inner bullies in my suitcase.

Needless to say, these inner issues raised the price of my tuition in life. I wasn't just trying to make a living to support myself. I was trying to clean up my act at the same time. I was attending two schools at once, the school of life and the school of self-love. It wasn't easy. And it certainly didn't come cheap...

My mother blamed my deadbeat Dad for her financial worries when I was a child (with good reason). But I had no one but myself to blame for my financial woes when I was an adult. I was in an inner prison one floor above hers with the exact same dimensions to my cell. I just had a view through the bars on *my* window that was a little higher than *hers*.

When I finally admitted that the job of parenting myself was the Herculean effort of my life, I began to appreciate what all parents must go through in choosing to have a family. My mother began the task of teaching me to respect *myself* by teaching me to respect *others*. I had to extend her efforts by teaching my inner child to respect my inner parent. Another way of saying that is that I had to teach my heart to contribute to the efforts of my head. I needed the two of them to work together, not pull in opposite directions.

I'm now in my sixties. Just this morning my heart interrupted my head with a picture of my bathtub, but I now have such a good relationship with my inner kid that I'm always eager for his input.

I had my bathtub reglazed some time ago, but now it already has a couple of chips and cracks in it. I realized this morning that what my heart was telling me was that although I'd resurfaced myself like an old tub, it wasn't pristine looking even after the upgrade. I was in better shape than ever before, but I. still not perfect. And this was an emotional message I could live with because it was realistic. I don't have to look *new*. I only have to look *improved*.

What my mother had accomplished financially in raising two children under such difficult, monetary circumstances in those days I accomplished for myself in raising me up from the depths of emotional despair. She gave me my first tools by teaching me the basics in managing money, but I had to apply her lessons to the emotional task of earning my own respect.

The Teacher makes sure each student receives tutors and tests intended just for him/her. There are no mistakes or coincidences. What we call good or bad "luck" is merely a portion of the Teacher's lesson plan we don't fully understand. I can't fault the Teacher for the questions She asks me. I can only fault myself for not being more

prepared to answer Her questions with a good attitude when called on. Struggling in front of the class and the Teacher with guesswork is an honorable thing to do. It helps me move through embarrassment to see the modesty I've gleaned from life. We're all in this school alone together.

Nobody told me life was a school of self-love in which I was expected to pride myself for learning how to handle myself during difficult situations. Nobody informed me that I'd be graded for every little thing I'd think and feel. They never said that every test counted even though I was also being tested in my imagination while I was going through adversity in the outer world. If my parents had told me self-love would be my primary "job" in life, I might have gotten spiritually richer sooner.

Everyone is a spiritual student of self-love with something to teach me, regardless of his/her level of learning. (Sometimes they only teach me that I've already passed the lessons they're struggling with.) Everyone is an important member of the student body. People don't even have to come into my life with the intention of being my tutor to hold some message of importance to me.

Today I asked my handyman over to do a plumbing project in my kitchen. I know nothing about plumbing. It's not a class in my curriculum. But I can still make a difference in my grade in self-love by striving for an "E" for "excellent" in my work habits and cooperation. I can still negotiate with him in good faith, pay him top dollar in appreciation of his expertise on the topic and treat him with great respect.

Today, I sit in the front row of every spiritual class I'm enrolled in, as close to the Teacher as I can possibly get. I used to sit at the back of the class singing 'they done me wrong' songs with the class clowns, unable to see what was written on the board of reality from such a great distance, and without any desire to try.

The unfolding design of self-love in my life lay in my subconscious most of my life. I couldn't see who I was becoming. But the Teacher could see me wherever I sat in Her classes and called on me whenever She chose, with questions she'd planned just for me.

But it wasn't until middle age that I was ready to let myself know that I secretly wanted to sit in the front row of all life's classes if it meant I'd get to learn about me, regardless what I was literally going through. I'd resisted my natural inquisitiveness about my past because I was afraid of me having to think of myself as a nerd or the Teacher's pet. I thought it better to complain about life (as my mother had so aptly demonstrated to me) than make everything I went through an

opportunity for self-learning given with personal importance to my spiritual curriculum.

I didn't have the emotional strength to be grateful for the wisdom and love I'd accumulated on my own in adolescence and early adulthood. I was afraid someone inside would put me down for expressing my pride. I was afraid of disturbing the bullies in my heart. I was afraid of what others would think of me.

I couldn't see how every challenge in life had been perfectly matched to my level of spiritual achievement. I couldn't see that the words "someone," "anyone" and "they" were aspects of the self I had to confront from *within* as well as *without*. Until I came to realize that wisdom and love are the whole purpose of every lesson in life, unconscious parts of me resisted letting the conscious parts of me in on their secret desire to sabotage my efforts. *I* was the mystery I couldn't solve until I listened more closely to what I was (and wasn't) telling myself.

Listening to others in early adulthood was a challenge that emanated out from within. How could I listen to *them* if I couldn't even listen to *me*? Everyone likes to use the expression "I hear ya!" But I'd never tried saying it to myself.

So much of the acknowledgement, love and attention I wanted from others was a projection of an urge to hear it from myself. Without being able to talk to myself, hear myself and acknowledge what I'd said to myself, I was terribly alone and didn't know it.

I wasn't able to see the board from my seat at the back of the class because I was turned around talking to those behind me instead of facing forward looking the right way. I was more concerned with others than concerned about my concern over them. My concern for "them" had been externalized. It hid my concern for me.

Pride doesn't come before the fall; *ignorance* does. The only way to fight your self-ignorance is by looking at your outer world to determine what you can be proud of as though that were a class you'd passed. What I can do well interests me less than what I do poorly because it's in what I can't do that the mystery of me must be explored.

The Teacher reintroduced me to the world of children by leading me into public teaching where I became an adult witness to the life of kids. She gave me a job as a junior high school English teacher so I could reconnect with that awesome departure from my childhood into my adolescence. Thanks to my career as a teacher of pre-pubescent and pubescent teenagers, I relived my passage from youth to adulthood through my students. I went through my adolescence a

second time, but with much greater appreciation for how hard it is to be a kid.

It was all a part of Her plan. I could make the claim that I made every decision in life myself, but that's not exactly the way it was. I made every decision I made based on my options at the time. But those options had been based on many circumstances that were out of my control. We can only make choices based on the options we're given.

Descartes drew the correct conclusion for the 17th Century when he said, "I think, therefore I am." But he'd be wrong if he made the same assertion today. Today's answer is, "*I love*, therefore I am." A head isn't enough anymore. You've got to have a heart, and you've got to learn how to weigh your thoughts against your feelings in your conscience to optimize your options.

If you don't rediscover the child in you in adulthood, you'll be stuck in your head, as was I. And then, you'll never discover the awesome joy of working with the Teacher as you advance through your spiritual curriculum. You'll never become heartfelt or soulful.

I now need tutorial time alone with the Teacher each day to make sense of the lessons She gives me. I especially need to use that time to learn from Her during Her office hours. Some call this "prayer." Some call it "contemplation." What I accomplished in these solemn moments was how to feel deeply and believe in myself with greater, critical clarity.

I need office hours with the Teacher every day to discuss my previous, incorrect answers in class. Even more than I need group assignments to learn how to work cooperatively with my classmates, I need time alone with the Teacher to improve my work habits and cooperation with myself. I can't give my classmates anymore than I can give myself.

I had to listen to the whine behind my words before I could confess my sorrow and disappointment *of myself to myself* while consciously in Her company. It's in prayer and self-contemplation that She seems to insist I listen to the compassion I have for my own pain and suffering. I have to care for me in order to I care for you.

Only in listening deeply to myself did She let me take a peek at Her role book in my soul to see how my grades in self-love were coming along. Only then did Her next lesson feel that it was a meaningful, personal event advancing me with self-intimacy. Only then did I see that the choices I was making were opportunities to change my mind; transform my heart; and transcend my belief system with Her unseen guidance.

Pretending to venerate the Teacher just to manipulate Her into pitying me had been childish and a poor substitute for pitying myself. Self-pity is the result of seeing for yourself what your spiritual grades really look like. Self-pity can be a motivator to do better. Life is harder than it looks. If you allow yourself to feel sorry for yourself and stop resisting the feeling of pity because someone once told you that that feeling was forbidden, you might *indulge* yourself less and *care* about yourself more.

It's no shame to do poorly on your coursework in the school of self-love. It's normal to be afraid of failing and ashamed of being lazy in class. It's quite illuminating to realize for yourself that you've been putting no effort into your studies in self-love and that you have lots of undone homework assignments to do if you're going to catch up.

Fear of you is the only thing keeping you from loving you. And self-pity can help if you're willing to feel sorry for yourself and then apologize. If you're not going to apologize, though, don't bother. If you don't yet deserve to put your feelings into words, it's because you aren't yet emotionally old enough to do so. When you literally a child you learned to talk to others. Now that you're a spiritual child, it's time to talk to yourself.

Self-pity was something I stole from myself because I did it in silence. I didn't give it consciously, willingly or openly because I didn't do it in words. Self-pity, when given freely, verbally and with compassion, is deeply appreciated and rewarding. There's a part of you that knows how hard it is being you. There's a part of you that wants you to admit it to yourself in words.

The Teacher hasn't asked you to leave Her classes because She's still preparing you in Her own special way. Your curriculum in self-love can't be compared to anyone else's. You can only compare it to the subjects you were enrolled in before today. You never know how the Teacher's plan for you may unfold. There's so much to learn and each of us is advancing with a concentration in our major that makes our own self-love special and unique.

You're paying tuition in the school of self-love whether you consciously use what you're learning or not. It just seems a pity to pay for something you don't make good use of. It makes far more sense to make "you" your major in life, and stop making pleasing everyone else your final objective. I'm much more affable today because I'm nice without being intimidated to be this way. I'm much nicer because being nice to others is the result of having been nice to me, not an empty promise of rewards for giving to others that which I really yearn for from myself.

Fear of the future is something all good students worry about. Whether your fear is about finances, loneliness or health isn't really all that important. You need money to survive; you need companionship to feel your life is meaningful; and you need good health to appreciate each day.

Fear of poverty, loneliness and illness begins as thoughts that emerge into consciousness to motivate you to become more in touch with your heart and soul. Once your thoughts and feelings are working in unison, you're never really poor, alone or sick anymore inside. Once you believe in yourself, you've got the confidence you need to get through anything.

Getting through your fear of poverty, loneliness and illness requires acknowledging your fear *of* yourself *to* yourself. You can even tell the Teacher that you're afraid of "you" if you're humble enough to admit to yourself how you feel.

You've never been you before. Nobody has. Nobody knows how to be you, not even you. You need practice. You need assignments, homework, lessons, quizzes tests and finals to teach you how to be you. It's perfectly natural that this process can be daunting at times. Admit to yourself how you feel.

Then you'll sense that the Teacher is with you, even if you're in pain, suffering by yourself or without the money you need. The secret to fame and fortune doesn't lie only in *doing* more and more. The secret lies in *being* greater than you were before.

I knew I'd never be able to hold the religious relationship of a spiritual child to "our Father." I yearned for a different challenge of authenticity before God, the relationship of student to Teacher. This was the relationship with Her that turned my conscience into my soul and added moral inquiry to all my actions.

I was never going to grow beyond the level of spiritual infant. I was a spiritual infant, child, adolescent, young man, mature man and old man, all enrolled in one in the spiritual university of self-love. I was every spiritual age earning every spiritual degree from nursery school through my Ph.D. in loving me. And I was doing it virtually simultaneously. I didn't know from day to day which level of learning the Teacher would have me seated in. I was a *doctor* of my head, heart and soul at all times, but I was also the *patient*.

I'm still a toddler in matters of the mystery of me. I can never know in advance what grade or class the Teacher will send me to today. It all occurs unexpectedly. But I can devote myself to living a spiritual life of self-study regardless of the students around me or the repetitions of each day.

When I was committed at Bellevue, the psychiatrists diagnosed me as paranoid schizophrenic. That diagnosis was later changed by another psychiatrist to manic-depressive. What I didn't know was that I was neurotic, psychotic and suffered from an obsessive/compulsive disorder that manifested itself as an addictive personality type. In all honesty, I didn't even realize I had a multiple personality disorder.

Taking me apart with psychiatric labels was easy. The doctors could do it and so could I. It was putting me back together again that proved to be so difficult. But somebody had to do it, and it was clear that it was going to have to be an inside job. "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again." (Humpty had to do it himself.)

My history of mental illness, drug abuse and attempted suicides had a plus side to it. I didn't have to pretend to be *cool*. I could relax and focus on the task of learning to be *natural*. If I was "still crazy after all these years," (Paul Simon) it didn't make any sense to *try* not to be. And that attitude gave me emotional latitude I think few others have when exploring their inner world. Thanks to decades of mental illness that disrupted every aspect of my physical and emotional being, I was spiritually luckier than most because I had a healthy imagination...

But how could I fix myself when I had no memory of ever having run properly? How could I put myself back together again when I was a chick that had broken out of its shell? I felt beaten, beginning at birth when I'd been taken out of my mom's stomach through caesarian instead of coming out the "right" way. I was an omelet, not an egg.

I identified more with the pieces of shell around me than with the chick that had once been inside it. Using my imagination, I saw myself as a bird psychologist and diagnosed myself as a chicken with a shell disorder. I was obsessed with something I couldn't get back into.

I was the egg; I was the chicken. I was the doctor diagnosing the chicken and the egg to discover what came first. But I was also afraid of myself because I was a conundrum. How could I solve the puzzle of being me if all the evidence pointed to the fact that I didn't have all the pieces?

I had no choice but to put all my trust in me to teach me to trust myself. I needed *my* trust to overcome *my* ignorance of me. And I needed *self-knowledge* to overcome my lack of trust.

But putting my trust in me, like everything else on earth, had to be yearned, earned and then learned. People, places and things were

clues to my spiritual transformation. They were pieces of my puzzle brought to me to learn how to be authentic and real.

How I learned to trust myself I can describe with two metaphors, one from my head and the other from my heart.

The metaphor from my *head* would say that I had to meet with my Professor in the university of self-love during Her office hours. The time “We” spent in quiet discussion of my feelings for me filled me with a greater spirit of goodwill for me which I was then able to share with those around me. From that process, I learned that everyone is attempting to learn the same things, each in a different way. When people were cruel or unkind to me, I realized it was because they were just as cruel and unkind to themselves. They’d treat me better if they were able to treat themselves better.

From my *heart*, I returned to the Hebrew Testament, and saw myself as all the characters in the Creation Story. My head was Adam (the seat of my thinking); my heart was Eve (the seat of my feelings); my penis was the serpent (the seat of my desires); my testicles were the fruits of good and evil (the seat of my power); my conscience was the seat of the god within – and I was a tree of knowledge growing in a spiritual garden. I was forbidden fruit unto myself, but the secret to my life was something I could pick and eat. Self-knowledge was attainable if I asked God for permission rather than steal from Her without gratitude for my education.

I could grow. I could branch out. I could send down roots that would give me a sense of confidence and security. I could bud, blossom and bloom. I could be fruitful and multiply. But it all rested on the metaphor in my heart of feeling like a tree.

I didn’t have to wait until the Sabbath to avail myself of our Teacher’s time. Her office door was always open to me. When We were together it was as if time stood still. I felt differently when I was alone with Her. I felt a part of something bigger. The inner experience of life gave me the reason I needed to choose life – not the experiences around me.

As I reached for emotional maturity through exercising my conscience as my guide, the god within became more evident to me. I passed through emotional infancy and childhood into an emotional puberty I’d never imagined before. I crossed an imaginary line from spiritual boyhood into spiritual adolescence. There was a bridge to emotional adulthood I hadn’t realized I had to get across. This bridge was no less mysterious than the bridge I’d crossed over from physical childhood into puberty.

Then I experienced the awesome affects of my heart (Eve) talking to my penis (serpent), conspiring together to overthrow my head (Adam). My urges and feelings outweighed my rational thinking until my conscience could separate these inner forces for me to perceive.

It was then that my ability to express myself began to parallel my artistic ability to use words poetically and dance passionately. When I wrote or danced it was as if “We” were doing it together, God and I. It turned my hands and feet into words of prayer that my conscience guided with righteous action.

The boundary between God and me may have been blurred at first, but at least I could finally sense Her presence within me. The boundaries between “Us” and “them” would be worked out over time. I wasn’t the first to suffer from a religious superiority complex... I was just one of the few who didn’t have to persecute Jews and gay men to get through it.

To create inner peace, I had to go into inner space, back through the memories of my childhood. I had to return to the darkness of that moment one early morning at about the age of three when I got up out of bed, went to the living room, looked at myself in a mirror and concluded I hated my face. In following these echoes of memory back to that moment when I first consciously *defaced* myself, I could apologize to myself at that precise moment held in my imagination for my gross error of judgment. It had never been my face I really hated; it was *facing* myself that I hated having to do.

I made many more mistakes in childhood by choosing to excel at self-*hatred*, thereby compromising my world within. I succeeded at learning many skills in managing my outer world while failing many skills in managing my world within. Granted, I survived the ordeal, but I inhibited my spiritual progress by exacerbating the gap between my head and heart.

My close attention to the *facts* of life and shoddy attention to mystery of my *feelings* was a desertion of my seat in the classrooms of the school of self-love. It forced me to seek the love of others because I wasn’t ready to learn about love from the inside out.

Such was my tuition in the early years of my schooling. It wasn’t cheap. It wasn’t free. It was costly and confining. I felt more like a prisoner in my body than a spirit going to school.

But I had to do it wrong before I could get it right. I had to wait for me patiently with open arms until I was ready to face myself from the inside in.

Every moral misjudgment I've ever made has, in some small way, inhibited my relationship with me. Breaking the 7th, 8th and 9th Commandments (cheating, stealing and lying) made it more difficult for me to find my way through to the 10th (jealousy and envy). The more I alienated "me" from "myself," the more "I" wanted what I had that I couldn't access.

Jealousy and envy are feelings that emanate out from within. If you haven't yet experienced *your* jealousy and envy of yourself, you're still in the elementary classroom of unconscious discovery of your love for you. You still don't know that *you* want what *you* have.

If my mother had taught me anything at all of use to me in life and of use to me in the pursuit of self-love, it was that modesty, humility and self-loyalty (grace) are very important in achieving self-love. Being right is the booby prize of life if it leaves you arrogantly detached from your self.

Carl Yung said that "God" is anything that got in his way. But *I* got in my way. I played god by doing things that weren't favorable to my relationship with myself. I ended up anxious, stubborn and determined to get everything I put my mind to. Little did I realize that God had gotten in my way internally, making my inner world emotionally uninhabitable. I had to earn a way into my body. I had to yearn to learn to cling to me.

You've got to consciously work to get through your embarrassment of your body to experience modesty. You've got to get through your shame of your character with effort to do better by yourself to experience humility. You've got to get through your humiliation of being you to experience the self-loyalty that comes of making an effort to love yourself. You can't do any of that if your opinions about your body, your personality and spiritual importance to this world aren't improving on a daily basis.

I could finally look back at my childhood to see that the explosive fury of my father had been the reactions of a raging inner child who'd had to go through concentration camp without an inner father. He spent most of his life making his way through the spiritual, terrible twos all by himself. He was an emotional toddler who literally made babies he couldn't raise. He was a toddler in the nursery school of self-love, emotionally immature and unaware of the importance of learning to grow up.

That conclusion left me feeling less frightened of myself and less angry with him. He'd lived in an emotional maelstrom most of his life. He really never knew the spiritual importance of maturing emotionally far enough to come to love himself. When we watched

T.V. together, he'd point to all the people who were Jewish. He was extremely proud of our people, perhaps because he couldn't be proud of himself.

The Teacher advanced him through home schooling and the emotional nursery school of life with harsh lessons that took a great, physical toll on him without very much in the way of emotional growth. He, like the Nazis who persecuted him, hadn't been aware enough of the meaning of life to do his emotional homework. But while the Nazis struck out at the Jews, he struck in at himself. He never hurt a fly. I have to let God be the judge of what degree She'll confer on each student of his generation.

Everyone today deserves the privilege and opportunity to strive to feel grown up. It was a pity my father never succeeded in reaching emotional adulthood. He'd have made a great man if he hadn't died an emotional, little boy inside. And it was an even greater pity I hadn't been emotionally old enough during his lifetime to help him with his lessons, as I've been privileged to do for my mother.

My father died an emotional child at a time in my life when I was a spiritual adolescent who could only scorn him for his lack of self-control. That was as far as our relationship went as classmates while we were in school at the same time.

But my relationship to him didn't die when he died. It continued to grow in me until I could hold my inner child with hope and soothe him with the unfolding mystery of my being. My memories of my father have been deeply internalized in me. The father/son relationship I missed with him has since grown into the father/son relationship I now have with my inner child.

My inner father developed in spite of my lukewarm feelings for my biological father. I learned to embrace my inner child without ever having the opportunity of sharing my inner son with my dad. I had to watch as my half-brother proudly shared his biological son with our father and how well the gift of a grandson was received. It just wasn't in the cards for my father and me to grow any closer while he was alive. I had to do that work after he died.

When my inner child and inner father were finally on speaking terms with one another my loneliness miraculously ended. When my heart (inner child) could speak to my head (inner dad) in their own special way, then, miraculously, I forgave my biological father for ruining his marriage to my mother and leaving me to grow up with my mother and younger sister.

I understand the spiritual struggle those who rage against blacks, gays or Jews are going through. They're frustrated, spiritual

toddlers who aren't mature enough to internalize their struggle. Their inner child's abandonment issues still rule their interactions with others. They're orphans who have no one to parent them from the inside in, and so they strike out at those they think have received gifts intended for them.

Jealousy and envy projected onto others is rationalized with hatred. You look for reasons to hate people who have what you want, and those reasons seem very real. In truth, the scapegoats you create are mirrors of virtues and vices you refuse to look for in yourself.

It's more than sad when you're not able to forgive your parents. It's dangerous. It leaves you projecting your disappointment with them not having raised you well on the weakest members of society. A homophobe is a juvenile who's afraid of his own penis. A violent protestor is an emotional child who's ready to battle police although he'd really rather hit his parents. And a terrorist is a toddler having a hissy fit. He wants to kill himself and take others out with him.

Cain never really wanted to kill *Abel* because God chose *Abel's* sacrifice over his. Cain wanted to kill *God*. But he couldn't. We hurt our classmates because our Teacher is too smart to make Herself vulnerable to us. She knows what we really think and feel about Her when we don't get what we want. And She knows to what extent each of us is too infantile, childish or juvenile to handle our feelings. Ignorance of how Cain's feelings operate didn't excuse Cain from being separated from mankind, and it isn't going to excuse you.

Helping those who were poorly parented to parent themselves is a parenting skill you may some day be glad you've got. We all have issues with our inner child regardless of how old he is. But those who tackle these challenges from the outside *out* are going about it the wrong way.

I attribute the spirituality inherent in psychology for transforming my relationship to God from "Father" to "Teacher." That gave me the opportunity to father my inner child myself. I took on the role my father neglected in our relationship and rejected a relationship to God as my "Father." (The role of father became a role I wasn't willing to give to anyone after my experiences in childhood, not even to God.) And in becoming a father unto my own inner child, I experienced feelings of loyalty and benevolence by our Teacher for using my life to learn to love myself.

Those who look to God to "Father" them are doomed to remain spiritually immature and easily manipulated by unscrupulous people who claim to love them like "family." The history of humanity is the struggle to raise spiritual babies into productive adult members of

society. Psychology has given us terminology today to explain a process previously left only to religion. And the history of religion has clearly shown us that it could only solve man's emotional problems with prejudice, hatred and wars.

Adoration of the "fatherland" in the 1940's caused the Germans to strike out with spite and cruelty at the homosexuals, gypsies, Jews, cripples and political enemies of their state. There was a spiritual ignorance and arrogance we can avoid today with spiritual psychology. That "ol' time religion" will never again take us where we don't want to go.

I hated *myself* while claiming to love my *neighbor*; the Nazis hated their *neighbors* while claiming to love *themselves*. There are many kinds of crimes against humanity in the school of self-love, but traditional, religious dogma rarely addresses them.

The suffering I caused myself by inflicting my rage on me in the privacy of my own mind is my spiritual explanation for my mental illness. My own stinking thinking in my teens and twenties left me in my thirties feeling like Germany after the Second World War, militarily defeated and civilly crushed. The heart of me felt like a bombed out berlin.

After childhood and my first foray into adulthood where I tried to kill myself, I became a fatherland who couldn't forgive my father. I was a nation divided and conquered, a head and heart broken in two and then crushed. The struggle between mindfulness and heartfelt regard is "Her story" in the making for the 21st Century. "His story" up through the 20th Century is thankfully behind us.

My mother came away from the horrors of the War so furious with God that she wasn't on speaking terms with Her for the rest of her life. She passed many of her assignments in self-love and wisdom with outstanding grades, but she couldn't show her work proudly to the other students in the school of self-love because she wasn't able to comprehend so vast a metaphor. She considered her achievements "personal" and "private." She couldn't spend time with the Teacher alone during Her office hours or on the Sabbath with those members of the class who believe in life as a school, and the Teacher who administers our education. My mother came through suffering the loneliness of her life in her own way; she never learned to appreciate the solitude of knowing God was always at her side.

Deep within, I knew my mother well enough to say that she treated herself harshly. She never would have let anyone else on earth treat her as impatiently, rudely, and with as little forgiveness as she treated herself. I felt sorry for her Teutonic, inner parent/child rearing

techniques. She couldn't deal with herself any more kindly than she did.

Like my mother, I was afraid of being alone. Like her, I did my spiritual classwork unconsciously, but still got pretty good grades in financial planning and social etiquette. But I was afraid of participating with my self, of taking off the masks I wore that separated "me" from "myself" and "I."

I was afraid of paying attention to what my imagination was conjuring up in my mind. I was afraid of talking to myself. I was afraid of listening to my intuition and questioning it. I was frozen inside, incapable of speaking and replying to me. I could only have relationships with others.

I saw conspirators and thieves all around me because I'd spent so many years conspiring to *take* goodwill from others and *steal* intimacy from myself. Granted, there are plenty of people to be wary of in this world, but I worried about them more than about a conspiracy coming from within.

In attempting suicide *twice*, I ended up embarrassing myself for trying to destroy my body; shaming myself for trying to hate my character; and humiliating myself for trying to denigrate my being. I was a tortured Jew and a sorry homosexual. If life was a school of self-love, it had been a secret well hidden from me! I was a self-fulfilling prophecy. I was a walking example of self-abandonment and self-betrayal. And because it had reached the level of a self-conspiracy, they locked me up and mandated psychiatric medication until I agreed to take my meds voluntarily.

When spiritually poor, joy had been an extravagance, and courage, beyond my emotional pocketbook. I complained constantly to myself of a hunger deep down within that manifested itself literally with food, figuratively with sex and metaphorically with a desire for forbidden fruit that left me spiritually anorexic. Food didn't do the trick. Sex didn't satisfy it; and religion didn't relieve my hunger pangs either. I wanted something my intuition couldn't put into words.

My impoverished spiritual condition led me into challenging life experiences, but little in the way of self-love or wisdom. I was still going through my K-12 spiritual education in the basics.

My tuition in the university level of life didn't kick in consciously until my self-knowledge graduated me to a much higher level of learning and contribution to the world. Then, despite the sense of responsibility and ownership of all that I said and did, I found myself magically on scholarship. Suddenly every opportunity felt like a grant, and every challenge, a potential endowment.

Tuition in the school of life isn't beyond your means when you have a good attitude about everything life throws at you. It isn't something you'll never be able to afford. The only tuition you need is courage to want to live a long life for the sake of learning all you can about yourself. You shouldn't feel you're going to be expelled from this school because you couldn't pay your spiritual bills.

There'll always be lessons, quizzes and tests in life. There'll always be homework, classwork and assignments that will take a long time to complete. But you can pass your classes with hope. Why would you even consider putting your hopes and dreams into anyone other than yourself?

12. Major

I used to feel I had a major role to play in the unfolding of humanity. But decades passed and I produced little of consequence I could call "my gift to the world." The idea that I'd play a major role in the world was merely a projection of the major role I could have been playing in the unfolding of my *own* world; I was given one chance after another to transform my world within, but I kept rejecting the opportunity to do so in favor of fame and fortune.

The Teacher was giving me lessons every moment of every day and when I figuratively faced front in class to look at the chalkboard of reality, I became consciously aware of Her intentions for me. But I still had a tendency to stare absent-mindedly out the windows of my mind, thinking only how much I wanted someone to love me. I was missing the lesson in loving *me* in every moment. I was dreaming of a lifelong lasting love; I wasn't living it.

I didn't need fame to achieve self-respect; I didn't need a fortune to ransom myself from the feeling of being trapped inside. I needed to learn that the purpose of my life is to glean as much self-love and wisdom as I could through self-improvement. But even that, it turned out, wasn't enough.

When I was able to pay closer attention to the personalized lessons the Teacher was giving me, I became aware of deeper, previously unknown parts of me. I was being shown how to witness the myriad ways She was giving me to express the goodness of my life.

How could I hate a Teacher who presented Her purpose in my life through lessons in learning to love me? I had little choice but to come to believe in me as I began to see that I was more of a good

influence on the world than I'd first thought possible. And, still, I wasn't fully satisfied...

The difficulty in deciding what major I should choose in the school of self-love (the famous question of what I was going to "be" when I grew up) was complicated by the feeling that others were going to disapprove of my major if my major was me. I didn't think it would be possible to achieve "humility" if I made my life only about self-discovery.

And so, all the years I refused to make *me* my major detracted from making self-love my goal and from making everything I did in life coursework toward that end. Making me my major gave me the liberty to be more sincere with others because I could be more sincere with myself. But there were so many unanswered questions in attempting to do so.

Previously, I'd been shy. I'd been emotionally generous with others without worrying about reciprocation. Whether or not people appreciated what I gave them mattered less to me because I just wanted them to like me.

I was motivated by a *social insecurity* that no one could take away from me. I reaped the rewards of my investment in others the best way I could at the time. My interest in others paid dividends or it went bust, and I could never anticipate which investments in people would pay off.

In my mid-twenties, long before any of my ideas about self-love were born into consciousness, I went to New York City for a second try at the professional world of dance, studying at American Ballet Theater and Harkness Ballet schools. But after a few months, I had a massive breakdown and had to be involuntarily committed to a locked ward at Bellevue Hospital.

One day while in Bellevue, I suddenly burst into tears while listening to Elton John on the radio singing, "Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word." I had no difficulty feeling sorry for others until I realized I was in a "sad, sad situation" because I'd never been able to feel sorry for myself.

I felt as though I had a crown of jewels I'd been collecting all my life inside my head and when I realized how sorry I was, all the jewels came tumbling down. I lost a crown that wasn't *on* my head, but *in* my mind. I lost my position as "king" of my world.

I didn't realize how emotionally cut off and separate I'd been from the self in me, or how deeply I wanted out of a feudal relationship with myself. I thought I wanted to die, but I really wanted to abdicate the attitude of the royal "we" I'd always taken for granted.

I couldn't unite my inner kingdom with the outer world and live happily ever after with injustice within. I wanted to live in a democracy.

It seems shocking now that I had to be committed to a mental institution just to learn to hold and comfort a part of my self that I hadn't met before. I now know that many people can't feel for themselves. There are many who are struggling with strangers inside them.

One of the mysteries of my time at Bellevue was that I felt sorry for myself years before I could apologize to me. I didn't learn to forgive myself for what my mind had done to me until long after my heart secretly felt sorry for me. I felt sorry first, and learned to express forgiveness later.

So many unsuspecting people like me end up in insane asylums. So many good people end up on the news because of unexpected disasters in their lives. So many have to come together in sorrow, not knowing when their broken heart will move their conscience to believe in the possibility of peoples learning forgiveness alone while together.

"Sorry" seemed to be the hardest word to tell myself because I wasn't yet ready to apologize to me. I suppose I could have *forced* myself, but I wouldn't have respected myself if I'd tried to force an apology out of me without the feeling of sorrow. I had the ability to identify with the intellectual meaning of the word "sorry," but I couldn't *feel* sorry if it meant I had to feel it for me. And that was as immoral as not feeling sorrow for strangers. When I asked myself who in this world really had good reason to be waiting for an apology from me, the only person I could come up with was me.

Although I learned to ape the behaviors others demonstrated enough to finally get discharged from Bellevue after seven weeks confinement there, there was no easy way out of the "psych. ward" within. The psychiatric medications only alleviated the symptoms; they didn't cure the cause. My illness went far deeper than the doctors suspected, because my problem was spiritual. And Lord knows the rabbis I spoke to weren't prepared to address this topic.

People have no problem going crazy because it's easy to get mad at someone you don't respect if that someone is yourself. But the problem is that people can't feel sorry for someone as awful as *they* are to themselves. And, so we're back to the pressing need for self-love.

When I was discharged from Bellevue, I had to begin the journey of self-discovery anew, emotionally crawling on my hands and knees like an infant inching forward for the first time. I couldn't

change the way I'd previously flown through life by leaps and bounds. There was no grand *jeté* to take me out of my inner asylum. I had to learn to come down to earth and move emotionally along the ground cautiously and slowly.

I moved back to L.A. and in with my mother and her second husband. I gathered my strength by pulling myself up slowly by my bootstraps. I learned to stand on my own two feet figuratively. I learned to walk through life by copying others emotionally, even if they weren't all that steady on their feet themselves. I learned humility by lowering my head to look at where I was placing my feet. When I saw myself doing so, I had to admit I was a broken man. That's when I finally cried over what had become of me.

The doctors gave me medications that helped me explore my feelings without losing control, but the drugs limited my ability to feel considerably. They were a crutch intended to support me as though I'd suffered a broken leg. But how long can you leave your leg in a cast?

I couldn't rely on friends and family to give me the kind of emotional guidance I needed. They hadn't gone crazy. They had no idea what I was going through. I was the canary in the mine and I was the coal digger. I had to learn to watch for my own symptoms. That was a lot to ask of someone who'd been involuntarily committed to a mental institution.

I was the last person on earth I wanted to be alone with, but I had to be alone to allow my anger at me to surface on its own. If you've felt abandoned, betrayed and conspired against by others, and then see that you've done the same thing to yourself, you can't turn around and in a single day claim to be your own best friend. I'd been born whole, but I'd been broken and then shattered myself into little pieces with self-ignorance. I saw myself as my own worst enemy, and rightly so. I hated me with good reason. I didn't need to candy-coat it. I needed to get through it. But nobody could tell me how.

My hopes for a ballet career in New York were, of course, dashed. My career in dance landed with a thud and never took off again. But the saddest part of the story was that I had no idea at the time how blessed I was at having been given the opportunity to figuratively relearn to walk, this time emotionally.

I'd probably fallen many times while learning to walk as a toddler and got up every time then. So I intuitively believed I could learn to walk emotionally, even if I couldn't put my optimism into words. It took decades to heal, but what was the rush? Once I got my head screwed on and could afford that second, summer home in my

heart, I had nothing to do in life besides seeking spiritual stroll to my soul just for the fun of it.

It isn't so terrible being naïve if you believe life is a journey, even if you don't have a clear sense of where you're ambling off to. It takes only modesty, humility and grace, the perspectives of a student willing to learn. It only takes courage to seize each day as an opportunity to move forward by bettering yourself step by step.

But I was ashamed of my naiveté. I was a boy who wanted to think he was a man, and that meant I couldn't admit my naiveté, lack of experience and quirky, egocentric style. I didn't want to say I had an answer for everything because I *didn't* have an answer for *anything*.

Forty years after my sojourn in Bellevue, I now have the ability to bow my head and agree with my self when I state that I'm always learning something new.

There are many who, like me, have been crippled by assumptions they came to in life that weren't true. For me, the assumption I had to look like I knew what I was doing was a false skin that took a long time to peel off. Today, I can contribute to making this world a beautiful place because I'm more committed to the metaphors that make my life meaningful. I now see that there's no way to learn something new every day if I don't live the metaphor of life as a school I'm pleased to be enrolled in. Not knowing what will be next makes me a lot more contented than having to pretend I did.

I'd told myself as a child that someone like me could never become a ballet dancer, and I'd proved myself wrong on that count. So when I told myself I was too stupid to ever fall in love, I didn't really believe it, either. I couldn't stop myself from wanting what I wanted. Even sanity had at one time been a dream, and that came true. There was a chance I could do anything if I learned enough about the process.

The question wasn't whether I was telling myself the truth, but the manner in which I conveyed my "truth" to me. The arrogance with which I addressed myself in my thoughts was unbelievably inappropriate. There were voices in me that whipped me like a racehorse trying to get me to come in first. It should have been no surprise that I'd always stumble and then lose the race by a nose. I had the ability to run like a winner; what was in question was whether I could develop the self-love to stop treating myself brutally.

Those cruel voices within were speaking for parts of me that wouldn't have agreed to treat me that way if they'd been made conscious of how sensitive and soft a person I really was. There were many infantile and childish voices in me that needed to be trained to

behave more kindly. There are many bullies in life. Some torment others. Some torment themselves.

Being harsh on myself while forgiving of others made no sense in the long run. I had to live with myself for a lifetime. There was no reason for *me* to be rude to *me*. I didn't deserve it. I was too nice a guy. But not recognizing the metaphor of me as my own child didn't help my inner parenting skills. It only made me more dependent on my mother...

When I became a teacher, I treated my students respectfully. I understood they weren't as familiar with the subject matter as I was. But I didn't take the same respectful tone with myself. I had to see through the metaphors of me as a *bad* dancer, a *sick* child and a *bad* pupil.

I could clearly see myself as a victim of circumstances; someone always picked on and unfairly treated by others. But, in fairness, I also made bad choices about the metaphors I lived by. I needed to learn how to live the life of a student who made himself his own major. I needed to live the life of a parent who was dedicated to his inner child. I needed to live the life of a dancer who was learning to dance with heart and soul.

I started and stopped studying ballet many times because I was afraid of the power behind the metaphor of life as a stage and me as a performer. I didn't have enough words in my spiritual vocabulary yet for the wonderful feelings that came over me when I danced. I'd get easily drunk on the love of me that raced through my veins when my body responded to music. But I'd also get easily frustrated and angry with myself when I made mistakes. Without putting all my experiences, good and bad, into words, I found myself repeating lessons instead of moving through them.

Ballet and I separated and came together like frenemies many times over the years, but I eventually realized dance was my best friend for life. Ballet taught me to feel all my feelings and how to "move" with them. Dance taught me what it felt like to be floating on air, but also how to hit the ground running. It taught me to how to take emotional baby steps with grace, poise and courage. I could learn how to balance feelings of frustration and impatience with myself by balancing my body.

What I didn't learn from ballet was that life is more than a silent movie when watched from within. It's a performance with dialogue *within* myself, *for* myself and *by* myself. And, as the audience member of my presentations, I had to learn to be able to critique myself kindly and fairly. I had to learn to talk to myself while

I danced. I had to learn to talk like a small child learns to talk. I had to learn to talk a second time, but from the heart.

The first time I learned to talk must have been very hard for me because there may have been as many as six languages spoken by various members of my family in our house: Russian, German, Yiddish, Lithuanian, Polish and English. Although nobody spoke directly to me in anything other than English, I drew strange conclusions about the nature of communication from the way words were and weren't being stated.

All my life, I'd been looking for a best friend, when it turned out that body language had always been there willing and eager to play that role in my life. I consciously rejected the best friend I ever could have had by not putting body language into words. I was so tongue-tied that I had no sense that movement is the mother tongue of the spoken word.

I had no idea happiness could be so close at hand. I had to stop scorning my body because it wasn't physically perfect and didn't move as precisely as I wanted it to. Every *body* speaks its own dialect. And everybody has the opportunity to learn from his body how to more eloquently put words to music from within.

Only in my fifties did every ballet studio become my synagogue and my ballet masters become my rabbis. Through music and motion, I could hear the mysterious questions the Teacher was posing in my head and heart. And through my body I was able to sway to Her WORDS from my heart on my own.

Ballet became my Bible. It taught me to move in silent WORDS of prayer. Dance brought me the spiritual authority I needed to commend myself. In a world where I had to look for refuge to protect me, ballet became my sanctuary. And when I got to my sixties and couldn't dance ballet anymore, dancing with weights by myself became my home away from home.

There was unimaginable joy when I consciously chose to make *me* my major in the school of self-love. The ability to inspire myself was the greatest gift I could have ever hoped for. Inspiration had been my intention in executing grand jetés down the corridors of Bellevue. Inspiration became the only song I was willing to dance to.

But I had to find ways to validate my experiences in words or the world would continue to call me "crazy." I had to scrutinize my head to make sure everything I said was honest. I had to scrutinize my heart to make sure everything I felt was sincere. And I had to scrutinize my conscience to make sure that it was judging my head and heart fairly.

I had no idea I'd been in so much denial. My life should have always been about me. Helping others was a wonderful opportunity to practice what I preached in how I treated myself. Since I'm not capable of being a part of the whole world around me, I have to make choices about where I can realistically put my efforts. It's only the world within me that I can share wholeheartedly with God. So I had to learn how to prepare for that internal experience.

The K-12 of Spirituality

13. Spiritual Nursery School

Because my father was a concentration camp survivor, I am the son of a slave. His liberation from Nazi persecution, and the freedom he cherished so deeply every day of his life thereafter were American-made gifts he embraced with all his heart. But I was born in *this* country; freedom meant little to me, and liberation, nothing at all - until I came to see that I was a slave to my emotions. Then I yearned for emancipation.

One night, in the fourth year of my life, after my father and mother had completed their customary evening quarrel at the top of their lungs, my father stormed into my room suddenly deciding he needed to see if I was still sucking my thumb. He'd told me many times to stop, but I wasn't about to give up my greatest source of comfort just because he said so.

I'd become accustomed to my parents fighting. Their nightly arguments were more than disagreements. My father was a deeply, emotionally wounded man, not because he couldn't forgive the wholesale murder of his family by the Nazis and his imprisonment in a death camp - nobody could - but because he couldn't come to terms with himself after the fact.

Perhaps he had survivor's guilt. Perhaps he blamed himself for not having been able to do more for others at the time. Despite his inability to love himself consistently, he was sometimes able to show great love and affection for others. And that was what was so crazy-making about his love.

Still upset at my mother that night, he stormed into my room, saw me sucking my thumb while I was sleeping, and slapped me hard across the face.

I awoke from slumber, biting down on my thumb in shock, and then choked on my blood. And when I noticed his silhouette in the doorway to my room looking down the lit hall, I cried out for my mother. She ran past him to comfort me with whispers and her, always, consoling touch. And then she led me to the bathroom to wash up.

I'd seen my father's fury many times before. It was a common sight in our house. He often exploded with rage, so I'd watch him warily from a distance every time he swore in Russian and shook his fist at thin air. But he never hit me when I didn't expect it, so I'd never been so traumatized by his physical abuse before.

But after being slapped in my sleep, I seized my chance to demonstrate *my* disapproval of *him* for treating me in a manner that was unmanly, even if I was only a child. In a calculated, but unconscious response to his attack, I overcame my fear of him for a brief instance, and witnessed that my heart was capable of feeling utter rage and fury, even hatred. The feelings I felt in that moment became ground zero for my disapproval of all authority figures for many decades to come.

By striking out at him in the privacy of my thoughts, I didn't realize I was simultaneously striking in emotionally at myself. My feeling of hatred was earthshattering, producing a wave of wrath that would reverberate through my being for many years to come. A tidal wave of blame at his failings swelled in my heart. It crashed from shore to shore in my mind, until my whole inner world was deluged with disappointment in him. It was as if my soul was saturated in this process, washing away memory of the eden of childhood within. At that moment at the age of four, I turned into a young man in the body of a little boy.

This was the flood of Biblical proportions that Noah was warned of. But God hadn't prepared me for it. I choked not only on my blood. I choked on having to be his son. I gagged, and then I was submerged in a flood of feelings. I drowned in me, and I never saw it coming. I didn't have a clue what had hit me. Parts of me are there still, underwater, talking to one another in currents that flow without words, waiting to be drawn out of the emotions of early childhood into the spirit of adult intellectual airs.

In the Quran, Mohammed speaks of the son of Noah who refused to join his father on the ark, and so he drowned. [11:41] I, too, was one of those who refused to embark on the ark. And so I had to spend a lifetime learning to that I was submerged in God's love, something so many religious people have always been capable of floating on.

Oddly, in addition to the blood in my mouth and the overwhelming sorrow and self-pity, came a strange taste of forbidden power that I quickly swallowed, but never forgot. I *liked* the feeling of holding a grudge against my father; it felt good hating him. Like Abel in the Bible story after he'd been murdered by his brother Cain, I unexpectedly found my voice. And my blood cried out from the ground to God for justice.

My father had punished me unfairly, but *my* apple hadn't fallen far from *his* tree. Like my father who couldn't imagine that God could see a good side to the Nazis She let live, I couldn't imagine She'd be

able to see my father's side of the story too and feel merciful toward us both.

The very idea that the same God could love my father as well as me, when I felt so violated, was beyond my ken. I couldn't conceive of a world that could include my father's feelings too. I saw no hope for me. I felt like forbidden fruit picked while God watched and did nothing.

I was that precious forbidden fruit severed from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. I was selected and arrogantly picked against my will. I was violated; then I was consumed with spite; then I felt discarded when my father left my room. I was the reason the eden of my infancy collapsed. My rage ripped it apart. But it was all because of my father.

I banished him from my heart for what he'd done to me. And then God banished me from infancy into childhood. I was hardly ready to be called a "man." I was a *little* man. I was a *very* little man.

It took a good 50 years to realize that my distrust and disdain may have begun with that incident initiated by my father, but it didn't end with him. I found reasons to distrust and disdain everyone. Everyone became a mirror of his authority. In my mind, everyone became capable of slapping me across the face when I least expected it.

Even though I felt like the apple, I could see that I hadn't fallen far from my own tree. I, too, violated me. I, too, slapped me around in my sleep. My father had taught me well... I became as cruel to me as he had been. Only he'd *tortured* me, while I *tormented* myself.

Until I could forgive myself for doing *emotionally* to me what he'd done to me *physically*, I couldn't forgive him. Until I could become a father to my own inner child, I couldn't speak to me; retrain me; make me understand the necessity of self-respect. Until I could love the man I was, as I was, I wasn't able to love mankind.

Until I retraced that experience, God and I were like distant acquaintances, like my mother was with Her. We knew one another in my mind, but Our relationship wasn't deep. Only when I learned to love myself, could I choose to give some of that love to God. Only when I left my head and arrived in my heart did I discover She was already there waiting for me with open arms.

From that trauma, I developed a taste for blood in the figurative sense. The blood from my thumb had actually tasted good. I became an emotional vampire that lived a long night of sucking the life out of others. I eyed people to determine whether or not they'd be of use to me. I'd victimize them emotionally with neediness. And then I'd

wonder why I struggled with feelings of such alienation from my fellow man.

I sought power through addiction, sucking the “bloody thumbs” of drugs, alcohol, sex and cigarettes in a confused effort to disgust myself enough to stop myself from bleeding me any further. I cannibalized myself emotionally, and didn’t know it. I sucked myself dry, and then I tried to kill me.

My mother became my only source of emotional light. She was the moon that revolved around me and faced me with inconsistent smiles. Her love tugged at me like the tides. I feared every cloud that passed between the two of us. I had no idea that her light was a reflection of a greater light that emanates out from us all.

After that incident with my father, I needed to sleep with a light on in my room at night. I worried that monsters under my bed would seize me in my sleep. Although I chased the monsters out from under my bed with a nightlight, to my chagrin, they reappeared years later at school; my peers turned into monsters that teased and bullied me. The nightmare bled into day.

I was a straight “A” student at school growing up with near-perfect attendance. I never talked back to my elders. I wasn’t the kind of boy anyone thought would grow up to become disobedient. But as I grew into puberty, a defiant voice within me began to shout out all the other voices in my head. It sang an insolent song, sensual and seductive, but also dismissive. And it brought with it the light of a hungry, earthly fire.

In childhood, I sucked all the comfort I could out of my thumb until it gave me buckteeth and I needed braces. But when I realized I could substitute my thumb with other things to suck on, hope returned with a vengeance.

In adolescence, sex shed a light more brilliant than the stars, a light far hotter and more faithful than the phases of the moon. Sex called out to me in a voice that tempted me like a moth to a flame. Sex seemed to be that sun I’d always yearned for. The lure of intercourse was a bonfire rising higher day by day in my sky. The light and warmth that disappeared in childhood was returned to me through the fires of passion in my loins. The juvenile in me said, “I see the light!” and everyone smiled because they, too, could see it.

Unfortunately, the hope that came with sex was short lived. My sex partners slapped me hard and unexpectedly many times after my dad did; they just didn’t do so literally or while I was sleeping. They slapped me emotionally. They disappointed me. They rejected. I soon came away from romantic love with the feeling that there was a world

conspiracy against me, against one poor, innocent, gay-Jew. I was so kosher and men were such pigs...

First the light and warmth of my father's love disappeared over a horizon of disappointment in him that I was never able to retrieve. And then the love of other men came and went like flames extinguished by more torrential rains. I had no hope another light within would ever appear.

I insisted my father's unfair treatment of me gave me the right to do anything I pleased. But the forbidden fruit I picked always had the familiar, haunting memory of the taste of blood. I sucked the juice out of myself with self-hatred and derision, and I didn't have a clue what I was doing wrong or what to do about it.

I hated the little *faggot* trapped inside the *kike*. I hated the fact that I hadn't protected myself from my own father, let alone from the teenage bullies at school. As an adolescent, I would have given anything to be anyone other than me. It wasn't just my body that I hated. It was the fellow inside it.

My immature, inner child was in complete control of my life because I had no inner parent to speak of. There was just a very young boy inside who was willing to do almost anything to please others, including "acting" like a man. I didn't just seek out experiences to indulge my fantasies. I also wanted to be bad to escape feeling bad about myself. I was in hot pursuit of "glee," not "joy." (I didn't know that being good requires the courage to feel everything.)

My father had been a child sucking his thumb figuratively when Nazism descended on Europe. The Nazi solution to the Jewish problem slapped him hard across the face. He had no way to avoid their cruelty. He had no way to wake up from the nightmare they put him through.

But when I was a child of four, of course I knew none of that. I was a child in spiritual, nursery school, given lessons that were far too complex for me to comprehend. I needed decades to learn to respond to my father's cruelty with self-compassion.

14. The ABC's of Self-Love

We describe thoughts as traveling by train, as in the expression "a train of thought." Thoughts don't travel by bus or airplane because there's an underlying supposition that words are connected to one another in sentences a way that produces thoughts linked together like boxcars on a train.

But thoughts also move in trains rather than any other forms of locomotion because trains run on tracks. Every train of thought runs on a track of feeling. And although it's difficult to prove that, you can sense it if you try.

Watching the thinking process is like being onboard a train. We look out the window of our mind at the world outside. We don't ask ourselves about the direction our thoughts are going in. We just watch the world around us pass us by. But when alone, we can often look beneath our trains of thought to observe the tracks they're running on as they crisscrossed the landscape of our imagination.

The metaphor of thoughts and feelings as a vehicle of transportation fits in nicely with the extension of the metaphor of 'life as a journey.' Those who make it to the locomotive of their trains of thought become influential, charismatic, powerful and sensuous. Those who remain in the passenger car can still see their inner terrain, but only in the final moments as the outer world zooms by their window onto it.

In terms of the metaphor of thoughts as trains, self-love is the final destination of every train that pulls out of a station. We're brought to that last stop on the track of self-concern after having made many stops in that direction. If you look deeply at your inner landscape when you wake up in the morning, you'll see that there's always a train or two somewhere inside yourself that made it to the end of the line the day before.

But there are so many other feelings going in so many conflicting directions along the way to self-love in the course of a day that our trains of thought go many ways before they get to their final destination. Although the end of every line is the station called "self-love," there are many ways to get there, and many people have no idea where they are and forget where they're going on some of their more arduous trips.

People don't question their thoughts. Nor do they question the direction their trains of thought are going in. Therefore they think they need to travel certain tracks to get to certain stations when there are trains entering that station from many other directions. People have emotional options they don't realize because they're so habituated to getting where they're going by always going there the same way.

People become dogmatic, insistent and recalcitrant when they can't imagine getting where they want to go with feelings others than those they're anticipating. People have a hard time solving problems because they don't question the other feelings that might get them to their destination sooner and more refreshed.

I remember the pride and joy I felt as a child when my mother taught me how to use the toilet, dress, close a button, tie my shoes, set the table and bring in the mail. Receiving a sense of independence from responsibility was an achievement I never questioned until later in life when I realized I'd graduated "independence" in the school of self-love and was registered in another class called "interdependence."

I don't mind mixing my metaphors of 'life as a school' and 'thoughts as trains' to make my point. I lay down my first tracks of self-love in infancy. That was the first station then and will always be my last. But I later lay down tracks that took my trains of thoughts to stations in life that were of greater use to others. I went from independent to interdependent and didn't even realize I was in a harder class.

When a child has gotten through his fascination with vehicles and become a mature adult who can perceive the metaphors, symbols and similes beneath his excitement, mixing metaphors becomes a creative way to describe himself. He sees himself more than a "vehicle" that keeps him moving at high speed in a particular direction. He sees himself moving in a special direction.

He may also see himself as a complex "device" that grows with sophistication and purpose. Nowadays, he unconsciously sees himself as a thinking device downloading applications that make his journey of life richer and more meaningful. He sees himself as a vehicle that requires computer input as well as operator control.

In the simile of the human body as a device for spiritual evolvement, 'man is like a computer,' and his life is a programming process in which he uploads software and apps to manage the complexity of the world he lives in. And every few years, he upgrades to a higher, operating system to keep up and feel current with his classmates.

Each generation of man, like each generation of computer chips, is more sophisticated than the previous. And in that sense, man is being reprogrammed by others and is reprogramming himself on a daily basis, even if his hardware doesn't appear to change nearly as quickly.

Man's dreams at night represent a rebooting of his system. And emotional issues each day are simply software glitches that can be discovered and erased over time. The spiritual progress man is making in understanding himself like a complex device he's learning to think about can't be denied if you look insightfully at history.

My mother was the first tutor of my spiritual education on earth, long before I joined the social custom of leaving home each day

to go to school to learn from teachers. The mystery of my mother when I was a small child lay in the fact that she knew so much more than me and imparted that knowledge so freely. She taught me to trust her, embrace, honor and love her. She taught me to build tracks to the destinations she was aware of and how to unconsciously operate my trains to those destinations she wished me to reach.

But now, at the age of 94, she's more like a 1950's Chevy than a 21st Century Lexis. To keep her mind moving toward her final destination, self-love, I have to chauffeur her. She'd meander and get lost going down memory lane if I didn't use my spiritual G.P.S. devise to keep her focused on where we're headed.

In childhood, my father and mother inadvertently derailed my thoughts from my feelings through unexpected calamities I couldn't have anticipated. And I didn't then have the skills to get my thoughts and feelings back on track by myself. I simply had to walk away from these inner train wrecks and come back later in life to clean them up.

When my feelings went in one direction and my thoughts plummeted in another, I was left feeling wrecked, bent out of shape and dazed from the experience. I neither knew how to prevent train wrecks nor how to recover from them. I didn't even know how to describe what was happening to me in language others could relate to viscerally.

Because I couldn't visualize what I'd been through, I had no way to put my experiences into words. Metaphor, symbolism and simile make it possible to visualize thoughts, feelings, desires and beliefs and to put them into words everyone can understand.

In one such derailment, my parents took me to the movies when I was about four years old, and after the film they met up with friends and told me they were going to have them take me home so they could go out by themselves. I suddenly turned into a train conductor who had to hit the emergency brake in disbelief that they would even think of allowing such an impediment cross my tracks. I screeched to a halt at the very thought of being separated from them far from home. I couldn't get my thoughts started again until my parents got that idea off my tracks and took me home themselves. The idea of us separating and taking different modes of transportation to the same literal destination brought up abandonment issues in me.

Reflecting now on the idea of my parents deserting me was intellectually infantile and unrealistic. It was a conclusion based on very little experience that made my train of thought veer off onto the track of terror.

I was a child in charge of a spiritual, transportation system I couldn't yet operate alone. It took the intellectual, emotional and spiritual knowhow of adults to prepare me for independence. But because communication with myself wasn't the most important tool in my toolbox, it took me an inordinately long time to mature.

In the early days of attempting to control my head and heart, my thoughts often accelerated until they were speeding out of my control and ran right off the track they were on. Then, the boxcars would crash into one another, bunching up like crushed cans with the cargo of concepts, plans and intellectual property that had been on their way to market in ruin. My feelings were also severely twisted and damaged in the process. They, too, needed to be replaced.

I was often an intellectual and emotional mess inside as a child. And there was no other conclusion I could come to then other than that my parents were the cause of it because they didn't teach me how to drive myself more safely. Only with experience did I come to see that the whole world was moving out of the metaphor of 'horse (head) and buggy (heart)' to 'trains of thought.'

The train wrecks of thoughts and twisted feelings I experienced in childhood didn't diminish later in life. It took half a lifetime for me to realize *self*-abandonment was a major impediment for me. I had to convince myself that I had the power and presence to prevent myself from leaving me in the lurch. But that took enormous inner effort on my part. (It also took a lot of experience in making mistakes.)

I had to purposefully recreate the crashes my parents had inadvertently caused in my childhood to understand what it meant to be a victim of other people's irresponsibility. I had to see others as vehicles that didn't stop for trains. I had to recognize the operating system behind all human beings to develop the forgiveness for them I'd then be able to apply to myself.

I hit the emergency brake many times in life and suffered confused thinking and bruised feelings, which are the result of a head and heart moving faster than is safe. I had to learn to control accelerations in thinking. I had to learn how to break slowly with compassion when I approached a curve instead of flooring it with the thought that I was the only one who had somewhere to go. And I had to learn to switch tracks effortlessly to get where I was going when coming from unanticipated directions.

When I was young, my system could take such abuse and confusion, but by the time I got to middle age I realized there was a more efficient way to learn than from hindsight. Learning patience and care could be accomplished much more easily if I could distance

myself from my thoughts and feelings. I needed a bird's eye view of the process. I needed a belief system that could incorporate all the inner forces that were affecting me: thinking, feeling, wanting and believing.

Distance makes the heart grow fonder. And nothing distances me from my own feelings than a frame around the videos my imagination creates in my head. Framing these videos my mind produces makes it possible to store them and access them with a simple click when needed. In this way, I can observe what I'm doing inside myself before I do anything outside myself. I can learn from *me*.

But my childhood had been filled with *accidents* that my mind turned into *incidents*. I saw malevolence where there had been only slightly risky behavior. I saw tragedy where there was often just drama. I thought the cargo lost from the trains of thought destroyed in those experiences had impoverished me permanently.

All I really needed was a combination of metaphors, symbols and similes by which my mind could visualize my past from many perspectives. I needed an inner device in my heart that could store and play back "MeTube" videos on demand with heartfelt expression. And I needed an imagination that could process this process with spiritual insight.

There was another negative experience that occurred at about the same age in childhood that left an impression on me that I concluded then was permanent and therefore detrimental for life. My parents took me to the library with what turned out to be an ulterior motive. Normally it was an activity I thoroughly enjoyed, not because I could read, but because the concept of reading was like magic to me; being read to left me awestruck. In later years as an adult, when I entered the great cathedrals of Europe, my heart sank because the feeling of awe and wonder in those buildings didn't compare to the feeling I'd felt as a child at the local chapter of our public library where people were sitting quietly reading or checking out books to read at home. Every library in this world, as it turned out, became *my* house of prayer.

But on that particular outing, the scene was quite different. The main room was full of men and women in white coats. There was a long line of families, and the children came out of the front of the line crying. It turned out I'd been brought there for a polio vaccination.

The prick of the needle in my arm was painful, but it didn't compare to how I felt when I realized my parents had lied to me. They tried to explain the importance of the trip afterwards, but I felt devastated at what I concluded was their intention to betray me.

My disappointment in my parents went down to a depth I couldn't plummet or express at the time. I had to reenact their breach of my trust many times in my mind before I could understand what they'd done to me in a heartfelt way. I actually had to betray my own trust many times in life and then compare that betrayal to my parents' betrayal of me when I got my first polio vaccine before I could forgive us both.

My head knew that my parents had told me a white lie with good reason, but my heart had been, once again, wounded. My thoughts had to travel those tracks of betrayal for many years until I could see that they weren't ever going to lead to the end of the line of self-love. I had to construct a track from that station to a new, unexplored place in inner space.

I had to betray other people's trust in me before I could forgive myself, mine. I had to take people aboard my trains of thought going in the wrong direction and feel sorry for where they ended up before I could feel sorry for my inner child who had gotten so lost inside me.

If I'd been able to watch the incidents in my past like a video, I'm sure the plot and the mistaken motives of the main character wouldn't have continued to plague me for so long. The problem was that I was sitting too close to the screen in my imagination. I was so absorbed by my own story that I couldn't separate myself it. I needed to frame these videos as though watching them on a screen before I could reframe my opinions of life.

Once I could stand back in my mind and see myself sitting so close to the screen, I could understand why I believed as I had. Once I could imagine seeing myself as a child sitting too close to my inner TV, I could scoot back a little. And this new position in the living room of my mind brought me the metaphor of me as a child inside my parents' home. This metaphor was comforting and, therefore, one that I'd want to hold onto.

Mixing the metaphors of a 'train of thought' moving through an inner landscape with 'memory as a short film' being broadcast by my imagination; and me as a child sitting at a TV at home – created changes to my persona, the forces within me. I was no longer just a combination of personality traits witnessed by others. I was a dynamic, spiritual instrument I was learning to operate from the inside out. I was learning first to "be" and then to "do."

Another way of developing this internal process is to live out the roles of the teacher/student; parent/child; judge/criminal; brother/sister and friend/enemy – in your imagination. Watch these programs your mind produces. Don't channel surf. Discovering the

metaphors you unconsciously live with can only be achieved by taking a *close* look at them with emotional *distance*.

The Hebrew Bible presents faith in God as a metaphor in the creation story using symbols in the form of thoughts (Adam); feelings (Eve); desires for God's power (serpent/penis); knowledge of good and evil (testicles); and conscience (the god within). The Hebrew Bible presents "you" as a tree of knowledge planted in this world and growing here, in what we could call, "God's garden."

We all have glitches in our operating system. We all take the Bible literally instead of figuratively because of emotional ties we have that we're left with from childhood. Once you can see the unconscious habits programmed into your software that are inhibiting *you* from operating more efficiently, you can go into yourself and fix these problems at their source. This will bring you hope, and hope will open your heart to something that can't be achieved through the metaphor of man as just a "thinking" machine. This will even bring you greater faith in God and Scripture.

The third emotional lesson in childhood that hit me hard also occurred before I ever attended public school. My father came home from work one night and my mother told him I'd spoken disrespectfully to her that day. She told him to punish me for it, and so he spanked me based solely on what she told him.

Worse than the physical pain (which was more severe than when my mother spanked me) was the realization that the two of them were working together with regard to my upbringing (seemingly to my detriment). I jumped to the conclusion there was a conspiracy on their part against me. I questioned whether they could really love me at all if I'd caught them scheming together to deliver punishment to me.

I doubted their motives because of the train stations where their thoughts and feelings had gone that I couldn't go to. I had no ability yet to understand that journeys to self-discovery aren't non-stops. In fact, sometimes you have to change trains many times in life along the way.

The *abandonment* I felt at the theater when my parents wanted friends to take me home; the *betrayal* I felt at the library when my parents took me there for a polio vaccine; and the *conspiracy* I felt when my mother asked my father to hit me – became the most confusing experiences of my childhood. These trains of thought had brought me to stations I didn't want to explore. But I got off the train and made my way onto the platform and into these villages to discover important truths about the difference between *my* parents and many *other* parents.

Over time I realized I had to parent me, that my parents had only begun the *training* process. I discovered how difficult it is to teach your inner child to comprehend the whole truth after a childhood in which you came to erroneous conclusions about others and the meaning of life.

My inner child is *all* feeling. He needs my head to act as my inner parent or he leads me astray. The role of my head (Adam) is to learn from my experiences in order to train my heart (St.Eve) and penis (serpent). My feelings (St.Eve) and desires (serpent) have a tendency to work together to get their way, to the detriment of my head's (Adam's) relationship with my conscience (god).

This is why God put my head on my neck where it can look down into the other forces at play within me. This is why my head can look in any direction it wishes except literally behind me and why my heart is blind. This is why I have to keep my penis covered when in public. My desires have to be concealed from others at most times or this world would descend into chaos.

For me to take on the job of making my conscience my guide, I had to grow up. I had to leave the world of toddlers and learn to talk. I had to prove to myself that I was ready to take on the job of being an adult by learning to communicate with others. Only then did I receive an understanding of the metaphors I live by that are running my life. Only then could I return to the process to see how it was benefiting me in becoming myself.

Understanding the meaning of cooperation with others had to happen first between my parents and me. My head and heart had to truly trust others before I could learn to trust myself. Interdependence (shared dependence with others) had to precede intra-dependence (dependence on myself). If I didn't come to know the group, clan, band, gang and guerilla terrorist fighters around me, I'd never come to understand those groupings within,

I had to look out the window at the world I share with everyone else before I could look within at the other passengers onboard my trains of thought. I had to feel safe outside before I could focus on the forces within me. Only by unconsciously taking frequent glances at the conductors passing through the compartment on my trains of thought; the characters within sitting and milling about; and the occasional stranger inside who I'd speak to - could I share my curiosity and excitement about each village we passed and each station we pulled into.

This may seem counterintuitive. We're all taught in childhood to learn from the world around us, not the world within. It's not until

we're experienced adults that we have the capacity to question what's going on inside ourselves. The ABC's of life (abandonment, betrayal and conspiracy) have to occur from the outside in before we can apply those experiences to how we treat our self.

Abandonment, betrayal and conspiracy are tracks of emotions pounded into the landscape of our being in early childhood. Abandonment, Betrayal and Conspiracy became the ABC's of the kindergarten of self-love. They're the letters that represent a whole spiritual landscape we traverse with negativity before we can discover our inner nature and the nature of others that were all created in God's image.

My parents inadvertently (and even sometimes intentionally) introduced me to the ABC's of negativity in childhood. They took me to places in my inner world I'd return to again and again in later life. But I'd later take different trains filled with different people and new cargo on those same tracks. It would only be by getting to know the landscape my tracks went through that I began to learn about the feelings that were beneath my thoughts, guiding them by using a clever transportation system that had been constructed during the expansion of my "wild west within" as a child growing up in front of the TV in 1950's America.

Eventually, I had to face my feelings of abandonment, betrayal and conspiracy of myself using the "MeTube" videos broadcast throughout the day on certain channels I'd suddenly tune into. But by then, I was an adult sitting in front of a PC.

In childhood, I was, in many ways, a lost soul traveling through my imagination like a hobo in the 1930's sneaking onboard a train. I was going through my own great depression. I had no sense of where I was, and it didn't really matter to me whether I got a bearing on where I was headed or not. Because I didn't think about what I thought about, I didn't question the feelings that were beneath the everyday thoughts of being a child. I just thought and felt. I was an unconscious passenger on trains of thought, getting on and off anywhere I liked. I bought no ticket in any station. I paid no fare once on board. And I thought that was what it meant to be totally free.

My thoughts rode my feelings free of charge without me ever reflecting on the ethics of using the belief system God had given me without conscious awareness of how it worked. I had no desire to question the direction the tracks had been laid down on top of my inner nature. I had no need to wonder about the cargo being brought along in the boxcars I was hauling. I didn't give serious thought to the train wrecks and twisted tracks that littered my inner landscape.

I had no desire to get permission from God for anything I decided to do. I had no need to express gratitude to Her for my inner world. I gave no thought to thanking Her daily for the increased knowledge I was receiving about my world from the inside in. I thought that all knowledge was coming to me from the outside in. I had no idea I could learn from me.

I was a spiritual beggar who used a spiritual system without paying for it. I didn't consider the notion that spiritual wealth was the currency that would change my status from beggar to billionaire. I didn't think God-consciousness was something I'd have to earn. So I didn't see that I was living on spiritual credit afforded me. I didn't see how great a price I was paying for my bruised feelings, internal wounds and the scars and callouses that built up around them. I was living life like a child who didn't give a thought about what would happen to him tomorrow.

When I think back to the spiritual bum I once was, uncaring of my inner destinations and purpose in life, I look back on where I was and where I've arrived as simply miraculous. I got a lot farther in life than I ever expected.

But I became much too old and experienced to live as an eternal, inner *child*. I eventually needed to confront the inner *adolescent* in me, and in particular, the juvenile delinquent that was getting his way within without acknowledging that everything he was doing was being charged to a spiritual "tab."

I needed to reflect on those parts of me that weren't living up to my parents' expectations. There were standards I'd been taught from the outside in that I wasn't reproducing from the inside out. There were infantile, childish and juvenile voices inside me that were giving me bad advice, but there was no adult voice inside to claim responsibility over them.

Once I literally left childhood behind and foolishly looked back on only the *material* gifts my parents had given me, it was far too easy to say they'd loved me. In my heart, I actually felt that their material rewards had been little more than bribes to trick me into doing what they wanted me to do to make *them* happy. I couldn't appreciate their spiritual efforts on my behalf because I didn't respect myself for having succumbed to their emotional trickery. And out of this distrust, I permitted the immature sides of me to take control.

It wasn't until I ended up in two mental institutions, went through 24 jobs and 18 addresses that I realized I hadn't a clue where I was really going or how dear a price I was paying for my adventures on these figurative "rails" as a drifter. I was just one more spiritual

hobo, camped out on the edge of civilization, unwilling to bribe myself into working harder for my esteem. I was just one more spiritual, homeless person unwilling to take care of my self the way my parents had wanted.

I was financially surviving, but I hadn't yet learned to live. It wasn't that I just wanted my life to be free and easy. It wasn't that I just wanted everyone to like me. It was bigger than that. I wanted to direct. I wanted to teach. I wanted to influence. I didn't want to be directed, taught or influenced.

I wanted to be a rock like Gibraltar. I wanted to be important. I didn't like the affects of the river of time and the rains of sorrow that were changing my inner landscape. I was eroding. And I thought that immoral and unfair.

There's a great difference between "artificial intelligence" and the "art of intelligence." Creating an intelligent human being is an art. A mind that can conclude it's a rock eroding is artful. A mind that can appreciate the forces of the river of time and the reign of emotions over intellect isn't artificial in its effort to express its intelligence.

It actually takes a *set* of forces to create an imagination. It takes someone with thoughts, feelings, needs and beliefs who understands how these individual forces combine uniquely in each person to create individuality and creativity.

Without believing in God, the imagination comes to a rest like a rock that's tumbled down a hill and landed in a gully. Without believing that God holds a special plan for you, you can't motivate your mind to discover what that plan for you is.

The emotional ABC's of my life began with Abandonment, Betrayal and Conspiracy. And they continued with D, E, F and G: Death, Envoy, Failure and Greed. Long before I ever attended public school, I knew some of the rest of the alphabet of negativity. I just didn't know how to combine those letters into words that would motivate me to move in a positive direction. You've got to know where not to go to discover where you want to go.

It was no wonder I graduated childhood at the age of four when my father woke me up with a slap across the face. It was no wonder I felt banished from paradise, never again wanting to be a child. It's no wonder I developed a juvenile delinquent side to myself that used pushiness, manipulation and persuasion to get my way. Everyone thinks he knows it all because all that he knows is the sum total of all that his inner forces can produce at that moment in time. But there's always more to come by the next day.

By the time I was five and started kindergarten, my heart was all but shut down by trauma or drama to conscious awareness of the meaning of life. I was frightened, suspicious and angry of everything. I'd experienced the ABC's of *life* long before my schoolteachers started me reading and writing the alphabet. I'd read the handwriting on the wall before I could read the written word.

By the age of seven when my parents divorced and I was transported to a new life with my mother and sister in California, my head was curious about the *facts* of life, but my heart had already been all but crushed by my own *feelings*. I mysteriously set aside the topic "feeling" for a time and place to be determined at some point in the future. I locked my feelings in a vault I couldn't get into. For years I made deposits, but no withdrawals.

Adults tried to control my *behaviors* when I was little rather than teach me the language of *emotions*. And bad experiences in later life only brought up the emotional wounds of early youth and how badly I'd felt held. People reminded me that there were things in that vault I really wanted to get into and explore, but they did so only coincidentally. I was left on my own not to feel anyway I wanted...

I found women, in particular, untrustworthy. Men were obviously emotionally unreliable after the sorts of behaviors I witnessed my father exhibiting, but I expected more emotional strength from women – until I discovered they used other pushy, manipulative and subtly persuasive techniques to get their way.

Historically, men have considered women diabolical, inscrutable and conspiratorial. But I'm sure those stereotypes were the result of emotional *self*-ignorance on the part of early man. The more man has evolved, the more he's been able to acknowledge the "x" factor in himself. The more he learns about his own personality disorders, the more he'll make this world safer for women and children.

Like most men, I adapted to my outer environment with greater concern for my intellectual abilities than my emotional insights. I could love plants and animals; I could love the planet as a whole, the rocks, wind and the waves. But I wasn't very happy when I was around people. I could only use them to avoid being lonely. I concluded that people, like food, were meant to be consumed to distract from unpleasant feelings. Hence my overstimulation by sex...

The thought that my Teacher was there seated beside me on every train of thought was way beyond anything I could have conceived of then. That She was whispering in my ear or touching me as I was looking out the window at the landscape of my mind was

impossible for me to believe without hard evidence. How could She be simultaneously outside in the world around me as well as within? How could She be inside me without me being aware of Her presence? That was the kind of magic they hadn't talked about in the fairy tales I'd read as a child. That was the mystical side of life I'd never been exposed to before.

In the spiritual nursery school of learning to live with my feelings and not fight against them, I was taught the language of self-love one letter at a time. And each letter was a tie that hammered another feeling into the ground of my being as I laid new emotional track to carry my trains of thought consciously from the grand central station of self-awareness to the self-love at the end of every line. The building of the railroad system of my "trains of thought" unfolded like the westward expansion of my country. I was an American with a manifest destiny to know myself. I was moving west. I was consciously discovering the greatest nation my world would ever know.

15. The First Day of School

I began elementary school at the age of six with deep reservations about liking it. I didn't want to leave my mother; I didn't want to be among strangers all day long; all my toys were at home. I could see no reason to go anywhere else to play. I tried every argument I could think of to convince her that school was a bad idea, but she was inflexible on the matter.

My next-best strategy was to ally myself with my first grade teacher who I saw as my only link to the *real* world, the world of sane, rational adults.

The children scared the life out of me. My decision to trust adults over kids was based on my extreme sensitivity to the feelings of assault and violation I felt from everyone but my mother. I worried about my *physical* safety when with the boys and my *emotional* safety around the girls. The fact that many of these worries were also projections of my unstable relationship with myself was, of course, much too deeply embedded for me to see at that time.

There were probably many kids who felt as I did, but I couldn't have known that then. I simply came to the conclusion that adults were kinder than kids and tried to survive the trials of the bullies at school by staying as close as possible to the adults for protection.

I didn't come to school to learn about myself; I came because I had to. The plethora of facts they gave me were, at first,

overwhelming. I didn't see any reason for knowing what they were teaching because they didn't start with the big picture. If they had just said that learning to read would teach me to learn to read people, and that learning to read people would teach me to learn to read myself, I'd have understood that it was all in my best interest. But they never explained how anything they taught related to me getting to know and love myself. It's a wonder I learned anything at all...

I didn't want the adults in my life to know how frightened I was of everyone, especially children. And when I grew up, I didn't want anyone to know that my opinion of my peers hadn't drastically changed after two, and even three, decades of life. I especially didn't want others to know how emotionally tied I still was to my mother.

All my life, I preferred the company of older people. The older I got, the more I painted those younger than me as untrustworthy, until I got so old that I couldn't live any longer in denial of my growing distrust of most of humanity. As my mother's generation entered their seventies, eighties and nineties, I realized I was running out of friends. And I looked down the hill of life at the younger generations coming in my direction, wondering what I'd talk about with them and where I'd go if I continued to try to avoid them. Death seemed the only viable way to avoid people.

As does everyone, I began my class work in the spiritual elementary school of self-love through group experiences. The lessons in learning to cooperate with others came as the result of being a member of small teams. Working well with family at home; classmates in class; and strangers on the playground - became precursors to similar, future lessons in romantic liaisons, on the job relationships with strangers and volunteer work with my community. Small group learning opportunities taught me the basic skills I needed in life to trust, respect and feel worthy of myself.

The coursework of my spiritual, elementary schooling lasted the first three decades of my life. It guided me through dependence on my parents and independence toward interdependence with others. But I never could really bridge the gap between the next person and me, to feel something bigger that we were all a part of. I didn't yet have a philosophy of life that embraced it all.

I had secrets, but I felt guilty about having secrets. I didn't want anyone to know how I really felt, but I was ashamed of keeping my feelings a secret. So I deposited them into a vault in my heart, the sort of night depository where I could make deposits, but not withdrawals.

"No man is an island." (John Donne) But *I* was an island. I either thought others were distant mountains bigger and more

important than me, separated by a mysterious ocean of emotion, or they were, like my mother, a coral reef surrounding all of me, leaving the waves lapping calmly at my shores.

My parents had unwittingly allowed the horrors of their alienation with the world leftover from the Holocaust seep into my psyche. They had seen something they wanted to keep secret from me for fear of terrifying me. And so I instinctively felt I should hide my deepest feelings of fear and horror, too.

Growing up gay in America didn't help to feel "native" born. I felt like an alien dropped off on a hostile planet for my own reasons. I didn't feel like I had much space inside to move around without getting caught and turned in to some Greater Authority. I felt like a Jew in Nazi Germany; I felt gay in hostile L.A. I felt like a man with a terrible secret I couldn't tell God.

Feeling like an island in an archipelago of people in an ocean of emotions is the beginner's way of learning how to map the world God created with Self-love. I felt like an island in a chain, separate from others, but able to detect the presence of others on my horizon. I didn't yet have a hold of the inner geography needed to understand my whole world from within because I didn't yet see God had created this whole world out of Her Self-love. I simply felt like a little patch of place that had suddenly appeared from great depth, seemingly from nowhere then sticking out of an endless, blue sea. And in that sense, I was no different from all others.

The first answers to alienation in the spiritual elementary school of self-love came with the joy of teamwork. But I hadn't been taught to celebrate the pleasure of cooperation and sharing with anyone other than my parents. I felt accommodating enough to work with others, but they didn't usually feel that way for long about me. (I was a nerd, a geek and a dork all rolled into one.) And there was no one around to help me through my frustrating lessons of life.

Right from the start, I thought I'd failed the Teacher's lessons in interdependence because I couldn't share myself freely with others. I was afraid I'd get frustrated with everyone and then push them away. I didn't want to be mean and nasty, but I instinctively knew I couldn't be nice for very long. So I made sure to keep a low profile.

I didn't realize the essence of popularity would be in learning to like *myself*. I didn't realize that frustration emanates out from us all. I didn't realize discussing my feelings was even an option. I taught myself to sweep my feelings under the rug and then forget where I'd left them.

I wasn't theatrical enough to be a great dancer. I wasn't dramatic enough to even be a professional actor. I should have gotten off stage and just relaxed. I should have shown the humility of an usher given a free seat for his services or the leadership of a ticket taker at the front door.

It wasn't in my best interest to direct myself in my own one-man show. I hadn't been given the lines to be a showman. I knew nothing about show business. I should have aspired to be a member of my own audience and enjoyed performing well for me.

The problem began with 20th Century tribalism. The European nations had squabbled amongst themselves for centuries. The only think they could all agree on was the inferiority of the Jews. And when that barrier was broken by the War, the only thing left to keep blacks and whites from killing one another in America was their mutual hatred of gays.

In the gay ghettos of San Francisco and New York of the 1960's and 70's, we came together because we'd been expelled from our family tribes. We were united in that we were perceived as everybody's enemy. We were the new "Jew."

The Holocaust fused the German Jews, Hungarian Jews, Polish Jews, Spanish Jews, etc. into a fighting force in Israel perceived by the Muslims as all the same enemy, when they could barely communicate with one another.

AIDS did the gay community what Israel did for the Jews. Gay-Jews, gay-Asians, leather queens, bears, otters, disabled gays, "A" gays – all came together to protect our weakest members from a world determined to eradicate us from the earth. Gays, like Jews, were originally many up of many tribes God made into a loosely held world federation of people who could both internalize their inner common interests and recognize that were being scapegoated by humanity's hateful intentions.

Some people learn how to become a team player by fighting a war. Some learn teamwork in a three-piece suit, carrying a cell phone in one hand and a briefcase in the other, marching in unison through the corporate world. Others learn teamwork literally through playing sports; and many through starting their own family. I learned how to become a team player all by myself. I learned to link myself up with me: perpetrator and victim, gay and Jew, male and female. And in these ways, I found my own way to connect with others as best I could.

But before I chose to lead and follow *me*, I chose to follow drugs, alcohol, lying, stealing and gambles with love. I used

anonymous sex and suicide to express my anger at who I'd been teamed up with. I chose *everything* and *anyone* I could to get what I wanted, even when I wanted death more than life itself.

I'd always been the last person I wanted on my team, the last member of the tribe I wanted to accept into my inner circle. When I realized that the person I was fighting in a war, doing business with in an inner corporate setting, and playing against like a family feud was *me* - and the team I couldn't get picked for was *mine* - then all those feelings of alienation I'd been through in the past began to make more sense.

I found the source of my estrangement. I found the source of everyone's estrangement. I found the reasons for all the wars and all the hatred in this world of ours. I found a way to interpret history and not repeat it. The problem with all of us emanates out from within.

Feelings are as hard as steel; as flexible as plastic; as valuable as gold; and as conductive as copper. Feelings can be forged, and alloys of fear, anger and sorrow can be molded into any shape desired. We're all examples of the "model" human being. We're all symbols for one another of ways to use the forces God gave us to make meaning out of life. And as we all know, the meaning of life is to make life *meaningful*, not *hateful*.

But in my youth at the elementary stage of self-love, I couldn't simply elect to be an engineer of the heart. I couldn't fashion my feelings into emotional tools for the modern age in which I lived. During the first few years of my elementary spiritual education, I didn't have a clue what to do with my emotions. I was frightened by my fear; angry at my anger; and sorry about my sorrow. I was embarrassed by my embarrassment; ashamed of my shame and humiliated by my humility. I had trains of thoughts and tracks of feelings, but no awareness of the importance of the cargo of ideas I was transporting. I was laden with intellectual goods for market with no idea where to take them or what to do with them.

Everywhere I went within I arrived at a place I felt I should have come to sooner. I was always at the right place too late and the wrong place too soon. I felt out of touch with time and place. I felt like I was born in the 19th century and living the life of a Jew in 20th century Germany. I felt like the grandparents I never met.

16. Nutrition

One of the fascinating aspects of elementary school growing up was the literal practice of bringing food to school for the nutrition

break and lunch hour. It turned out (to my surprise) that my physical survival while away from home required daily planning. And because we were quite poor, I had to bring food from home rather than buy the food sold at school.

The very idea that I'd one day have to feed myself was something I hadn't considered when I was a child. And I'm still reeling from what that lesson entails, especially as I head toward older age now that I'm retired.

Eating was something I took for granted as a child. In our house everyone relished food, but nobody gave thanks for it in words. My father cracked the bones of a chicken with his false teeth and sucked out the marrow. (He lost his own teeth in concentration camp.) My half-brother made a ritual of mopping up his plate with bread until there wasn't a spec of food left on the plate. "Dieting" wasn't yet a word in our family vocabulary. For the five Holocaust survivors with whom I shared my meals, there was real intensity at the table. Food was mined like gold. It signified much more than physical survival.

Neither my classmates nor I had ever known real hunger. And so it seemed to me that the kids at school ate as though food and drink were sand and gravel they were mixing together to make cement. But of course, that was also a projection of my own disregard for the spiritual importance that food signified for me at that time.

The idea that everyone is a spiritual guest at God's table hadn't been taught to me. The idea that we must learn to serve one another to receive the bounty of Her blessings was a dish I'd never tried. For me, religion was broccoli and sex was ice cream. That's all I knew, and I thought that was enough to make good choices in life.

My own appetite to be fed through sensation arose long before my teens when lust entered into my life. In childhood, I lusted for tender touch from those I loved, tickling from anyone who wanted to hold me and the sensation of flying that came from machines. When I suddenly developed a sweet tooth for sex in my teens, my tastes may have changed, but my thirst for self-love didn't (even though I couldn't have stated it as such at the time). My taste just widened with conscious awareness to include more ways of getting my appetites met.

As a teenager, I looked at sex like a trip to a bakery. I was interested in men as though they were cookies, slices of pie, hot pastry and thick pieces of chocolate cake. I told myself I was interested in finding a partner, but I really was more interested in getting through the dough on the outside to the filling within. I was a gourmand, not a

gourmet. I wanted quantity, not quality. I yearned for physical sweets, not emotional nutrition.

Men were a feast for my eyes, but I was too guilt ridden to admit I only wanted one after another because they all looked so good. In my late teens and twenties, I convinced myself I was sleeping with men to physically dialogue with them over the possibility of becoming boyfriends. But after sex, I always found excuses why the guy wasn't good enough for me. Secretly, I pined for love, but my behavior said quite the opposite. The evidence showed I was out for sex even though my heart claimed to be yearning for one, special man.

If I'd eaten in front of a mirror in those days, I'd have seen that I didn't look like I was enjoying the food I put in my mouth either. I didn't get my fill of food from food either. I was always dreaming of trying new dishes with new and strange ingredients and spices. I was always looking to put something in my mouth that was new and different...

Sex was like food in that I wasn't getting enough sex to satisfy that appetite either. I was greedy for more. No man was enough. The dream of a lifelong relationship with one special guy was the elixir of love that charmed me into believing I was hungry for love. But I now see that wasn't true.

I didn't want love. What I wanted was just what I got: to believe I wanted love as a way of assuaging my guilt for being driven by lust. This complex trick I played on myself actually slowed me down sexually because I could feel that something inside was wrong. And, looking back, it's what I think kept me from pigging out on men like so many of my generation who died of AIDS.

The metaphors of food from the Bible (forbidden fruit/bread and wine) finally brought me to realize how spiritually malnourished I really was. I could eat away at my frustrations. I could chew on my problems. I could grind my teeth with rage at being a victim of circumstances beyond my control. But I couldn't swallow what people were telling me. I couldn't digest what was happening to me. Nothing gave me the feeling that I was spiritually, well fed. I was always hungry for something I couldn't put my finger on. There was a hole in my belly that couldn't be filled.

My emotional malnutrition when it came to self-love combined with my insatiable, physical thirst for the male body was perfectly understandable in a society that promoted only heterosexual illustrations of love. Only by observing myself and listening to my intuition could I rectify the straight, limited conclusion about the meaning of love and sex.

I had to perceive that I could spiritually feed myself. I had find a way to use masturbation (physical sensation) and philosophy (intellectual insight) to develop my sexual/spiritual identity. But I couldn't spiritually feed myself until I had something sincere (heartfelt) to offer me, and a real desire to be fed.

No one ever truly eats alone unless he wants to be alone. The Teacher sits at every table where people are gathered together. She watches us eat just as She did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. She participates with us in our meal just as Jesus did at the Last Supper and The Breaking of the Bread (Eucharist).

I could easily say that food *comforted* me, but it wasn't true. The truth was that food *frustrated* me because eating hadn't yet become a learning-about-me experience. Food concealed my emotional and spiritual ignorance instead of revealing it. I ate to avoid me, not to get to know me better. I didn't eat to feel; I ate not to have to feel. No matter how many sweets I consumed; I still came away feeling bitter or soured in some way.

Physical sustenance is often the starting point for metaphors that mirror emotional and spiritual sustenance. And yet feeding my heart and soul was a concept that was too complex for me to consider in those days. I was a new student in the school of self-love. I wasn't nearly ready to be weaned off my diet of other people to feed my self.

While I was enrolled in the elementary level in my education in self-love, life was like the nutrition break I remember in the fifth grade of public school. We stopped what we were doing, and we all took out the food we brought from home or the drinks we bought at school. We simply fit into the system that got us fed without asking any questions about what we were doing or why.

I'm now a child of the universe who's dependent on myself for physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual nourishment. I'm physically well fed nowadays, but I was unaware that that my plate had been filled with meat (God), potatoes (others) and vegetables (myself). And at the time, of the three, the vegetables were the hardest to get down.

In early adulthood, I learned to make better choices about the food I put in my body, but only once I cared enough about the body that would contain the food. Because I was too physically young then to correlate food to the intellectual, emotional and spiritual contents that also went into my container, I wasn't concerned enough about any aspect of my diet. I ate up life without regard to the metaphor.

The nutrition break at elementary school should have been a teaching opportunity in filling more than my belly. It should have been

a prelude to filling my head, heart and soul. Learning about myself should have been a daily intellectual, emotional and spiritual exercise in feeding myself in every way for a lifetime.

The wisdom and self-love I gathered consciously in later years might have begun much sooner had somebody told me what I was supposed to be doing while I was doing whatever I was doing. The success of my public school education would have been greater if they'd at least mentioned the fact that they were there to fill my head, but that my heart and soul would also need filling.

In the *spiritual* nutrition break in the school of self-love, learning to receive gratefully is a lesson that can take a lifetime to complete. I had to be rigorously drilled in the joy of receiving from others and joyfully giving back to them. Like everyone else, I was taught it's better to *give* than to *receive*; but I wasn't taught how to receive joyfully from myself.

17. Lunch

In our house, I learned to eat as though I were swallowing diamonds as Nazis were banging at the door. By copying the determination and anxiety my family exhibited at the dining room table, it took no more than ten minutes for me to scarf down my lunch at school. That left me 50 minutes with nothing else to do. I usually spent the extra time walking around the quad or pretending to study, nutritionally sated but emotionally and socially hungry for more. I only knew how to satisfy my physical hunger by remembering to bring my lunch to school each day; I didn't know how to achieve social nourishment during the lunch hour. As basic as that hunger is, nobody at school taught me how to achieve it. And I certainly didn't get any instruction on the matter at home.

I'd sit on a bench with a book up during the lunch hour, shielding my face from others, or I'd wander around the quad, but always with the nagging feeling inside that I was doing something wrong by not having any friends to talk to at lunchtime. I felt like the emperor after the kid shouted he was wearing no clothes. I felt socially naked and embarrassed. I felt all eyes were on me.

I tried listening to my classmates, but didn't find the conversations they were having "interesting" - in other words, "meaningful." I was on a grand tour of life first discovering all the things I found boring. And to this day, there are many things that still aren't meaningful to me. Only now, I'm no longer ashamed of what doesn't interest me.

In those days, that damn little kid inside me insisted I was the emperor who was emotionally nude and socially rude. Even when I was happily engaged with others in something I cared to talk about, as if from nowhere, that pesky inner brat would bellow out within me that those around me could see more of me emotionally than I realized showed. And then I'd feel exposed, regardless of the expression on my face or the physical stance I was holding. It took 30 years after graduating from public school to find a way to don the social clothes that made me feel emotionally comfortable around others and socially well dressed at every occasion.

I was embarrassed about my body. I didn't think I looked "cool." I was ashamed of my personality. I didn't think I acted "cool." And I was humiliated by my very being because I didn't believe I'd ever *be* "cool."

As a child, I wanted people to see me as indistinguishable from one of the boys. I wanted to fit in at school, sport the right pose, the right words and the right demeanor. But I couldn't do it. I couldn't even *attempt* to do it. There was a layer of angst within me that I couldn't get through.

I was really a wonderfully kind and goodhearted person, but I felt pinned into an emotional diaper for 50 years. (And it was full.) I knew I smelled bad socially, but I didn't understand why others were giving me strange looks. I couldn't get through my angst to enjoy feeling emotionally naked with myself, let alone with anyone else. So I remained an emotional baby inside, crying out for someone to "change" me.

At school growing up, I had no choice but to remain on constant lavender alert. The jabs and jeers of the homophobic bullies made it too dangerous for me to let my guard down, and that put a big chink in my social armor. I had to look a little macho just to cover up being gay. (I could have gotten killed in those days just for being me.) I *had* to augment myself with artificial emotional enhancements. It would have been social suicide for me to be myself.

Coming out of the closet (which I accomplished at the age of nineteen when I was living on my own in Israel) should have given me permission to wear whatever feelings I felt like in the privacy of the tiny, gay ghetto in Tel Aviv. But I wasn't accustomed to breaking emotional habits.

The straight world's insistence that I adhere to their emotional uniform was an inner dress code I felt I had to don even amongst my friends. You'd think coming out as a Jewish-American living in Israel

would have given me permission to dress emotionally casually and comfortably. But I couldn't let my hair down even amongst Jews.

I had to find a way to love me as I was; and then, through me, I could come to love the world. I had to forgive myself for how I'd had to treat myself when I was uptight. Only then could I forgive the world for contributing to making me so uptight.

The gay world in Israel and the western world have countered homophobia for almost 50 years by teaching straights to accept loving relationships between men. But I was a man, too, and my gay brothers and sisters everywhere failed me in not teaching me how to love myself. We were all uptight in those days. I had to embellish on everyone's wisdom with wisdom of my own.

The gay community pointed me in the right direction by teaching me to love the man in every*man*, and the Jewish community taught me that God's goodness lies in every*one*. All that I hated about gays and Jews turned out to be a projection of those things I was struggling with in myself.

Those who hate-men-who-love-men and those who wish to rid the world of Jews and that-angry-God-of-the-Jews - haven't completed the elementary education of self-love. They haven't uncovered, discovered and recovered themselves. They're still struggling with projections they can't break.

A man has to learn how to change his mind. He has to be instructed in how to transform his heart. He has to be inspired in how to transcend his head and heart from that magical place called his "soul." And he needs help to do it. It can't be done alone. It has to be done alone together.

In the school of self-love, our Teacher gives us gay-Jewish tutors, gay-Christian tutors and gay-Muslim tutors to help us attain our degrees in our major in life. It's a shame to blame the tutors with the principles based on sexual choice. The blame should lie with the student, not the tutors' sexuality. The Teacher enrolled everyone in this school with some needs that can't change.

I'm now at peace in having been created in God's gay, Jewish image. I'm contented now with the identity I was born with. I don't have to accept the old, hand-me-down values of a bygone era. I no longer wear the ragged, threadbare morality of other people's emotional diapers. My diaper days are over. I'm not anyone's baby. I'm my own child, and I've grown up.

As the gay son of Holocaust survivors, I can say that I loved my parents with an unusual fervor not typically seen in American children. I was particularly close to my mother. But both my parents

were traditionalists born to a different era; they did what they could to fit in with their generation despite the hatred of Jews and prejudice against gays at that time.

I was my parents' spiritual "revolutionary" bent on turning the world upside down to make a place for people like me. I don't give in to my self-hatred anymore without a fight. I counter fear of my self with anger. I counter anger at my self with sorrow; and sorrow of my self with love.

This is my gay-Jewish message for the world in the 21st Century. Mark my words. The world will watch as hatred shrivels up in humanity and dies from the inside of every individual. You will watch your hatred die and praise the Lord for it.

When I entered late adolescence in the early 70's, it was easier for me to take off my clothes than to remove my emotional armor. I wanted men to find me handsome on the outside. I didn't yet care about being attractively dressed within.

I had to be guarded with my gay brothers because I couldn't yet envision more comfortable inner, emotional apparel. It wasn't safe enough in those days to let anyone see what I was wearing inside.

The fig leaf of genital embarrassment didn't grow any bigger to cover up my shame or conceal my sense of humiliation. I was mostly made up of leaves of embarrassment that concealed my branches. There were few buds of shame to blossom into flowers of humiliation. There was very little in the way of fruit yet hanging from my tree. And each winter, I became a scrawny mass of twigs shivering in the wind.

To get *physically* nude then, I couldn't afford to be *emotionally* naked. Those I chose to sleep with enjoyed the fact that I disrobed easily and gleefully, but I don't think anyone realized how much of my inner self was concealed in order to do so.

I was in the same physical space as my peers but in a different emotional space. I shared an age, an epoch and an era with the men I slept with. We shared a bed, an alley or a tree with skin-deep feelings of lust for one another. But I wasn't able to give more of myself at that time. We had sex alone together. Only our bodies touched.

But I still look back fondly on those lusty days of youth. Doing just as I please, pleased me then, and it still pleases me to be lusty (in bed) today. But my reasons for having sex have changed since then. I'm so much more naked today when I'm nude.

Sex slowly turned into a metaphor for self-love, a union of the masculine and feminine aspects of myself. Loving other men became foreplay to the discovery of self-love. Sex today is about more than physical penetration. Sex is a metaphor for penetration into the

mystery of life, a mystery of sharing myself with me while sharing myself with another. Today I take off so much more than just clothes when I make love.

In striving for emotional maturity, I need satisfying *social* intercourse in addition to *sexual* intercourse. Today social and sexual intercourse are precursors to satisfying *spiritual* intercourse with myself, and God. I need to feel that I'm spiritually penetrating the big questions of being human to feel emotionally satisfied with myself. I need to think wisely about myself to think clearly. I need to feel at one with myself to feel everything. I need to believe in myself to believe that God is with me under the covers.

Self-love is an art, not a science. I paint a loving self-portrait each day through all that I think, feel and do. It doesn't matter how I frame God in my life. What matters is that my canvas and frame grow bigger day-by-day.

Conversing with God has always been one of the ways my thoughts and feelings have kept Her appraised of what I consider "my progress at school." But I don't realize how often I'm figuratively raising my hand to get Her attention or how often I figuratively stop Her as She walks up and down the aisles looking over everyone's shoulder as we work on our assignments. It was only after I became spiritually inclined that I made a conscious effort to speak to Her during office hours, late at night or early in the morning when alone and at peace.

The direction my trains of thought are moving in isn't only determined by my tracks of feeling, but by the ground beneath them. The landscape of my soul is natural and beautiful even if it's rugged and wild in many places. I have a manifest destiny to go west toward the setting sun. I have a curiosity to know and love the inner continent I'm exploring. I refuse to pave my inner self into a parking lot. There have to be national parks in every american state of my being. There has to be an urban farmer inside me.

The world my parents survived as Jews in Europe in the 1940's and the world I had to survive as a gay boy at school in America in the 1950s and 60s left me no choice but to conclude that social intercourse has to be loving, respectful and kind. I have to believe that others *want* to treat me with respect despite the words that often escape their lips and deeds they let loose from their hands.

While walking around the quad as a child at school during the lunch hour with nothing much to do, I knew nothing of the joy of emotional transformation or spiritual transcendence. During those long, lunch hours, I could only walk about by myself trying to figure

out what was wrong with me. It took 30 years after graduating high school for me to discover that when I'm alone, I'm in good company. If I can respect myself, whether or not I can respect those around me, I feel I'm the Teacher's beloved student.

I know little of the God that resides on mountaintops, in sunsets or makes Herself known through weather formations and natural calamities. The aspect of God I've been introduced to guides me through my imagination. She created me in Her image, so I can recreate a vision of Her in my imagination to share with others.

To *love* myself, I needed to begin by learning to *like* myself. To *love* God, I needed to begin by learning to *like* Her. Hating myself doesn't improve my relationship with Her or me. I was created as one of God's *Chosen* People because I usually make good *choices*. I don't care if religious zealots don't like my choices. They'd do better to look at *their* choices rather than criticize *mine*.

There are no free lunches in the school of self-love. When you humiliate yourself, you have to eat humble pie. Therefore, take small bites of the guilt on your plate and chew on them thoroughly.

Treating blacks as though they were inferior to whites was immoral. Solving the "Jewish problem" was as immoral for the Christians in the past as it is for the Muslims of today. Telling women they have to let men decide what's right for women's bodies is also immoral. And telling gays we're perverts is part of the same list of behaviors that will lead to the serving of more humble pie on your plate.

Jews, blacks, women and gays are good books that should be "assigned" reading in everyone's curriculum in the school of self-love. Just because you may not yet major in *you* doesn't give you reason to major in *me*.

Choose to focus your conscience on *your* life as a gardener with a plot to plant. Blacks and Jews have the right to own their own gardens. Women have the right to weed their gardens of plants out of place. And gay men who choose to plant seeds in men rather than women are gardeners, too.

If you want to pass the first grade in self-love, you have to look for God's reasons for enrolling *you* here. My emotional and spiritual curriculum has nothing to do with yours. What I do with my semen is nobody's business. What women do with your semen is nobody's business. Do more to protect the sprouts and the saplings in this eden of ours than the seeds.

18. The Teacher's Pet

When I was a child going to school, I did all I could to be the teacher's pet. I wanted to feel that my elementary school teacher held my heart in her heart; if the gaze in her eyes moved around the room *lost*, I wanted it to return to mine, *found*. I wanted to demonstrate my dedication to my education with love for my teacher; and I wanted to feel uniquely chosen by her in return.

I needed my teacher to know that I wouldn't reject her under any circumstances. I couldn't bear the thought of disappointing her. Her anguish at my poor performance would have torn my heart open; and the very thought of her ever mocking me would have sealed my heart shut for good.

I didn't care if others saw me as a kiss-up. I didn't care if they thought my relationship to my teacher was as close as my relationship to my mother. I saw my relationship to all learning as pure.

In truth, I'd simply projected my love of myself onto my teachers. And I did what they asked of me to please them, unbeknownst to me at the time that my investment in all that love for them would one day return to me with great interest in my self.

So when I ended up becoming a teacher in my thirties, I tried to help my students see me without projections. I wanted them to develop themselves from the inside in. I don't think it's ever too early to begin awareness of the importance of self-love.

But as a child, the operative word in my relationship with my teachers was "pet." There was a *puppy* in me that desperately needed to feel emotionally held by my *master*. And while the other students helped one another in receiving the rewards of peer acknowledgment, I sucked the soul out of my teacher with all the force my father used in cracking chicken bones to suck out the marrow.

I used my teachers as a love-delivery-device. I was a good student to please *them*, not to please *me*. I was smart; but I was terribly needy. I was good so *they'd* like me. I wasn't good so *I'd* like me.

Neediness has been a sensation that's been tearing through me most of my life. I've tried to make it go away with food, drugs, alcohol, shopping and sex, but neediness always returns. I need me, and until I acknowledged the projections of neediness on all the people and things in my life, I felt like an Israelite dancing around a golden calf.

Most of my life I thought I needed my mother. Now that she's very old, I see that she needs me much more than I need her. I see that I've left my mother's side emotionally and I'm moving closer to my Mother. But I know my neediness isn't even for Her. It's for me. I

need to feel that I'm here for *me*. As I age, I want to know that I'll be able to get all my needs met and won't have to suffer the angst of wandering through life any longer.

In elementary school, I yearned to be chosen for team sports. I yearned to have kids to talk to at lunchtime. I wanted friends to walk home with after school and spend time with on weekends. But my peers couldn't give me the mega amounts of attention I craved.

While my parents were still together, my father adored me as though I were his pet. And when my parents divorced and my mother moved my sister and me from New York to California, I felt like an abandoned dog without my owner to hug and hold me.

In pet stores in California, I intuitively felt the loss of my father the most. I identified with the dogs locked in cages waiting to be adopted. Like them, I was waiting for a boy to find me, bring me home and play fetch with me. Outwardly I cried for a dog of my own, but within, I identified with the whimpering pups in the cages. I secretly wanted the "master" my mother had left in New York.

The television drama "Lassie," in the 1960's on Sunday nights at 7:00 PM allowed me to imagine life as a boy with a dog. In many episodes, Timmy and Lassie were separated from one another and had to struggle to be reunited. Once a week while watching "Lassie" my abandonment issues with my father were played out for me on the screen. And at the end of each episode, when boy and dog were back together again, I had to hold back tears, the same tears that welled up in me in pet stores; tears that tried to fill the canyon inside that had separated my father and me from one another.

The pain of feeling disowned by my father was too terrible to admit consciously at the time. But as I entered my teens, a part of me tried to strive to be as human and boyish as I remembered him having been. I wanted to drink, smoke and swear like he did. I wanted to be "one of the boys," like he was, so I could claim to be (like) a man.

As a teenager, I acted like a dog in a pack. I had an instinctive need to follow the dictates of my peers on the quad even if I was intellectually single-minded in class. I didn't want to feel separate and distant from them out in public where everyone could see me. At times like that, loyalty became more important to me than individuation. I wanted to fit in with my generation so that no one would see what a misfit I really was. I wanted to become a *master* of my fate to give up the shame of feeling like a *dog*.

I became as frustrated communicating my emotional needs to my boyfriends later on as Lassie had been with Timmy. Lassie always

seemed to understand the danger in every situation, and Timmy was always clueless at first to what Lassie was trying to tell him.

But the men in my life couldn't understand me when I barked at them either. I couldn't express the danger I was experiencing in a way they could understand. They didn't know and couldn't appreciate the depth of my loyalty to them.

I only met one man in my late teens who made me feel like a puppy in the hands of a boy. We only had sex one night, but I'll never forget how protected, cared for and appreciated I felt in his arms. He wasn't particularly good looking in the traditional sense, but he gave me thrills that I still remember to this day.

I wanted to be a boy's best friend, so it was no surprise, later on, when I looked back on the men I'd chosen to sleep with, that they were all (except for that one) emotionally and spiritually still little boys at heart. Whether I acted like their puppy or they acted like mine, our relationship was based on the relationship of Timmy to Lassie.

I fell in and out of "puppy love" many times as an adult, unconsciously revisiting my ABC feelings time and again, coming away from romance with a feeling of increased loneliness and neediness.

But the problem wasn't that I was gay. The problem was that I was human and immature. My problems had nothing to do with the gender of those I fell in love with. It had to do with an emotional evolution that nobody then was capable of talking about.

Those who don't believe in evolution of the species can't understand physical evolution as a precursor to emotional and spiritual evolution. Their feelings are flat, uneventful and unchanging. Theirs is a flat-earth spiritual principle that 500 years of world circumnavigation and exploration hasn't given them enough time to internalize. Theirs is a problem that can't be repaired with reason. It doesn't even emanate from their heart. It comes from a sorry soul.

"My" father, unlike "Our Father," wasn't faithful to our family when I was a child. He was a financial adulterer who betrayed his family with monetary infidelity. He wanted money, power and prestige more than family values. He lived out his fantasy of becoming rich monetarily, not emotionally or spiritually. And when he later married for the third time, his wife was monetary rich and kept him in the comforts he was accustomed to growing up in Lithuania with rich parents. But his fantasy of becoming a rich man in America based on his own efforts was never realized.

He didn't elicit loyalty from me through his hysteria and rage at the least little thing I did wrong. And when I neared the age of thirteen

and he wanted me to have a Bar Mitzvah, he didn't earn my respect when my mother had to pay for it. I couldn't thank him for his religious influence on me without him backing up that desire with money. My conscience wouldn't allow me to respect someone who fantasized about money, but who couldn't put his money where his mouth was. Apart from our deep, mutual love of the animal kingdom, there was little we could share with one another.

In puberty, my anti-authoritarian tendencies rose to the surface where they could be clearly seen by others, but not clearly by me. I thought cynicism and scorn were behaviors that signaled adulthood. I thought my disappointment with my father was something that united me in a *positive* way with my peers.

My parents had conditioned me into giving from the outside in, rather than from the inside out. They unintentionally taught me to give in order to receive. But it was obvious to me, even then, that they expected me to give to others in order to receive back from others, when spirituality teaches us to give through our self to others in order to receive back from God through our self.

Mental illness made me needy, and neediness brought me back to my mother time and again. I wanted to be independent, but I couldn't achieve independence without extra help from her, my first tutor. I couldn't go to my father for help in anything. In that sense, it felt like he was a stranger.

The inner child in my heart felt one way, but without an inner parent in my head, I did just as I pleased. I listened to the voice of the child inside me that told me to hate those who hated themselves, and I indulged that voice in that way. Little did I know that hating those who hate themselves was a convoluted projection of how I unconsciously felt about me.

It's no wonder I was so sensitive to abandonment, betrayal and conspiracy. My heart wanted to avoid guilt, and my head found good reasons to do so. The two of them could only agree on apposing making my conscience their guide.

By the time I reached my fifties, I could finally see that the men in my life hadn't appeared by coincidence. They'd been text books assigned to me by the Teacher in spiritual classes I'd been enrolled in. My Teacher had brought each of them into my life with lessons tailor-made for me. What had gotten in the way of me accepting them as tutors of self-love then was my ego telling me I wasn't a student in a school but on a vacation with my self.

The evolution from "teacher's pet" to "Teacher's pupil" was long and arduous. I had to feel like a dog rather than own a dog. I had

to humiliate myself in order to learn to express loyalty to myself. My emotional and spiritual evolution took me off the path of boyhood to trudge the rocky road of becoming a man I could respect.

19. Spiritual Junior High School

When I was spiritually young and juvenile, I did my best to acquiesce my personal needs for the needs of the group in an effort to show that I could be cooperative and responsible. But I had a hard time adapting these positive traits to life as an adult, as evidenced by my checkered work career and need to doctor my résumé.

My *head* told me it was my job to participate out in the world, but my *heart* told me it wasn't motivated to do so. Life may be a transformative experience, but the transformation was very slow and painful in my case. I wanted to listen to me and follow my gut level feelings, but I wasn't on speaking terms with my impulses and intuition.

I had to go *in* to come *out*. I had to let myself into my heart to get out of my head. I had to think about what I was thinking about with loving regard. I had to question if, in fact, the cruel ways other people were treating one another didn't, in fact, mirror the way I was treating myself.

Loving me with tough questions was the best idea I ever had. Questioning what I was thinking about allowed for a depth of experience in life I hadn't previously conceived of or achieved. Only my attitude toward me needed to change for me to glean results from my answers, and that occurred naturally once I learned how to commit to the questions and answers of self-love.

Basically, life is a game of "0's" (no's) and "1's" (yeses). When a man can't take "no" for an answer, when his heart (eve) is filled with disappointment, he allows his desires (serpent) to override his feelings, which then negatively impact his thinking (adam). His conscience (god) then has to step in and prove to him that there are negative consequences for each and every action he takes that isn't based on righteousness for himself. The outer world is an orchard, but man's inner world is a bare plot of land that he's got to learn to cultivate.

When I'd been a pre-pubescent boy at school growing up, I saw myself as bright, even sometimes brilliant, capable of doing many good things, and able to interact intellectually with many kinds of people on a wide array of subjects. I could appreciate the graceful way my mind waltzed through intellectual challenges. And I concluded, quite naturally, that life was a dance of reason.

But by the end of puberty, I was so sick of being told what to do and not do that I only wanted to escape to an island in the South Pacific to do things my way. I thought if I could just find a tiny place of my own surrounded on all sides by water (and far away from my mother), I'd be content for the rest of my life. Although "no man is an island," I saw myself as the exception that proved the rule. I was an island, a jewel in the sea far from the mainland where others were incomprehensible and cruel.

Sex so consumed me in adolescence that my mind really wasn't free to think clearly until I got some of my physical urges out of the way. Only then did I get a glimpse of how deeply my desires (serpent) were influencing my feelings (eve), which in turn affected my thoughts (adam). I loved quickly; I hated long and hard. I couldn't take "no" for an answer. The answer "no" devastated me.

As I began to sense more and more sexual power surge in me in late adolescence, I felt a new passion for living I hadn't known in youth. I *felt* I had a reason to persevere. I saw my life as a marathon and all the 50-yard dashes of youth as races that had prepared me for crossing the finish line a hero with fame and fortune by my side. I saw myself, at last, as one of the potential winners in the game of life.

My academic education had required me to learn to train my mind, and with scholasticism came discipline, policies and procedures. And in the third decade of life when I became a teacher, I was finally able to engage my mind as the primary tool of my being, which made me conclude that juvenile thinking and behavior was literally only around me and figuratively far behind. But once I achieved financial security through acting reasonably in the work world, I erroneously concluded I could unlock the mystery of my heart the same way.

Life is reasonable and rational *some* of the time. But sometimes it's unreasonable and irrational. Sometimes you become frantic and afraid. Sometimes you become incredibly horny and it's not the "head" on your shoulders that you witness doing your thinking for you...

When my father slapped me across the face, it was a blow to my head that affected my heart and changed the way I believed about having a soul. And when my mother divorced him, it broke my heart in two with sorrow at something gone from my life forever.

I don't think I thought I'd been the cause of their unhappy marriage. I just saw that the king and the queen of the castle in my kingdom had descended from their thrones. I didn't see myself as the prince who'd inherit their fairytale story to add to my own.

My emotions were thereafter divided between love and guilt, right and wrong, yes and no. At the age of six, you could appeal to my reason. At the age of thirteen, you could appeal to my feelings. But by the age of eighteen, you could only appeal to my body to judge right from wrong.

By the time I was a teenager, my spiritual curriculum in the school of self-love for the next 35 years was pretty much set. I was pre-enrolled in most of my life classes for decades to come. I had no room in my schedule for electives again until after the age of 50. Such is the difference between “fate” and “destiny.”

20. Passing Period

The school of self-love may be in session at all times, but it's just too difficult being lectured to by life without any breaks in between. Even in junior high, they gave us five minutes to go from one class to another. Life, too, has passing periods between subjects, breaks that are meant to be relaxing and refreshing, and that give you time to get to your next class.

But when I was in junior high school as a kid, I ran out of one class to be the first person at the next one. I wanted to demonstrate to my teachers that I was the most dedicated and responsible of all their students. I wanted the next teacher's undivided attention during the passing period by being the first student in the room in order to receive the kind of personal regard that wasn't available once the others arrived. I needed the emotional regard of my teachers, and I was frantic about getting it.

While I rushed to get to my locker and then to my next class, the other kids were using their time in a way I couldn't appreciate. They were walking slowly, talking, laughing and playing around. They were touching each other physically and emotionally. They were using the passing period to relieve one another of their anxiety while I used that time to get the next teacher to relieve me of mine.

I thought my peers were doing nothing of consequence with their time, when in fact the passing periods were teaching them *who* to connect with in life and *why*. Like most straight “A” students, I ended up working for managers in the real world who'd gotten “B's” and “C's” in school, and only now can I see why. They weren't in such a rush to get to class. They were learning about *relationships* at school while I was there only to learn about the subject matter.

My mother had taught me to plan ahead at all times. She turned everything into a question of survival. Nothing was casual or relaxed

with her. Nothing was for “fun.” But I couldn’t really fault her for the tension she held inside because I turned out to be just as up tight as she was.

In later life, I had to work with her to spiritually undo what we’d both erroneously held to be true emotionally. The fact that *her* spiritual grades wouldn’t be on *my* report card didn’t excuse me from my responsibility to teach her to appreciate the emotional work habits in life that had helped me calm down once I realized what I was doing. Showing her how the two of us were behaving similarly was a great bonding experience. That’s what it meant morally for me to honor my mother.

Anyone who’s come to me in the last ten years with a sincere desire to listen to what I have to say has become part of my experiment in self-love. And, although people are vastly different in temperament and personality, we’re all the same in terms of the elements of our persona. The inner forces at work in each of us are the same even if we combine them in uniquely creative ways.

As a youngster, I was task oriented. I needed to keep busy or anxiety would creep up on me. I needed to see concrete results from everything I was doing in order to feel productive and at peace. But I preferred mental or physical challenges because they distracted me from having to face my feelings.

I could only embrace the feeling of being alone when I was high on drugs, so I’m grateful today to drugs for aiding me in enjoying my own company (although that turned out to be an artificial relationship that I’ve since had to mend with mega-doses of reality). If not for the pleasant experiences I had on drugs in my youth, I never would have believed it possible to enjoy spending time alone or with others. Drugs did me a great service by helping me relax. It was only once I began to get curious about how I truly operate that they brought up negative feelings I couldn’t control.

I was like a thermos bottle without an inner lining. The heat and cold of my emotions had no inner containment. My feelings leaked out in every direction. And when I felt alone while in the presence of others, I became ashamed that they could sense the emotional heat or cold I involuntarily exuded.

I was thin-skinned. I was single-paneled. I was a metal container on the outside with no insulation within. And it was especially true that when I was around others on drugs my emotional complexity became most apparent to me.

It was shocking to discover 20 years after I left public school that I was finally living the life of a junior high school, spiritual

student on the quad during passing periods. I was finally goofing around with my classmates between classes. Despite the fact that I was really screwed up, I was proud of myself for, at last, behaving a little more like a kid.

I'd been overly sensitive to my inner, emotional climate growing up, something the other kids seemed to be better able to express without shame. But I was finally radiating some of my emotional intensity out onto those around me without guilt by my 50's. I'd built an inner lining. I'd become a thermos instead of a bottle. And I was proud of myself for having done so...

The spiritual passing periods between the courses in each day today give me the opportunity to slow down and stroll from one class to another. It's my chance to pour out my feelings from the thermos I finally developed without leaking my feelings all over the place. It's my chance to live the life of a junior high school student in the school of self-love with enough distance on my feelings to be able to feel what I feel without freaking out with guilt for feeling something.

Emotional breaks in concentration during the course of the day are now opportunities to connect lovingly with myself regardless of how negatively I might feel overall. Emotional breaks are in some ways, more important to my spiritual education than my class work because they're so rejuvenating.

Plans, intentions, strategies, schemes and plots amount to no more than about five percent of what happens to me in the course of a day. Ninety-five percent of each day is filled with inner occurrences (thoughts, feelings and urges) that are beyond my control. Most of what occurs within me is as unpredictable as the weather. I can choose to observe and comment on all that, or I can allow it to happen in the background of my being as I go through my day.

Spiritual school doesn't always revolve around the outer world "lessons" the Teacher gives us. We're all on our way to class internally from time to time. We may be enjoying the "passing periods" without having to give much thought to what they mean. The Teacher awaits each of us with open arms when we get to class. But She also gives us time to be with our selves and others.

21. The Bully

In elementary school as a child, I avoided the bullies, arriving with the crowd in the morning and leaving quickly at the end of day. But by junior high, as the boys got more and more aggressive in and around school, I had a harder time avoiding confrontations with them.

Even though I suffered very few traumas in youth from other kids, I was always afraid I'd be called a sissy, a homo or a faggot. I was terrified of getting beaten up mostly because it would have been proof of my peers' scorn of me, which mirrored my own.

There was little positive, public opinion from males at that time for kids who avoided fights. Men expected boys to prove their ability to protect themselves. I had to find clever ways to avoid having to protect myself from the bullies because I couldn't even convince *me* I really cared about me, let alone anyone *else*. I was wracked by fear.

My parents were on yellow alert in Nazi Europe. I was on lavender alert in America. My body may have resented the tension it was forced to bear, but there simply was no choice in the matter if I wanted to get to adulthood physically unscarred. With practice, my mind learned to shut itself off to the repeated shocks it was forced to go through. My heart had already deflected suffering by shutting down love altogether.

To this day, I find no justification for the terror I was subjected to at school growing up, but I no longer blame the world for what I had to endure or for the frantic pace at which I had to learn to love living. Today, I only hope to make it easier for other children, especially gay children, to find reasons to love love.

Growing up, I didn't have violent thoughts of retaliation against the bullies. They so intimidated me that I was terrified some days about going to school. But I didn't imagine becoming a superhero who could strike back and get even.

I had to disavow how deeply I despised myself for feeling so afraid. By being a male who wouldn't and couldn't retaliate against those who threatened me, I succumbed to the conclusion that I wasn't a fighter. And that made me sad.

My heart was filled to overflowing with disappointment in me. So I dreamed of becoming physically attractive and alluring to the bullies. I dreamed of them wanting to have sex with me. That was the way in which I hoped to deflect their anger and disapproval. That was the way in which I hoped to deflect my anger and disapproval.

Today, bullies are striking out with automatic weapons, bombs strapped to their torso and videos sent round the world to advertise their desire for help in their nefarious goals. The violence and threats of violence have become worse, not better. And you have to wonder how many men and women would secretly prefer to solve their problems of repression and inferiority with sexual solutions instead of wars.

I had to “act in” because I wouldn’t allow myself to “act out.” My mental illness and debasing sexual fantasies were, ironically, *healthy* responses to violence and intimidation that I couldn’t deal with any other way. The healthy consequence of being treated disrespectfully isn’t always antisocial behavior. Many may, like me, turn their inner world into their stage, and all their inner men and women into sexual players.

Gay marriage won over the hearts of Americans, in part, because we proved to society that they wanted what we have. Our creative abilities contribute to making this country more peaceful and productive. Those older adults who think we’re an abomination before the Lord will die. Society will change, and the past won’t be repeated.

But when my parents’ generation was running the world, drugs were the best medication I could find to conceal what my mind had to endure to survive. Drugs woke me up on one level while they buried my fear, anger and sorrow on another. I had to strike out and hurt somebody, and the most moral choice I found was to hurt myself. When millions of people feel the need to manage their problems internally, it creates problems externally.

Gang warfare, white-collar crime, bigotry and impatience with strangers are understandable reactions to crimes against one’s humanity. Drugs and overeating are other unhealthy ways of dealing with the bullies within.

Hurting others is definitely worse than hurting yourself, but each of us has his own way of treating the moral challenges of hurting and hating the ones you’re with. Because everyone is a child of God, the one we really all want to get back at when we don’t get what we want is God. And there are many ways to get back at Her for having to learn to take “no” for an answer. People are just scapegoats...

There was no recourse against injustice to gays when I was growing up. I had to suck it up and do the best I could. But my disappointment with *myself* grew when it should have been my disappointment with *others* that should have grown. But now that society is more just to gays, I’m able to complete my inner work and make a greater contribution to society.

The bully on the schoolyard had wormed his way into me. Bees, flies, spiders and creepy, crawling insects became symbols of the bullies around me. They could climb trees, fly into flowers and eat leaves. They repulsed me because they were just small enough to get under my skin. I was a tree of knowledge that metaphoric insects were using to their advantage.

While a student in junior high school ostensibly to get an academic education, I excelled in finding new ways to creep myself out without even knowing it. Junior high school became the scene of a spiritual crime against my own humanity. And that's a tragic commentary on public education in those days.

The teachers didn't teach me to take myself personally. They didn't talk to me about how I could be my own worst enemy. They were so busy dealing with the kids who were a public nuisance that people like me were completely overlooked.

To make matters worse, at that age my body suddenly began to break out with hair in all manner of unsightly places and my emotions exploded on my cheeks in pimples that looked like snow-capped volcanoes ready to explode. Meanwhile my desire for sex gave me torturously painful yearnings for male contact that I wasn't socially or emotionally able to satisfy.

I wasn't even *physically* able to satisfy my needs because I didn't learn to masturbate until I was sixteen. And, then, I only figured out how to do it thanks to a book on sex for boys. There wasn't even a way for people like me to achieve physical knowledge about sex in those days. (The porn industry has certainly changed all that.)

I can't imagine anyone in this world who was more of a mess growing up than me. I think Muslim children who grow up to become terrorists have a greater chance for rehabilitation than I had in my day. I'm a miracle walking on two feet. God has been very good to me.

As a child, I smiled at everyone to look disarming and agreeable, but hot, violent forces were building within me like lava making their way slowly to the surface. As much as I tried to hide my feelings, by puberty my body was being propelled through something I could acknowledge, but had no idea how to control. I could feel rumblings inside me. But, honestly, I had no idea what they meant or how they'd turn me into someone who became determined to die rather than embrace life.

I found myself looking up at the bullies with admiration for their physical strength and emotional bravura. I felt penetrated by their gaze in an exciting way and wasn't ashamed of feeling that way. They mystified me. I dreamed about them. I wanted what they had, but I couldn't put into words what that was.

In early childhood, I abandoned myself when I realized I couldn't face the fight my father wanted to engage me in when he slapped me across the face. And then, in puberty, I abandoned myself again with lust for the bullies. I couldn't fight them for a different reason. I secretly found them beautiful to behold.

There are so many sick people out there who believe they're acting on principles, when, in fact, they're acting out in reaction to lust. They believe God hates sex. They believe She wants them to suffer from the hormonal changes that come with puberty.

This is, of course nonsense. We're all made in God's image, male and female. The human bodies are mysteries we can unravel if we have the courage to talk about our feelings and urges. These aren't moral issues that require wars, but sexual issues that require communication.

I really wanted the strength and confidence of the bullies, thinking that if they touched me, their power would seep into me and I'd feel strong and satisfied with myself. I lived in the fantasy of believing that if they kissed me, I'd wake them up from *their* nightmare and they'd wake me up from *mine*. I was still a very little boy inside who wanted to get very close to a hero, even if that hero was really a bully.

My masculinity was projected onto the bullies who hated me, but I didn't know it to let myself know it. *Their* machismo was really *my* machismo disowned. Their flashing black eyes and white teeth glistened with *my* love even though my hair isn't black and my teeth aren't that white.

There was no way any of the bullies could give me what I wanted. I wanted to *be* a masculine man. But to become that man, I needed to find someone who could know me; penetrate me; plant the seeds of his love in me; water them with his tears; and watch them until they flowered and fruited with gratitude. But that "someone" had to be me. There wasn't a man on earth who wanted to devote himself to my life. I finally came to the realization that I had to do it. And I had to learn to do it with a smile, not resentfully.

I recreated my desire to be loved hundreds of times through sexual encounters and fantasies, but it never came true. I never became a man through my fantasies. *I* had to enter me and give me to myself on the inside. Only then could I understand what was happening around me.

From the ages of thirteen through fifteen, I was only great in junior high thanks to my intellectual pursuits. Secretly, my trip from innocence to experience was happening through fantasies of intercourse with, or, at the very least, social proximity to, bullies. I was living a double life.

When I was born, my father was a 42-year old emotional toddler who quickly lost interest in his family, as any toddler would with a toy. And, ironically, it took me 40 years to get through my own

terrible twos to arrive at a place in life where I could admit I'd been a spiritual toddler most of my life, too.

As a young man, I professed that love and war don't mix, but I couldn't yet feel the depth of my words. They were thoughts; ideas I held sacred. I secretly dreamed of having sex with soldiers, firemen and the California highway patrol. But I didn't yet have the experience of self-love to know that true self-love goes far beyond MeTube videos I created in my mind.

I should have taken my fantasies further, not give them up out of guilt. I should have peeled off the uniform of the men in my mind to discover they were self-made copies of me. It had come *from* me, *through* me, but my fantasies didn't have real meaning *to* me.

Sip from your own cup. And when your cup runneth over watch how much you'll have in your saucer for others. It's O.K. to let people know they're only allowed to sip from your saucer. We shouldn't give anything but our overflow to others or it'll deplete us.

The problem for me most of my life was that I was consumed with worry about there not being enough for others when I had no idea how to renew what I had for me. Giving too much of myself was my problem. "Enough" was never enough and "too much" was never enough either. I didn't know how to give more or less because I couldn't visualize the process by putting it in pictures.

In adulthood, I had to help defeat the bullies around me politically through gay rights. I defeated the bullies professionally as a teacher. And in witnessing the strength I had to protect others from bullies, I gained the confidence I needed to help myself. Once I could see myself participate in that sort of team spirit, I could admit I wasn't as ostracized from people as I'd previously believed. In doing my spiritual work from the outside in, I discovered I was ready to do the core of my spiritual work from the inside in.

After my first mental institutionalization, my mother helped me apply for S.S.I. when my mental illness was so severe that it was impossible for me to hold down a job. But when I became mentally stronger, she encouraged me to get off public assistance, get a job again and support myself. That was excellent advice.

Once I could handle the responsibility and pressure of fulltime employment, I then realized I had to find a way to support myself emotionally, as well as financially. I struggled to mix my primary inner colors: yellow (fear), red (anger) and blue (sorrow) to create a rainbow of hope. I had to learn to *tolerate* a colorful inner world before I could *accept* my darker feelings as they were. I had to get out

of the black-and-white world I'd accustomed myself to slowly and learn to admire how colorful I could become over time.

I was the rainbow flag personified. I was hope in the flesh. I was Noah who saw God's promise to all of humanity in the arc of the rainbow. Even though I was still a kid on board a voyage that was going to last a lot longer than 40 days and night, I had hope. And it was so precious that I held hope in my inner sky while I made my way among the spiritually deformed, twisted, perverted and repressed down here under the rainbow.

The vision of the wisdom in seeing the way things are has to be earned. Insight doesn't usually begin 20/20. The view you have of something you're moving toward becomes clearer as you approach it.

We may start out in life emotionally nearsighted and oblivious to much of what's out there, but we end up emotionally farsighted over time, able to see the big picture but less able to focus on the details. We then have to deal with the discomfort of seeing the things up close appearing a little blurred even though we have a much better perception of the reason for our being. As we develop emotional hindsight and foresight, we glean much in the way of insight.

The same can be said of *spiritual* vision. You can't see God clearly from any one place or inner space. None of us can. We have to learn to focus on Her participation in our life from many angles. We have to recognize the ways She prepares us for answers when She decides we're ready to receive them. God isn't invisible, and we're not blind. But we do need to learn to use our imagination to become aware of Her omnipresence.

"Seeing" isn't believing; "perceiving" is. You *see* with your eyes. You *perceive* with your mind's eye. Puppy love was the result of *seeing*. Wisdom was the result of *perceiving*. Only when your two eyes and your mind's eye see the same thing will you find your second, soul mate.

As a teacher of adolescents, my students' need for a safe, learning environment made me want to protect them from the physical and psychological abuse of the bullies in their lives. And in creating a safe classroom for them, I proved to myself that I could do the same for me within. The safety I created for them at school was a precursor to the later safe, secure and loving nature that I was learning to create for myself within myself. Self-love was the result of the love of wisdom I bestowed on my students.

The emotional safety I created as a teacher for my students brought me spiritual strength I couldn't commend myself then for achieving. But as I gave my strength to them, I unconsciously gave it

to myself. Only years later in looking back on what I'd done and in witnessing the love I'd given to others, I realized I had no choice but to conclude that I had enough love to offer myself without feeling guilty about it.

Our good opinion of ourselves always has to be based on fact. We need the world to be our blackboard. We need to work out our challenges of self-love through reality by first making our love meaningful to others. Good thoughts aren't good enough; they have to be carved into the clay of reality and made real with good deeds. We have to *earn* the right to perceive our goodness. Only then can we appreciate our selves for being "us" rather than just thanking everyone else and being grateful to God.

I fulfilled promises to myself by first taking on and fulfilling unconscious promises I made to myself through conscious promises to others. I was married to my job long before it occurred to me to marry myself. In the junior high school stage of self-love, *how* I felt was projected onto what I *did* for others long before I could perceive it for myself.

My father hadn't come through on his commitments to my physical and emotional survival. His ability to love himself had been impaired by circumstances beyond his control. In fairness, his generation was learning self-love through other means. Self-sacrifice was still more common in those days as the main means of measuring someone's intentions. Each graduating class in the school of self-love is given a slightly different curriculum that builds one upon the next to produce a coherent history we can look back on and study for spiritual enlightenment. As Einstein said about physical reality, "God doesn't play dice with the universe." But She doesn't play dice with our emotional and spiritual universes either.

Even without a male, parental model growing up, I learned to achieve financial and emotional independence through a female parental model, proving that love, devotion and fidelity aren't constrained by the gender of the model. In my case, I was a man because my mother taught me how to become a man. And devotion to her became important in realizing I had what it took to devote myself to me.

Life is a poem with rhyme and reason. The Teacher edits our poetic endeavors by embellishing them through time as She so chooses. She has an infinite ability to make revisions and amendments to our words so that we can better see how we've written out our lives on the parchment of reality. It behooves us to compose ourselves to the best of our ability in the here and now because there's no telling

how the present will be used in the future. The depth of our sincerity is all we really have on earth and the unique key we're each given that opens the door to the kingdom of heaven.

If you can't alter the pronouns of the Hebrew Testament, you certainly aren't going to be able to amend its message in other ways. You're going to live in the past embracing death and dying. You're going to go back, not forward. You're going to call yourself conservative and right, but you'll witness that you're reactionary and wrong. The world will appear to be going against you, when it's *you* who's really going against the world.

If you pierce the fabric of reality with good deeds for others, you'll find yourself on the underside of the fabric of life where you'll see how self-love threads its way through all deeds, great and small. Life is a tapestry; your thoughts are the needle; and your feelings, thread. It's all about the colors of thread you choose to weave, which depend on the picture you wish to create for your Creator.

The Christian Bible begins, **"IN THE BEGINNING, GOD CREATED THE WORD."** But you'll never be able to believe that until you can move your knowledge of words from your head, through your heart to your soul. You have to relearn to talk, and you have to practice talking to yourself to discover the depth of the words you're using. To be able to understand the meaning of a word, feel its personal importance in your life and believe it with all your soul, you have to learn to right each word anew.

The purpose of this book is for you to agree to the *principles* set down by God, not Her *methods*. It's very likely that the things you love, whether they're puppy dogs, sports cars or female breasts, don't have to correspond to the things I hold dear. A diamond has many facets on which to reflect the light.

Mental illness was a boxing match, and the real bully that threatened me wasn't my father, the boys at school or my bosses at work. It had been *my* voice within insisting I was unworthy of my own respect that I'd been struggling with. It had been my own face I was slapping over and over, which caused the sting of all my later disappointments. I was the one who'd concluded I was a worthless loser when things didn't go my way. I was the one who'd beat me up with my own expectations about how I insisted it had to all turn out. I was the one who couldn't say "no" kindly and therefore couldn't take my own "no's" for an answer.

The word "Israel" means, "struggle with God." My inner landscape is my whole world, but my inner israel is that one special place within me where my "god" and I struggle with our "God."

“Israel” is my land of milk and honey, an outer place God promised us in the Hebrew Testament that mirrors an inner space.

The bullies around me growing up were absolutely real, but they’d come into my life as lessons to teach me how to overcome the bullies within. Those bullies on the playground and the streets growing up are long gone and many of the bullies within me are, too.

I am poetry in *emotion*. I am the one who needed to turn sex from a sword into a ploughshare. I am the one who had to turn lovemaking from the science of baby making into the art of self-love.

My head, heart and soul are unified now. Only my penis, the locus of my desires, wants, impulses and urges, still likes to interfere with what’s best for me. But even my penis is slowly learning how to work inclusively with my thoughts, feelings and beliefs rather than maintain its previous stand of exclusion.

I hadn’t suffered in life for naught; all my experiences brought me spiritual credit that would advance me class by class toward my Ph.D. in self-love. I was my own mystery in the making. I was learning to perceive me “whole *hearted* ly.” I was achieving self-love one degree at a time.

Go back to the tender feelings of childhood and the emotional wounds you suffered then. Perceive the scars from the knives that were stabbed in your back. Look at the intentions of your caregivers more closely. Begin your life anew by contemplating your navel. That’s the one scar we all have that proves we’re now on our own. Look for that which you haven’t yet learned about *you* from *you*. You’ll see that you’ve always been your greatest tutor of modesty, humility and loyalty, even if you previously refused to listen to what you told yourself to do.

Your caregivers once picked you up and carried you safely in their arms, but today you know your lofty height doesn’t give you the right to look down on them with ridicule or derision. Your opinion of them lies in your conscience, not your head or heart. Your head is entitled to its opinions. Your heart is entitled to its feelings. But your attitude is something for which you’re responsible, and that comes from your soul. Come to your caregivers from a new place and you’ll see yourself in a new way.

When you understand the tenderness in *your* intentions you’ll forgive *their* methods. You may suddenly discover your male role model had no emotional arms. That would explain why he wasn’t able to pick you up and hold you when you felt like you were stumbling. He may not have had emotional hands with which to handle your feelings in ways that would have made you feel more secure.

The Teacher gave me a father who was emotionally disabled. Once I could see that my dad had no emotional arms, I was shocked out of anger and resentment into compassion. It was actually a relief to see him as he truly was, emotionally deformed. It was easier to feel sorry for him when I could imagine what he looked like from my soul.

My mother fed and sheltered me because my father couldn't. She held me emotionally as I struggled to become a man because he wasn't able to do that either. But she had no emotional legs. She couldn't stand up for herself. But she also couldn't run away from her responsibilities, as my father had done.

Perhaps my mother had been initially attracted to my father because he had strong emotional legs with which to step on those who tried to step on her. But if she anticipated that he'd carry her along in life like a princess in a fairy tale, she was sadly mistaken. He didn't have what it took emotionally to live out her fantasy.

Both my parents were emotional cripples, but they were well matched for one another in an odd sort of way. And by looking back on them through an emotional, rather than intellectual, lens I was able to get a glimpse of the challenges I had to face. I was no Adonis, either.

I needed to teach me how to stand up for my self; I needed to teach me how to embrace my self. I had to do for me what my parents hadn't been able to do for one another. I had to get past my expectations of anyone doing my emotional work for me. I had to use the emotional arms and legs that had lain dormant for decades within that no one had ever told me I had. Like a frankenstein awakening from death, I had to learn to use the odd assortment of body parts I'd been given.

22. The Student Store

I was first introduced to the concept of a student store in junior high school, the on-campus store where I could get school supplies such as gym clothes and book covers. At first, I was appalled that the school was running a business. I thought every aspect of an education should be cost free, that education was a necessity of life, not an industry.

It was a rude awakening that for everything in life there is a charge. Although the cost of a good, spiritual education has decreased for each successive generation, learning doesn't come without a price. When children improve upon the answers given to them by their

parents that increases the importance of life's lessons, making the progress of humanity more apparent. But nothing in life is free.

To improve upon the principles your parents set is harder than it sounds. Every generation of teenagers and young adults thinks it has better answers without having greater experience than their parents. Therefore the road to progress isn't entirely rational. It's actually quite emotional. The next generation has to prove their superior moral stance with love.

Despite how low the cost of my education has been in comparison to those who came before me, I still find myself resenting having to pay a price for my experiences, both good and bad. I had to force myself to overcome my spiritual thriftiness (heretofore considered a Jewish trait) to convince myself to invest in me. Only by seeing everything and everyone as lessons from my Teacher in learning to love myself did I come to appreciate the emotional cost of my spiritual education.

In the spiritual junior high school of self-love, I started to spend time with myself *wisely*. Being always with myself had its stressors. I was physically and mentally alert to life around me, but emotionally numbed by it. I couldn't yet verbalize why I sometimes felt so disconnected from others because I couldn't see how disconnected I was from myself.

Being with yourself has to happen on four levels: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. It's a struggle to unify yourself on all four. It's like having to really think about what each of your arms and legs is doing separate from the other three.

When I'm at the gym and I see guys doing their exercises as quickly as possible to avoid the discomfort of tearing muscle to build muscle, I understand the tendency to evade pain. When I see gym bunnies wasting time on their smart phone instead of working out, I understood the tendency to shun suffering as well.

When I would look in the mirror as I lifted weights, I realized how much easier it was to focus my attention on others to avoid having to look at myself. It was hard to be with me every moment of every day. Sometimes I had to use people as a distraction from being with me.

When I was a young man I was frightened about not doing well when it came to survival issues. I yearned to discover what I could do well in life in the hopes that the answer to that secret would make my life less anxiety provoking and more pleasant. Satisfying my physical needs was my main goal in life; money, property and prestige were my tools. But I thought they were the sole solvents that would dissolve my

fears. I didn't have the emotional tools and spiritual goals to work through my fears any other way.

Thinking about what I was thinking about was an enormous undertaking. This was because my mind would digress to avoid the stress of paying attention to the meta-messages beneath what my mind was telling me. My mind was like a Rube Goldberg contraption with one thought cascaded into the next to create a series of mental events that ended with something very minor being accomplished.

There was seldom a likelihood of anything significant happening after all the commotion in my head subsided. The complexity of my thinking apparatus didn't create substantial results. I needed to observe myself another way. And the only rational conclusion I could come to was the need to look at my feelings.

Figuring out how my mind operated made me feel like a monkey playing with a smart phone. It was a humbling experience. And, as you now know, humility is the spiritual outcome of overcoming shame. I had to overcome my shame with honest confession to achieve the humility needed to think in new ways.

Metaphors, symbols and similes are key components to our operating system. Every thought is triggered by a feeling that, in turn, affects a belief we hold. This process is like weighing your thoughts against your feelings in your conscience to determine what actions to take.

But when your mind is operating like a Rube Goldberg device and you're sweeping your unpleasant feelings under the rug, you aren't going to come up with plans of action that will be morally sustainable. The progress of humanity in each generation is contingent on us exploring our head (the Jewish area of expertise); exploring our heart (the Christian area of expertise); and exploring our soul (the Muslim area of expertise). God has got the game rigged to force us to cooperate with one another if we want to survive as a species.

I traveled the road of life *alone* for quite some time before I discovered the *solitude* that comes with realizing God is always there beside me. Life is really not as much of a "public school" of self-love. It's more of a "home teaching program" with each of us seeking out God for inspiration on how we operate. Everyone is in class with Her alone, together. Everyone is working on Her classroom assignments internally whether he knows it or not.

The price of my spiritual education wasn't exorbitant at all when I considered what my parents had to go through just to survive as Jews in their youth. I only had to overcome the notion that self-love

was a rip-off. I only had to become willing to pay full price for something that was really worthwhile.

In the school of self-love, *other*-love was like a Rube Goldberg device that eventually gets stuck somewhere in the middle. Loving others without being able to see that love emanate out from within is anything but a bargain in the long run.

When I was spiritually juvenile, I was frightened by all the events in the external world that were coming at me. I felt like I was fighting multiple battles at once. And I expressed my disappointment with copious amounts of blame and complaining. (And because I was unconscious of the deeper meaning of life, I wasn't even embarrassed by what I sounded like.) When I bitched, what I was endlessly trying to tell myself was that the classes I was enrolled in were too hard and that my tutors were unsympathetic to the depth of the answers I was seeking.

I expected my education in good and evil to be subsidized just because I believed in God. I watched myself become more conservative, not progressive. I was aging in a way I didn't like. I was getting more soured, not sweeter.

I foolishly thought the best way to get a grant in this educational institution was with blame. Complaining did nothing for my standing with the class. To protest unfair conditions is one thing, but I was getting lazy. I became less civic minded and more selfish. I became cynical and sarcastic.

That's when I realized it didn't matter how soulful I thought I was. My conscience had to play a greater role in my life. I'd become so good at making my conscience *other* people's guide that I'd forgotten to use it on myself.

I saw that in helping others overcome their fears I could overcome my own. I figuratively became a preacher who then told myself I had to practice what I preached.

So I got busy. I figuratively took on a couple of students to tutor. And from my spiritual income from helping them, I got what I needed in the way of the honesty and sincerity I needed to change the way I behaved toward myself.

And it was perfectly O.K. to feel sorry for myself in the process. It was better to feel sorry about the past mistakes I'd made than feel too afraid to make new ones. Lightening my attitude toward myself really helped. It demonstrated to me that my penis (desires) had screwed me in the past, but that my head and heart, when working together, could fight back.

My penis had been in control of my head and heart for so long that I couldn't figuratively dismember myself overnight to change the way I thought and felt. The job of facing my desires, urges and impulses was going to bring up thoughts of dishonesty and feelings of insincerity. And if I wasn't willing to face them, I wasn't going to face my fight internally at all.

"Sorry" may have once seemed to be the hardest word to utter, but it sure was worth telling myself I was "sorry" and paying for the pittance it cost my conscience to overcome the delusion of honesty and sincerity I'd previously held of myself. I knew I had a Teacher who could see my greater intentions. I knew I was making progress, even if my movement toward the left, left me a little farther from "perfect."

You really can buy *now* and pay *later* when it comes to the spiritual realm. You've been doing it for a lifetime. You've enjoyed the benefits of self-knowledge without realizing how indebted you are for what you know. The best way to become spiritually wealthy is to ask God what you can do for Her in gratitude for what you know about yourself. Nothing you've learned in life was ever intended to be free. The self-knowledge you enjoy must be accounted for. The forbidden fruit you've taken must be paid for since it's too late to give it back.

In the junior high school level of the school of self-love sorrow won't pay the bills for your education in life. All the ways you took yourself for granted in the past require apologies and amends. All the ways you didn't learn from your experiences will cost you over time.

To open the student store to all the educational tools the Teacher requires you to have in your classes, you need to be willing to pay. And since you have nothing to offer other than the knowledge you've amassed, you have to pay for what you know with guilt, and the modesty, humility and loyalty that comes with learning.

23. The Boys' Locker Room

At the age of twelve in junior high gym class, I found myself having to strip naked in front of other boys. And I felt deep pangs of embarrassment at having to do so. I couldn't fully fathom the emotional depth of my feelings, but I knew these feelings were huge. Nudity in the boys' locker room at school made me want to hide from boys, and I outwardly pointed my finger in foolish, prudish blame at a school system that would force me to feel embarrassment through public nudity a few minutes each day.

Gym class was also the time at school when I began to suspect (by the speed at which some of the other boys were dressing) that I wasn't alone with my feelings of discomfort. I saw that the other boys wanted to hide their body from prying eyes too. And it became an unspoken joke many shared and laughed about.

Intellectually, I knew that the loss of innocence was a natural consequence of the physical maturation process. But there were emotional transformations that came with puberty that were inextricably linked to the physical changes. Although I strained intellectually to try to understand what was happening to me emotionally, I couldn't imagine why my Teacher had created puberty. It's not something *I* would have put anyone through...

As a young teenager, even though I didn't like taking my clothes off in public, gym class was still the most mystical and magical time of my day since I could watch the other boys get naked out of the corner of my eye. I thrilled at seeing them reveal themselves. I reveled in their male beauty. I saw poise in their posture, grace in their bulging muscles, and mystery unfolding in the wild weeds that sprouted over their enticing manhood. I was secretly grateful to be able to be there. Nothing in the way of pornography in adulthood ever matched those mystical, magical moments in the locker room in junior high school.

Never in my wildest dreams, though, did it occur to me then that the nakedness that excited me in the boys in the locker room was my own nakedness projected, that the beauty of their bodies was my own, rejected, unclaimed physical beauty.

I didn't yet even *like* myself, so I certainly couldn't see any physical beauty in being me. By the time I discovered that my attraction to men was a projection of the *physical* aspect of my self-love, the bloom of youth had left my cheeks.

My feelings of repulsion for those boys who were ugly, fat or deformed in junior high were also projections with emotional consequences, but I couldn't see that either. My rejection of them physically brought up thoughts and feelings of inadequacy that I was unprepared to deal with at such a young age. My conscience was in denial of the physical, emotional and spiritual parts of me that needed "special attention." I was so challenged in dealing with all the aspects of the puberty God dragged me through that I couldn't feel anything at all.

Although I was born an emotional cripple, that didn't mean that that had to limit me physically or spiritually. In God's eyes, I was

probably beautiful even though She had contorted my heart into a very odd, emotional shape.

I may have been an angel in disguise, but from my heart I could see that I had one broken wing; a queerly bent halo; a clubfoot; a lisp and a withered arm. It isn't easy getting around down here when your heart was created in as weird a shape as mine was. Even with all the spiritual operations I've since been through, I'm still a scarred mess inside.

As a young adolescent, I unconsciously projected my disdain for myself onto those who were overweight, and chuckled at them internally instead of reminding myself of all the ways I overindulged myself. I projected my own emotional deformities onto the bodies of those whom I saw as ugly. The last thing I was motivated to do was to explore our physical differences for insight into my own. I wanted men who were picture perfect on the outside. I didn't care what they looked like within because I had no inkling there was a world within me.

I couldn't wait to get through adolescence in the hopes I'd have more fun being an adult. I anticipated that as an adult out in the world on my own, sex would be the sport I was going to excel at. I planned to rip off my clothes whenever I wanted to play ball. I anticipated getting men to play with me would be the best part of the game (until I later realized they could see my emotional wounds, scars and deformities). I was sure I was going to feel great about myself if I could just prove to myself that I could score easily and often.

A whole generation of my gay peers was lost because of that belief. We needed validation of our body because society was so opposed to us on principle. They used the Bible like the Nazis used concentration camps. They were hell bent on watching us go up in smoke.

AIDS, like the Holocaust, was only a test. It was a test we'll never have to take over. The Jews and the gays have passed that class. We're moving on. Our Jewish Israel and our gay israel have a lot in common. Whether you're Jewish or gay, you know the something about life that can't be put into words. You know a truth about the evil inclination in man that they can never convince you of otherwise.

Because of my parents' Holocaust and my own holocaust, I saw myself as separate and different from the human condition. I wasn't above membership in the human race; I just thought I'd been given the gold card that separated me from the salt of the earth. I thought I was special. I saw myself as much, *much* more than a spectator in the game

of life. I saw myself as a quarterback. I wasn't just a *player*. I saw myself as a *star* player.

As it turned out, none of us feels equally equal. None of us is less equal than others, but many believe they're more than equal. That's an easy lesson to unlearn for the losers like the Germans and the straights, but it's a hard lesson for the winners like the gays and Jews. Coming down from the mountain to engage with what we saw when we were way up on the summit is a humbling experience. God knows, we're not better than anybody else. But She also knows we've passed classes in the school of self-love that many others haven't yet had to take.

Needless to say, becoming mentally ill on top of having worn glasses, braces, and breaking out in a face full of pimples, didn't help me identify more enthusiastically with the other members of the human race. As the homely, crazy son of Holocaust survivors, I felt cheated. I felt poor. I felt betrayed. But because I wasn't on speaking terms with myself, I didn't know it.

I guess I felt like a tattooed guard dog. I didn't understand my beautiful pattern. I didn't understand the reason for the pain I was going through. I just barked viciously at anyone who came close to my door.

Evangelical Christian homophobes and Muslim anti-Semites have a lot in common in principle. They revel in identifying as the victims in this world. They project their pain and suffering onto gays and Jews and then claim that suffering for themselves. They believe that Christmas is under siege by the gays, or that Palestine has been overrun by Jews. They're different in pattern, but they have the identical weave. They're cut from the same cloth. They're just died differently.

Identifying as someone with a mental challenge helped me enormously in life. Because I had so many mental problems, I didn't have the opportunity to indulge in the sex life that destroyed my generation of gay men. But when I was finally able to join in the spirit of the gay community because I'd taught myself how to handle my personality, I was then able to present myself openly as a gay man with mental challenges. I could finally say I honestly, sincerely and authentically belonged to three communities: the Jews, gays and disabled. I had a Jewish head, a gay heart and a disabled soul.

All three were my ticket to self-acceptance, even though I paid an awfully high price for becoming a member of these three teams. Because of my concern about my thoughts, feelings and beliefs, I could be genuine and express myself frankly with a wide range of

people. My head could handle a variety of ideas; my heart could accept differences in expressions of love; and my soul could embrace the brokenness of everyman.

Becoming intimate with the result of exercising my imagination. I could envision the left and right halves of my brain being traversed with bridges. I could perceive broken nerve endings as inner voices calling out to make their way in the dark to one another.

I could listen carefully to those voices within me that sounded as though they were coming from outside of me. And I could admit they were *my* voices - alienated, separated and yearning to be reunited with me. I could heal.

Nobody is enrolled in the school of self-love without having to take "Special Ed." classes in one spiritual subject or another. And the Teacher has a very good reason for doing this. Special Ed. classes are designed to teach us the value of guilt. Special Ed. classes are designed to teach us that we aren't a finished work, but a work in progress.

By moving through embarrassment of our body to modesty; through shame of our character to humility; and from humiliation before God to grace in our soul for being the way She allows us to be in this moment – we come to see the struggle of humanity in everyone. We come to love *ourselves* despite our *selves*.

Before I suffered from mental illness, I couldn't see how misshapen I was. There was an oddity to the way I moved through life that was unique, but I didn't want to look at it. It pained me. It scared me. It embarrassed me. I just wanted to fit in.

And I discovered that I do. The way I think and feel isn't abnormal. I'm not the way I am because my Jewish head and gay heart are misshapen. It isn't because my disabled conscience holds beliefs that are so weird and different from others.

The problem lies with my penis. It's my impulses, urges, needs, wants and desires that had taken control over me. I was a tree of knowledge that a snake had gotten into. And it terrified me.

It was only by exercising my mind, promoting the sincerity of my heart and believing in the moral goodness of my being that I came to understand the great struggle within me to *be* that one tree in the garden that had a snake in it.

I had to take the Hebrew Testament personally. But I had a bad attitude right, and I didn't question it. Instead, I projected an enormous amount of my self-pity onto others, and I was loathed to take it back.

The voice inside that sounded like it was coming from the outside was the voice of the infant in me that still assumed more than

60 years after my birth that the world revolves around me. It still hopes that every person in the room has entered it for my sake. But until I bothered to question that voice, I remained egotistical without knowing it.

If sociology is the study of group activity, and psychology, the study of the individual, we all think, feel and believe as individuals while behaving in groups with a herd mentality. The “herd mentality” is a unification of heads, hearts and souls that have a tendency to be expressed in unison with those whose urges are similar. These various sociological forces can be boiled down to the issues of the infant, the child or the adolescent.

Rallies, marches, demonstrations, protests, rebellions and wars are outward expressions of the “we” in people like “me.” When people unconsciously or consciously identify with the desire for power they perceive others have that they do not, they tend to conspire together to get their *needs* met.

“Sociology” is therefore the study of the “serpent” in the Hebrew Creation Story. But the serpent can express itself as a baby, child or adolescent – becoming more dangerous to the establishment the older it gets. World politics must be observed through this Biblical lens to be understood in a spiritual context.

Do you say “God bless you” when you’re alone and sneeze? Do you cover your mouth when you yawn and there’s nobody around. The “sociology” of good manners begins when you see yourself in the presence of God.

Tenderness begins within. The more gently you treat yourself, the more you’re in touch with your inner infant. The more mindfully you treat yourself, the more you’re in touch with your inner child. And when tender touch and thoughtfulness just don’t do the trick, you have to employ more stringent techniques to make your inner teenager tow the line.

Everybody is accustomed to privacy from others, but nobody is accustomed to the privacy we get from our self. Even the most religious need to “forget” about God from time to time. Giving up personal privacy for the spiritual company of God is an acquired taste best begun using thoughtful words to you that hold profoundly loving feelings. Relinquishing your privacy to your own company is the gentle, tender way to self-intimacy that will also let God in.

The ignorant are blessed with the assumption of privacy the true believer has consciously chosen to renounce. The ignorant are like bored babies in cribs waiting for someone to enter the room to interact with them. The true believer questions the voices inside himself,

knowing he can never blame God for his ignorance of his world within. The true believer takes responsibility for everything his body produces, inside and out.

I may have been given a normal external frame on which to paint my self-portraits, but I was given a very oddly shaped, inner canvas to work on. I'm "queer" in the original sense of the word. I'm one of a kind. I'm unique inside, even though I'm not special in terms of the inner forces I'm made of.

It was difficult for me to identify with groups or participate in them because my penis was so figuratively misshapen. It looked perfectly normal on the outside. My heart was no more badly bruised and my soul no more deformed than anyone else's, even if my head had been badly dented by banging it against heaven's door in frustration. (There were definitely some holes in my thinking that corresponded to unseen holes in my head.)

People who meet me today immediately sense that I'm odd. Some like me for it. Some discover I'm queer over time and then politely avoid me thereafter. Others become quite threatened by my strange ways and feel they must protect themselves from me in the future. This was a common historical occurrence for the Jews; it's now the norm for gays and other minorities.

I used to think I was a failure at loving others because nobody loved me. I couldn't see myself as courageous and authentic because I couldn't yet *like* myself just as I was.

Liking ourselves is so much more important than all the popularity contests we're tempted to join around us. But liking your self isn't easy to accomplish when you discover everyone has a "penis problem," "a problem with wanting things he doesn't really need, urges and impulses that don't serve him in positive ways.

I knew someone would finally come to love my figuratively misshapen penis if I was patient with myself and progressed slowly enough in the school of self-love. And I was right. When I learned to love myself despite how "bent" and "out of shape" I was, then, ironically, one special someone finally did come into my life.

My boyfriend today is very different from the men I was attracted to in the past. He's manly in a boyish way and boyish in a manly way. He understands why I'm still afraid of being abandoned like a baby, so he kisses me when he leaves the house. But he isn't interested in a romantic relationship that mirrors the male/female bond. We enjoy a male/male relationship that fits together nicely in another way.

I had to tolerate the guilt that came up from time to time when I realized how difficult it had been in the past for me to put my faith in me. I couldn't put my faith in God or others if I didn't have any faith to give, so I had to come to believe that my penis problem could actually be an asset rather than a liability. I had to look back on my past to make sense of how I'd slowly wound my way into my own heart.

Thanks to physical puberty, I was coaxed out of the ivory tower of my mind in the direction of exploring my passion for raw, hot sex. But because my head, heart and conscience mitigated my desires, it took me a long time to explore the power of my penis in healthy, safe ways.

My passionate fantasies for sex paradoxically led me to compassion. Thinking about touching others physically led me to thinking about touching them emotionally and spiritually. Learning to guide my raw passions with good thoughts, kind feelings and unifying beliefs as a mature adult turned me into a more powerful person. With time and awareness, I was able to figuratively caress myself deeply and intimately with the spiritual urge to know myself deeply. I became curious to know how it felt to give a greater love to myself, and through myself, to God and country.

The boys' locker room in junior high was my first introduction to institutionalized embarrassment. If only I'd known then that overcoming embarrassment would lead to modesty, I'd have realized that modesty was the first clue to discovering the God-given gift of guilt. With enough guilt you can learn to love yourself regardless of whatever shape you're in.

24. Physical Education

The subject in the school of self-love that I always studied ardently for was "physical education," knowledge that came through being physical. The sensations of my body transported me to distant lands within, mysterious inner destinations I never wanted to return from. My body was my earthly vehicle to heavenly sensations. And after decades of delights, I have to admit I do so love to go on these little trips to ecstasy.

When I was a young man, sex, drugs and classical music (not rock 'n roll) were ways to adore myself physically without having to explore myself emotionally or spiritually. Sex, drugs and "L'elisir D'amour" by Gaetano Donizetti opened my door to self-awareness and the delights of being a human *being*, not just a human *doing*.

But I still thought my outer body was all there was to being me. I worshipped life through physical sensation as an end in itself. I didn't realize there were other, subtle sensations within to appreciate. Self-love comes *through* the body (landscape) to the mind (train) via the heart (tracks). Each train of thought is a thrust that moves me toward a greater goal. Each thought is a sensuous enticement winding through me that prepares me for the next.

An appliance works on electricity, but the appliance isn't the source of the power that runs it. The body is like an appliance, and God is the source of the energy that runs it. The body can run without a sharp mind and a good heart. But it can't run *efficiently* on stinking thinking and little in the way of self-compassion. Most people aren't well plugged in. Most people need to increase the juice that flows through them to make sure the plug is completely in the socket at all times.

Waking up with a bad attitude is caused by insufficient electric flow. Grumbling without putting your issues into words is a common way of experiencing an interruption in energy flow. Allowing your penis to maintain its habitual control over the forces above your waist is a sign of a frayed cord.

As an adolescent, once I'd discovered how to reach orgasm, I chose to study ballet. I sensed my body was the source of all the love in my world. But my body was just the *instrument* of my love. I'm not the source of love, only a conduit of it. It doesn't take modesty to know that. It doesn't take humility to feel that. It doesn't take the grace of God to believe that. I had to learn to appreciate myself like the appliances in my home I worked so hard to attain.

I'm *like* the objects I own. I *am* the object I own. I see myself as so much more useful to God's plan as an instrument of Her will. But to know Her will, I had to discover that my own will was made up of thoughts, feelings and beliefs that were stronger than my desires.

We aren't born with an instruction manual on how to operate ourselves for one simple reason. We have to have the free will to discover or ignore our self. A blender has to figuratively first love *what* it blends and *that* it blends before it can appreciate what it means to have been given the *power* to blend. We have to learn to love *what* we do before we can learn to love *that* we've been given the privilege of doing it.

God's love moves through us like electricity runs through an appliance, but we take that for granted because that power has always been there to varying degrees.

Some people will never know what it means to be in awe of God. They'll take their fortune and misfortune as a given. They won't compare their *fortune* to their *misfortune* to realize the gratitude they're gleaning from what they're learning about themselves day-by-day.

The gay community discovered that we could love one another more deeply thanks to AIDS. We discovered we could teach the world to help the unfortunate without hiding who we are. We discovered we could make alliances with women that straight men can't, and through those relationships make a better friend to our selves.

If we come to know the energy that allows us to operate ourselves, we become wise. We recognize the freedom we have that makes it possible to discover our own way to live life; the liberty that makes it possible to love our own way; and the emancipation that makes it possible to believe in ourselves.

Most people think they know what self-love is, but their self-knowledge is elementary. *The wisdom of self-love* they have is childlike. They think they know more than they do because they don't realize there's so much more to feel for themselves than they're presently allowing themselves to experience.

Fear is not a mandatory feeling. You can avoid fear with denial. Life can be very frightening, and so we all need a certain amount of denial to maintain our sanity. But those who know fear intimately strive to find the courage to move through it to express their courage and conviction. Then, fear leads to self-awe.

For those who are infantile, fear leads to self-hatred, and because they can't stand their self-hatred, they project it onto others as prejudice. The greatest fear in this world is the fear of women. They appear to men to be trees of knowledge without a serpent in it. Therefore they appear to be more powerful than any man. All men hate women until they learn to embrace the serpent in their own tree.

When I was juvenile, I didn't work at using the love in my heart for the betterment of every person I had sex with. I used men like appliances, tools that made my life more pleasing. I used them to blend in socially. I used them to explore my fantasy of being popular.

I was too embarrassed about the greater rewards of being a spiritual instrument to admit to myself that I only wanted to be *physical* with men. I didn't want to love them. I fantasized about having a relationship with a special guy one day, but I wasn't willing to start the process from within. I knew how to turn men on and how to let them turn me on. Therefore, I thought I knew all there was to know about how men work.

I treated myself like an appliance I was proud to say I knew how to “turn on.” And I was very proud of the fact that I could turn other men on, too. But this was only the first level of self-knowledge I achieved in perceiving myself as a spiritual instrument. When I was young, I was *objective*. And I couldn’t become *subjective* until I learned all there was to know about *objectivity*.

I was a perfect Ph.D. candidate for the university of self-love. I was the ideal person to teach myself to search for and find the Source of love within me. The mistakes I made and corrected gave me the wisdom to align my head with my heart to this task. But the great mystery of my life could only be discovered in tandem with the world around me. I wasn’t alone in this world. I was here to learn about me from everyone.

But to become better schooled in matters of the heart, I had to give up the charade of the *primary* importance of others in my life. I had to turn my focus around to think about what *I* was thinking and feeling, and ask myself if my thoughts and feelings were up to the standards I was so good at professing others live up to. I had to learn to heal and help myself.

Often I discovered that my head disapproved of what I was feeling, but even more often my head disapproved of what I *wasn’t* feeling. So, often I felt like a blender that couldn’t cut through something stuck inside it. My head wasn’t sharp enough to slice through the pit in my stomach. I could almost hear the motor inside whirling without turning.

Because men are taught to control their feelings, I often found me telling myself not be afraid, angry or sad. But by my head telling me what my heart *should* feel, I found myself in a spiritual Catch-22 because my conscience had to decide what action to take based on a rational head and an irrational heart.

My heart has its own reasons for feeling what it feels without telling me what they are (usually self-pity projected). But my heart is also jealous of what other people have in the way of physical attributes. My heart wants to “have” people because it can’t “be” them. My heart is vain. It hates the idea of not having the most attractive *container*.

My head also has its own reasons for what it thinks without telling me outright what they are. But I now know that my head is envious of what other people have in the way of spiritual attributes. My head wants to “be” someone else because it can’t conceive of the importance of being me. My head is conceited. It hates the idea of not having the most attractive *contents*.

No one can get into my body to show me how to orient my muscles from within while dancing. No one can tell my head what to think about during sex. No one can get into my heart to make me feel good about myself. I have to focus separately on my body, head and heart to discover how to operate me.

Operating the body I inhabit requires a belief system that's based on constantly learning what I'm doing. It requires an engineer in the locomotive of every train of thought who can see the tracks and the landscape every thought is figuratively dividing in two. Being human is harder than it looks because I'm learning how to believe in myself. That requires that I visualize what I'm doing.

The reason the headlines in the newspapers are what they are, is because people have no idea what they're doing internally as they're doing external things. It's like they're sitting in a subway moving underground through the dark. They're running on automatic pilot underneath the landscape of their imagination through underground tubes fashioned long ago for expediency in a crowded landscape they can't control. If there's someone at the controls in the first car, his or her job is minimal. There's nothing to look at when they peer through the windshield. There's hardly any possibility of danger, so there's virtually no need to give attention to what's happening.

It only took curiosity to get started on improving myself. But curiosity about myself was the last thing I'd ever heard anybody suggest I needed to pursue getting ahead in life. (And it certainly wasn't something they discussed in group therapy in the looney bin...) It was only once I'd found this metaphoric way of expressing myself that I was ready to begin the process of appreciating me.

Before I considered pursuing loving myself from a spiritual perspective, I plummeted the shallow depths appropriate to lower levels in the maturation process. I had to postpone becoming a tutor unto myself because I didn't yet have the humility to desire getting to know me personally. I was the one person on earth I could have come to out of curiosity, but I always seemed to be more curious to learn about other *things*...

If not for dance, I'd probably never have learned to love at all. Even though I didn't have the body to become a famous dancer, I'm grateful to my body for being my portal to self-love. Loving my body while dancing did wonders for my self-esteem. It taught me to look beneath the body parts I didn't like to love the sensations they elicited instead. It even taught me to look beneath the negative feelings I had about others to love the soulful ways I struggled to believe in the goodness of mankind.

When I was young, men were first and foremost means to sexual ends, tools I used to manipulate my senses. I wanted to be penetrated by them sexually in the hopes they'd penetrate me emotionally, to make me feel the first giddy sensations of being beloved.

Men were forbidden fruit on the highest branches of my tree of knowledge that fruited with good and evil. I picked men for their color, shape and ripeness. I was willing to climb any heights if I thought I had a chance of reaching a particularly good-looking one. I had an insatiable appetite for fruits. I was piggish, selfish and greedy. My hunger couldn't be sated. But each time I got a bellyache from too much loving, I realized that, like fruit, I'd been choosing men by their outward appearance, not their emotional or spiritual ripeness.

I didn't appreciate the story each man brought me that unconsciously contributed to me becoming emotionally and spiritually more involved in being me. Each exposed me to something I needed to learn about myself, even though I didn't know that at the time. Each was a good book sent by the Teacher for me to peruse, even if I wasn't willing to read it from cover to cover.

So I judged men *only* by their cover. And if I did open them up to read a little more about who they were inside and how they got that way, I soon found reason to criticize them for something. Although I later became an English teacher by profession, I have to admit that, when it came to knowing people, I was only mildly interested in the blurb "about the author" that was on the back cover. It took a long time for me to get interested in opening up to kind people reading me, which then made it possible for me to want to read them.

Because I saw men as *instruments* of love; *tools* of the sex trade; *devices* to explore virtual reality; *equipment* to be checked out; *apparatuses* to get a job done - it should have been no surprise to me that they invariably shocked me - for one reason or another - like a defective appliance.

People didn't often do what I wanted them to do; they broke down when I really needed them; they were unreliable soon after I turned them on. I thought the mystery of a man lay between his legs. It hadn't yet occurred to me that he was a book to be read.

In my *physical education* classes in the spiritual junior high school of my life, I struggled with lessons in pessimism, sarcasm, suspicion, skepticism, cynicism, distrust and doubt. I was under the impression that self-love was the ripest of all fruit, but I saw it hanging on the thinnest twig of the furthest branch of my tree of knowledge, too far out of reach for someone I had so little curiosity in picking. So

I grabbed at that which was within easy reach, even though deep inside I knew better.

I was alone in the darkness within because I wasn't on speaking terms with me. God was surely there beside me, but We weren't yet on speaking terms either. So I sat by myself in the passenger cars of my trains of thought, looking out the window with nothing much to do. I'd just come along for the ride. I had nowhere really to go.

The irony of life is that you can't see yourself until you're no longer where you once were. Each day is an opportunity to look back on who you were the day before. This is what it metaphorically means "to ripen."

I didn't live as though I loved God. I didn't even live as though I even *liked* Her. I was juvenile. I got bitter or confused about some new thing almost every day, but the reason for that was because I didn't like me.

So much of me was projected out onto the world around me that I couldn't figure out how to retrieve myself. I was distanced and disassociated from the world that I was disinterested in being me. I wanted to avoid having to feel positive about anything I did.

And that actually made a lot of sense. Why like anything you do if you don't like yourself? Why hold anything up as a measure of yourself if you're not looking for anything good?

Guilt was the only feeling that could easily have penetrated me, but I did everything I could to avoid guilt. Guilt invariably brought up fear, anger or sorrow, and nobody had told me in getting through all those feelings I'd achieve the reward of self-love.

I was hiding in the darkness in my imagination *from* me, while my Teacher hid there patiently waiting *for* me. I couldn't demonstrate fidelity to Her because I hadn't yet made a commitment for a lifetime to myself. Becoming religious in the conventional sense would have been the worst possible solution to my problem.

So I was pruned by life. I was cut back by the world until I felt like a bonsai in an orchard of elms. I was turned into a victim of circumstance without knowing it, but I couldn't imagine what for. Why would the Teacher make me feel like a frightened victim one minute and an angry perpetrator the next? Why did She put so much attention to my *physical* education?

25. Asleep in Class

It was all too common for me to look out the window of the classroom of life rather than pay attention to the Teacher's mysterious

call to study Her lessons in self-love and the compassion for others that I needed to make my life meaningful. It was all too human of me to be “absent-minded,” absent from spiritual class in my mind.

I hated the idea that school might be in session day-and-night all life long. It irritated me to think I was constantly being given lessons by the Teacher. It annoyed me to think of constantly having to work on my imperfections.

Once I realized God could hear all my thoughts; feel all my feelings; sense all my desires; and see all my beliefs by the actions I took - I thought I'd never get a moment's privacy to just *be*. Once I realized She was there inside of me as well as all around me, I felt exposed. And that made me want to reject Her presence even more. So I chose not to believe in Her. And at the time, that made a lot of sense.

I wanted to live my life like a summer vacation, without feeling guilty about ever having to go back to school. I wanted life to be a holiday from God. I wanted to focus on the world around me, not on the world within. I wanted to strive to be “happy” in the world around me not “contented” from within.

My mother had been my father and mother. She'd modeled for me how to be a man and a woman. The thought of there being as much woman as man in me didn't make me happy. I wanted to be more like a man. And the thought that God might be as much like a woman as a man didn't make me feel good either.

Now it does. Now I feel less afraid of God knowing She knows how I feel and understands my feelings even better than I do. Now the feminine stereotype of emotional subjectivity feels comforting, not alien. But that was a long time in coming.

I don't think I'd have ever gone to class in the school of self-love unless the Teacher's truant officers hadn't come to get me. I preferred to stare aimlessly out the classroom window of my imagination, dreaming absentmindedly of finding ways to try to have fun with more exotic penises. I metaphorically put my head down on my desk and slept through every experience I had. I used every experience to distract myself from life, not to live it.

I was a disciple dosing. I was unaware of the awesome presence of our Teacher. I was unaware of the reason for the other students in my life or the assignments presented just for me on the chalkboard of reality in the classrooms of life at every moment of every day.

When I became a junior high school teacher, I thought it rude of my students to sleep in class. I saw it as an affront to the other students who were awake and working hard. In fact, I considered sleeping in class more than a sign of being tired or bored, but disruptive. I found it

disrespectful to the institution of learning and the very idea of what learning signified. It made no sense that I should work hard teaching while some students dosed through the assignments I'd prepared for them.

While some were literally sleeping in my English classes, I now see that I was metaphorically sleeping through *my* lessons in the school of self-love. No wonder the behavior of my students had had such a personal affect of me.

I can see now that it was no coincidence that as a teacher I was in the company of those unmotivated youngsters who were assigned to my classes. Our Teacher puts us together as instructor and students on many levels. I was with them for more than the subject matter. They were important to my spiritual education, and me, to theirs. They were teaching me something about myself that I couldn't see at the time. And I hope, in retrospect, they learned something from me that has contributed to their life.

I slept so spiritually soundly amongst teenagers because I was so unaware of the depth of the trauma I'd been through when I'd been a teenager myself. It wasn't until I realized I was going through my *emotional* puberty that I could look back on their *physical* puberty with greater wisdom, compassion and regard.

The seeds of modesty, humility and grace had been mysteriously planted in me in youth by my parents. And my Teacher watered them by shining Her love upon the ground of my being more faithfully every day than the sun shined down on the good earth beneath my feet. I was a seedling of good and evil growing into a tree of love and wisdom. I had nothing to fear in picking my education over everyone else's. I should even have seen that it's our nature to do so.

In rapture, I cried out when I could see modesty, humility and grace break through the hard ground of my conscious awareness like grass growing up through the snow early every spring. I was a far better person than I realized. I had God's permission to know and love myself. I believe it on faith. I finally woke up to conscious awareness of Her classes thanks to the self-esteem I'd earned from the thoughtful ways I'd treated others.

It wasn't that difficult to choose to change my seat in the classroom of the school of self-love to be closer to the board. It wasn't that hard to ask the Teacher for extra credit assignments to make up for the work I'd missed when I was "sick." In fact, I found there was a seat left open for me in the first row. I'd just been too modest all those years to take it.

26. Poor Grades

I often suffered from depression in my youth, a common occurrence of the heart when I was feeling spiritually in the dark, submerged and under pressure. Being depressed happened when I'd see myself sink, yet again, down to the bottom of my inner seas. There, there was no inner light. There it was always a night without stars. There, there were no shadows, no hope, no sense of time. Depression was a place where only my wails dared go with me.

When I'd sink into depression, I'd feel that awful black that often comes with feeling blue. But the more I delved into the emotional darkness below the surface of spiritual light, the more disappointed I became with my life.

The mystery and awe of my depressions dawned on me when I realized I was too old to be afraid of the dark. Then darkness became fascinating. It signaled a time to learn.

Absence of God's loving light isn't terrifying when you remember that the sun is always shining somewhere above. Your universe isn't overwhelming when you have the science of mind to show you how to perceive the art of knowing your heart.

At my advancing, spiritual level of self-awareness, I had to accept my lessons in self-love just as they were given. I had to stop fighting the way I was, even if I felt infantile, childish, juvenile, young at heart or immature. I had to look for the good in the presence of the frightened, angry and sad.

The bruises others had caused by bumping into my heart would heal naturally over time. They weren't that serious. Rejection isn't life threatening. I just needed to learn to set better boundaries to protect me the next time.

In the first act of the classical ballet, "Giselle," Prince Albrecht chances upon Giselle while on a hunting trip and falls in love with her. But when Giselle discovers Albrecht is betrothed to another woman, Giselle dies of a broken heart.

In the second act, Albrecht goes to the underworld where the women who have died of broken hearts reside, in search of her. Although he finds her, he's neither allowed to bring her back nor stay in the nether world with her. The ballet ends in a tragic separation of lovers who had the best of intentions but, because of circumstances beyond their control, couldn't be reunited.

The Albrecht in my soul betrayed the Giselle in my heart. I made promises to the Giselle in me I couldn't keep. I was a prince betrothed to my love of the outside world. I abandoned my heart to keep my promises to others. I devoted my soul to the betterment of the

world. And like Giselle, I was heartbroken at my self-duplicity. Something tender and loving died in me when I realized I was two-faced. In putting everyone before myself, I betrayed me.

In the second act of my life I decided to search for me, to go down into the depths of my being where darkness concealed the beauty of my being. I was determined to fight that darkness to bring me out into the light. I was determined to unite with the female half of me that was concealed in my subconscious with deep anger and dark disappointment. I wanted to move through the blackness of self-denial to allow myself to feel the feminine side of myself that had made me so terribly angry and sad.

I was in a *pas de deux* with myself, unaware of how deeply I yearned to be *with* me, not *against* me. My life was a 19th Century, tragic ballet that couldn't end happily until I could see myself as both the male and female principal dancers on stage together. I had to internalize the characters of this Romantic era ballet to make sense of it psychologically.

The loss of my personal power to depression was rooted in my duplicitous relationship with myself, exemplified in this dance. The Giselle in me couldn't forgive me for abandoning me. And the Albrecht within had to overcome his fear of the dark to search for me in the underworld within beneath the curtain of outer reality where people sit and watch you perform. The prince in me had to beg my forgiveness, and the village maiden inside had to grant it.

Searching for my Giselle redeemed me in my own eyes. It made me feel like a prince, not a cad. And it raised my Giselle from peasant to princess. My soul felt regal within, a prince with God at court in Her heavenly kingdom. Every fairy tale becomes a true story in the psychological sense of the word when you can personalize its characters.

The tragedy of this ballet is that, although finally united, Albrecht can't bring Giselle back up from the darkness into the light. In psychological terms, 19th Century Romantics weren't sufficiently aware of the workings of the mind to bring their heart and soul to consciousness. The sorrowful ending of the ballet is a reminder to us of what a struggle it is to come to know and love ourselves.

During one, particularly lengthy depression in my thirties, I had a dream that was particularly, personally revealing. I dreamt I lived on an island in the South Pacific, in a place that was virtually paradise on earth. And in my dream, I discovered a cave in the volcanic mountain that formed the island. I descended into the cave, explored it and discovered it was actually an entrance into the largest cavern in the

world. The cavern lay under the entire Pacific Ocean, and it was all mine because I'd found it.

Since there was only one way into this cavern that lay under an ocean of emotion, I decided to use the cavern to store my private wine collection. In the next scene in my dream, I saw rows of wine racks for miles on end in the cave, each rack holding bottles of fine wine with each bottle labeled. And on each label there was a date and time, recording when that wine had been pressed and bottled.

But when I pulled one bottle from a rack to look at it more carefully, I realized it wasn't a "wine" bottle at all, but a "whine" bottle. Each bottle was filled with a fermented feeling. And each label noted the date and time when that feeling had been first bottled up inside me.

All the grapes of wrath I'd ever grown were pressed into whines that had been bottled and were aging deep down within me. They were all fermenting slowly over time. My whole, inner world appeared to be no more than an island on the outside, but deep down within it, it revealed a secret place I hadn't even known existed.

The cavern within is my soul and it lies under an ocean of tears produced by my heart. In my soul, below the sorrow and disappointment of everyday life, I'd collected memorable feelings from my past, feelings I saved to savor some day when I learned to love myself a little more.

The bitterness of life is an acquired taste. Sorrow, like fine wine, has to be savored to be appreciated. Unless you can acknowledge that what you've been through in getting to know yourself has been worthwhile, it's unlikely you'll find the entrance to that cavern that goes down to your soul.

The Teacher created Her school of self-love for us on this spherical world that rotates in outer space. In this way, light and dark appear to have been divided into two. In this way, our world looks flat although it's really round and unending. Ask a scientist *how* this world turns, but ask a poet *why*.

27. Introduction to Spiritual High School

When I left elementary school as a boy, I wasn't ready for secondary school. I was afraid of higher standards, more to learn and a greater personal responsibility for my education. I was excited about being in an environment with older, smarter and more experienced students, but I was also panicked at the thought of some of the boys being bigger and more aggressive.

My parents boasted about my brains and my teachers held high hopes for my academic future. Some of my classmates even joked about my intellectual brilliance. But being intellectually able to focus on schoolwork was something of a booby prize if I couldn't get respect for anything other than my brains. I had a high I.Q., but the development of my E.Q. (emotional quotient) was seriously retarded.

In high school, my grades began to count toward college. And in spiritual high school, you begin to realize that every day counts in a way that it didn't before. Every day becomes an important class moving you toward that Ph.D. in "me" that you're striving for.

At the age of nineteen, while living in Israel and dancing with an Israeli dance troupe, I found the courage to openly declare to the world that I was gay. I couldn't give myself credit for that then, but it demonstrated a determination and daring I was later able to appreciate about myself.

But talking about my feelings was much harder for me than simply declaring my sexuality out loud. *Going in*, it turned out, took much more courage than *coming out*. Coming out was just a precursor to going in.

In the spiritual high school of self-love, "going in" is no longer a theory or a metaphor for a concept you intellectually hold. It becomes the most real experience of your life.

It's at this stage in knowing yourself that you begin to realize the enormous difference between the words "I" and "you" when speaking to yourself. Try saying a few things to yourself now beginning your sentences with the word "I" and then talk to yourself using the nominative case pronoun "you." See if you can sense the difference between self-regard in these two ways.

I took my first brave step toward emancipation at the age of sixteen by secretly taking ballet classes after school from a schoolmate. I didn't want anyone to know I was studying ballet. If anyone had, I'd have died of embarrassment. It wasn't until I'd graduated high school that I went to ballet school with my head held high to ask them to teach me to dance.

Upon graduation from high school at seventeen, I enrolled in the ballet school of the child prodigy dancer of the Ballet Ruses, Tania Raibouchinska. After her dancer career ended in Europe in the 1950's, she married the Russian dancer/choreographer David Lichine, and together they opened the Lachine Ballet Studio in Beverly Hills. Tania modeled her lifelong love of dance not only on dance technique; but also through voice, poise and manner. I intuitively felt she was in touch with the artist within, and so I wanted to learn as much as I

could from her. She was *childlike*, not *childish*. She embodied spiritual, as well as physical, grace through every move she made.

At the tender age of sixteen, I wasn't yet prepared to get to know myself through verbal communication. I chose to do so by pursuing the mystery of my body through dance. The art of ballet slowly yielded some of *my* secrets to *me*. *Motion* unlocked *emotion*, and I instinctively learned that I couldn't divorce my heart and soul from the grace and poise of my body.

The excitement of going from spiritual junior high to spiritual high school in the school of self-love isn't about dance. It's about anything that's important to you. It's about the excitement in doing anything that makes you feel as though you're coming alive.

But unless you talk to yourself about what fascinates you about your life, you'll be an outsider to your own experiences. When you use the word "I" when talking to yourself, you're in the most intimate relationship possible. There's no one between you and the world when you use the first person, nominative case pronoun "I" to address yourself.

When you speak to yourself using the pronoun "you," you create an emotional distance from yourself. It's like you're at the summit of a mountain looking down on the valley, or on a balcony speaking to the people in the street below.

Speaking to yourself using the subject "you" often infers condescension. It can imply unintended criticism or even blame. If you're going to speak to yourself using the word "you," be very aware of the meta-messages you may need to unpack because of your choice of subjects. You may hold more anger at yourself than you're aware of.

When you watch the "MeTube" videos you produce and screen in the privacy of your home theater, think of them as productions coming from the attitude of "you." Think of them as your exceedingly polite way of pointing fingers at yourself, often for behaving very similarly to the way others are treating you.

Realize that you'd sometimes like to kill you; that you, too, cheat on you; that you steal from yourself in ways you don't allow yourself to see; you lie to yourself using denial; and you're terribly jealous and envious of what you have that you won't give yourself. In these ways, your "MeTube" videos will help you deepen your relationship with yourself by prompting apologies and amends.

Don't worry about being a bad person for treating yourself badly. Worry about the embarrassment, shame and humiliation that

you may try to circumvent by arguing with yourself or turning your back on moral topics you broach that offend you.

The “I” in you and the “you” in you are personifications of your head and heart. You may find that what “I” think and what “you” feel” aren’t always on the same page. But any exploration of the two of them will strengthen your conscience. Any ways in which you look at both sides of yourself will make you soulful. God will make Himself known to you to the degree that your conscience becomes *self-centered*.

Our parents’ generation was self-sacrificing. They still believed that the source of moral purpose came from denying themselves for the sake of helping others. They weren’t wrong, but they weren’t all right. You have to move through self-sacrifice to become self “centered,” not selfish. People who are selfless often become the most immoral people in the world. They have no way to balance their sacrifices with an inner understanding of how they operate. They don’t realize that they’ve become hateful.

The spiritual high school of self-love isn’t at all easy. If it were easy, there’d be more people out there trying to behave like adults and fewer behaving childishly or in a juvenile manner. If you’re not in spiritual high school to graduate, only for the social life, don’t bother.

Puppy love begins between people who think they’re behaving very rationally. But it always ends with one or both parties dropping out of spiritual high school.

The high school level of self-love requires self-scrutiny. It’s intended for those who have great aspirations in life, even if they don’t know yet what those aspirations are.

28. A Study Partner

After I got the substances I was abusing - alcohol, drugs, cigarettes and coffee - behind me in my thirties, the lessons of life got much more interesting and instructional. Even though legal and illegal drugs alike had taught me to love the sensations my body could produce, they made promises they couldn’t keep. Even though sex brought me in touch with bodily sensations I adored, worshipping men had also been a serious mistake. Self-love isn’t a form of self-inebriation.

What I was really drunk on was the opportunity of being me. I loved life more than I could ever have imagined, even though I’d projected so much of myself onto others that I was out of touch with my own love. My love of me made figuratively me burst like a bottle.

There were shards of me in everyone everywhere. And it was my job to collect myself and put me back together again.

Putting all my efforts into pleasing others wasn't in my best interest. Using the love I got from others eventually made me suspicious about my motives. Mindlessly making others happy or allowing them to do so for me wasn't making me happy anymore.

Before I sought love from the inside in, my errors of judgment made my life agonizing. Idolizing men and drugs had brought me to the gate of the school of self-love. Men and drugs hadn't helped me rearrange my priorities in more righteous ways. They hadn't gotten me in the door.

When I met my former partner, I was 37 years old, but I was still an emotional adolescent who couldn't experience the joy of being happy by himself. He and I became like spiritual, high school sweethearts. Adoration and adulation were the levels of love I felt for him. They were the levels of love I was enrolled in, in the school of self-love. I had no idea then that there were feelings of love any greater than them.

For the first few years, my love for him was like the Pacific Ocean I saw for the first time as a child when my mother moved us to California: vast, irresistible and awesome - exciting and mysterious. I walked through life with that man along the shoreline of love, hand in hand, getting my feet wet, moving perpendicular together along those breathtaking, crashing waves. And because he was holding my hand, the ocean of my emotions didn't seem so frightening. I didn't know whether we'd ever learn to surf the powerful currents of love together, but when we jumped into the waves and played in the water, *it was fun!*

He was the perfect partner for the shoreline of love. I celebrated mastery of the surf with him. But when I was ready to swim further out beyond the swells of adulation to a deeper, *spiritual* love for my self, he tried following, but then swam quickly back to shore. He didn't want to go out any farther. He made it clear to me without words that he wasn't ready to explore a deeper level of love.

So I dove deeper down within to fathom the meaning of love on my own. I couldn't live anymore only with what I'd gotten from him. After fourteen years together, it became clear we were no longer suited to surf the waves of other love for a lifetime. The love of a good man was no longer enough for me. I needed my *own* love more than I needed *his*.

29. Choosing a Major

The pressure of what I was going to *do* with my public school education began at a very early age, but the ruckus reached a crescendo in high school when I had to choose a major. My counselor told me I ought to specialize if I wanted to become a valuable member of society who'd make a good living. Choosing a major in high school was supposed to determine the direction of my life and how my reason for being would unfold.

As it turned out, I became a pretty nice person without achieving a prominent career or finding my reason for being. The major I choose in high school (English) did help prepare me for life, but not in my spiritual major.

My major in life turned out to be about evolving a major relationship with myself. "Self-love" was my major. But dance and English were figuratively my minors. I used my minors to make money, and my major to make my life meaningful.

The question of what *I was going to be when I grew up* has never been answered. By my senior year of high school, I was so turned off to school that I gave up any idea of a career in favor of my love of ballet.

In an effort to know myself when I was a child, I tried on one career after another like leather jackets to determine what would look cool on me. My parents rolled their eyes at their weird, American son who went from one career choice to the next without finding himself. My odd and unorthodox behavior concerned them.

What I really wanted to do by my junior year of high school was move to Europe to become a famous dancer. My mother found out about my secret plan when I gave up a scholarship at UCLA to study ballet full time at the Lachine studio, and, needless to say, she disapproved of my decision on the grounds that nice, Jewish boys don't grow up to become ballet dancers. She suggested I become a college professor and dance during my summer vacations...

At the age of eighteen, once my desire to dance was no longer a secret, the next challenge I had to solve was where to find a man to help me discard my virginity. Nice, Jewish boys don't grow up to become "faygales" either. [Yiddish: little birds, gays]

I was plagued with guilt at the thought of having sex with a man on the same continent my mother lived on. I wanted to get to Europe as fast as I could (ostensibly to dance), but also to put ten thousand miles between her and me, so I could get laid on a continent where I unconsciously assumed guilt didn't exist.

After graduating from high school at the age of seventeen, I traveled for three months by myself in Europe and Israel, but I didn't work up the nerve to have sex with anybody. At the time, I figured that I must have brought all my guilt with me because I was so up tight. But that was something I planned not to repack when I returned to Europe to live permanently.

I went back a second time a few months later when I was eighteen. By then I had a couple of years of ballet training under my belt. But I couldn't get a job in a ballet company in Holland. I couldn't even get into a state run ballet school. I wasn't technically skilled enough, and I wasn't Dutch. And, to add to my chagrin, I was still just as terrified of approaching men for sex. Apparently guilt had inadvertently found its way into my suitcase despite my best intentions...

So I moved to Israel where there were more opportunities for a novice like me to practice my *arts*. I ended up coming out at the age of nineteen in Tel Aviv in 1972 while employed as a dancer in an Israeli, modern ballet company called "Bat-Dor." Tel Aviv turned out to be a great place for a fagele to fly free.

I was a handsome, young man in those days, but I wasn't emotionally attractive. And by that I mean that I repelled people with my unpolished personality despite my striking good looks. I didn't think about what I said sometimes. I didn't realize that repression and impulsivity made me into a hot mess, something anyone with a keen eye could see.

My container was good looking, but my contents were under pressure. Today my container is a little bit lumpy in places, but that's taken off some of the pressure on my contents.

Quitting my career in dance after one year on the job was a foolish decision at the time. It was based on an overwhelming need to be accepted by *others* more than I wanted to learn to accept *myself*. I had talent. I had good looks. I had perseverance and tenacity. I just didn't have patience, and I was easily *so* hurt.

I also didn't have insight. In order to avoid the disapproval of my peers, I gave up the one activity I loved the most: dance. The dancers didn't accept me as one of their own. I may have been *Jewish* like them. I may have been *gay* like many of them. But I still hadn't found my tribe. They saw me as an outsider and therefore I felt like a stranger among them.

I should have pushed through their disapproval of me to question how it mirrored my own disapproval of myself. I should have become more calloused to my own sensitivity, as so many others do.

Instead of trying to please them, I should have looked for ways to improve myself in ways that would have gotten *my* approval.

I should have complimented myself for not recreating their bad manners. I should have worked on becoming more attractive to myself by fighting for the psychic space I needed instead of running away from a second nation where I felt unwelcome.

But I wasn't that kind of person. If people didn't want me around, I felt ashamed. I liked being liked more than I liked being right. I would have liked to be in relationships that were mutually admiring, but I was content to admire others if the just didn't torment me.

Whether people were irritated with me; in awe of me; or pitying of me - didn't make any difference to me then. I want to be with anybody good looking who showed any interest in being with me. I had unending hope I could *make* people like me.

I always felt like a victim of circumstances when I was a young man because I didn't know what to do about interpersonal adversity. God put me right where She wanted me - in Tel Aviv, Israel. But I didn't know how to use that experience to my greatest advantage until decades later when I looked back on what I'd been through.

Now I remember my late teens in a foreign country, learning a foreign language and discovering a new culture as a great achievement at the time. I was in my high school years in emotional classes in the school of self-love, but I was failing my Teacher miserably. I was slowly turning into a dropout. I remember even now that I could feel a sense of hopelessness rising.

After quitting the ballet troupe in Israel, I got various jobs to support myself by day and indulge myself in Tel Aviv, gay life in cafes and parks at night. But after a year of sex and drugs in Israel, I decided to move to Amsterdam to pursue the "good life" there instead.

My mother had taught me how to help keep her home clean and neat, but my *inner* house wasn't yet my "home." The world was my "abode." I was merely camping out in me. I was making a mess in the tent I'd set up for myself. I was too young to be at home in me. I was juvenile at heart.

I somehow thought my mother would come in from time to time to tidy me up. The rug I'd thrown down on all the rocks in my head was three feet off the ground because of all the unwanted feelings I'd swept under the rug. My thoughts were in disarray because there were no drawers or closets in my inner tent to put anything away. My ethics lay broken and discarded outside the flap I called my door, and there was no one around to make me do anything about it. I was a kid

on an adventure. I was camping out, but I couldn't see the forest for the trees. I was living in the "woulds."

I wasn't interested in the scouring power of self-scrutiny to clean up my act. Who needs cleanser when you're living outside inside? I didn't need a white glove test to prove how soiled I was because there was nothing but dirt all around me in me.

Who has any use for the purifying power that comes with fear of the Lord when you're still in youthful awe of life? I was on summer vacation under the sun by day and under the stars by night. I was a happy camper even though I was a very *unhappy camper*.

At that time, I needed to become my own emotional housekeeper. But, since there was no one inside telling me to straighten my self up, I didn't think I had any need to do so.

I was a spiritual, high school student of life whose major was still "undeclared." I had no idea who I'd be when I grew up. I just knew I didn't want to be a housekeeper for an emotional slob like me. Cleaning for a living was beneath me.

I was your typical, arrogant, young man who had it too good. I was an emotional kid on his first adventure in the body of an adult. I thought I was very gifted and special when, in fact, big boys like me are a dime a dozen.

I was waiting for someone very special to fall head over heels in love with me. I was waiting for someone completely different from me to show up, someone who wouldn't remind me of my working class, German-Jewish mother and upper class, Lithuanian-Jewish father. I was hoping for someone exotic and different.

Cinderella could cook, clean and sew. Cinderella was a knockout on the outside *and* attractive within. She deserved a charming prince. Her footprint on the planet was small. She was humble and kind. She was grateful when a fairy godmother suddenly came into her life and she was magically transformed. Deep down inside, I think she knew she deserved the makeover.

I was more like Cinderella's evil stepsister in those days. I expected rewards for work not given. I was looking for a housekeeper and a prince, hopefully wrapped up in one person. I may have resided in the real world, but I dreamed about being in a fairytale.

I was living out a fractured-fairy tale existence. I was the frog and I was the stereotypic, Jewish princess. The more I distained the idea of having to kiss me, the longer I remained the same. I was in desperate need of a fairy godmother with enough insight to tell me what I was doing. I had no idea...

30. Midterms

Spiritual class is in session every moment of the day, and the Teacher is by my side throughout every lesson whether I'm turned toward Her, doing classwork or looking away doing homework. There are assignments every minute, pop quizzes from hour to hour, homework every night, and a midterm and final once a week. The Teacher runs spiritual school over the course of six days and I have office hours with Her all day on the seventh, at which time we discuss my grades from the previous week, my curriculum going forward and my goals further down the line.

There's a big difference between a "lesson" in the school of self-love and a "test." You don't have to be here for all the *lessons*, but you do have to take all your *tests*. There are plenty of people who don't even come to class, in the sense that they don't think about learning about themselves during the course of each day. People are typically only interested in learning about those things that will advance their knowledge about the world of finance or romance. When faced with adversity, they simply do the best they can in that moment. They aren't emotionally prepared for eventualities that go beyond their everyday understanding of life.

The lessons in the school of self-love are voluntary. You only study "yourself" if you're interested in the topic. You only question yourself if you like discovering more about your self. Those who do their daily assignments with contemplative, self-regard become tuned in to the moral lessons in the everyday actions they take. They weigh their thoughts against their feelings in their conscience before they decide what steps they're going to take. They practice for their tests even if they have no idea specifically what the Teacher is going to ask on the midterm and final each week.

They prepare for eventualities because they like to be prepared for anything. They think about unlikely circumstances just for the challenge of practicing getting through them. They test themselves in advance of the Teacher's tests.

When I was young, I looked at the world *objectively*. That was the time in my life when what mattered most to me were the *objects* around me. Because I spent an inordinate amount of time pursuing the acquisition of "things," I wasn't aware that I was inadvertently treating myself like an object just out of my grasp, a forbidden fruit I was reaching up to take.

I wasn't able to look past the objective world to see the underlying subjectivity that brings spirituality into everyday objects. Because I thought of myself as *just* a physical container, I was filled

with desires *just* for other objects that would enhance the “thing” that I was.

I was embarrassed by the emotionality coming out of others. I wanted someone to have and to hold, but I didn’t expect anyone to develop *real feelings* for me. I wanted to be treated like a precious object, not like a subject enrolled in life for which I’d get a grade.

I wanted to be adored. I wanted to be danced around. I wanted to be worshipped. I thought I was a golden calf, but I didn’t think enough about it to understand the underlying feeling of self-adoration that lay under that thought. And, just like in the story from Exodus, I was hollow inside and bellowed when the wind blew through me.

Secretly, I must have yearned not to be treated like a thing, but that was a secret I didn’t let myself in on. I was very sensitive when people treated me like a thing (obviously because I unknowingly did the same to me).

I didn’t perceive people as classmates in a school of self-love because I hadn’t gone far enough with my own emotional education to notice that other people were subjects in my class schedule.

We’re all students enrolled in this school with good reason. And what makes us different from one another are our feelings. It’s part of our Teacher’s plan that people, along with their feelings, interact with me and mine.

But when I was in spiritual high school, *they* often acted like they were out on the playing field, on the quad or between periods walking to class. *They* seldom arrived to class before it started or were prepared with their homework once the lesson was in session. *They* were usually late to class, wondering what was going on and what we were doing.

I have to be fair and admit that a part of me had treated people like objects hurling through space when I was in spiritual high school because we all treat ourselves that way. The fact that others revolved around me only because they were attracted to me didn’t seem unusual. Many a heavenly body would get caught in my gravitational field whether or not I was attracted to it. But the physics of physicality didn’t include conscious awareness of tender emotions or spirituality when I was a spiritual youngster.

Emotional and moral compatibility wasn’t something that drew my interest when I was young and inexperienced. I was just the sun at the center of my solar system. My family members were planets, and strangers were nothing more than comets and asteroids that came close to me at varying distances and times. I didn’t see everyone as a star.

They were either heavenly bodies I wanted to hold close, or I perceived them as stars millions of light years away.

When I finally decided to engage with myself each week as a unit of spiritual time I was investing in to achieve a spiritual education, my midterms became amazingly similar to the midterms I had in high school. High school midterms gave me a sense of how the teacher tested and how well I might be able to do in the class. The midterm showed me what direction the teacher would probably go in on the final exam. The result of the midterm either encouraged me to continue to do my assignments the way I was going, or it warned me to change my work habits drastically.

Contentment came from coming to class daily; doing my lessons in class to the utmost of my abilities; doing my homework faithfully; and turning it all in on time. The tests in life weren't nearly as overwhelming when I was emotionally well prepared for them. Contentment came from a spiritual midterm ached and the expectation that I'd pass the class with flying colors.

But year after year, I chose to do less and less in my spiritual classes. I didn't do my assignments in class; I didn't do the homework the Teacher asked for; and I didn't show up back in class if I didn't do well on the midterm.

I avoided the question of *my* attendance record in the school of self-love by blaming others for *theirs*. I saw myself as the Teacher's star pupil who didn't have to study. I behaved like I was the sun. I saw myself as the only star in the sky by day. (Thank God She separated the day from the night, or I'd still think that way.)

I was an adolescent in the school of self-love, but I turned into a juvenile delinquent. I became a know-it-all who didn't need to study. I became someone who didn't need other people's opinions of me ruining my day. The longer I saw how gays and Jews were being treated in this world, the less respect I had for the learning environment in which I lived. The human condition was just too vile to feel that I was a part of it.

I overcame my inferiority complex as a student of life in spiritual, elementary school by convincing myself I was the Teacher's star pupil in spiritual, high school. I dismissed anyone I didn't like; I dismissed anyone who didn't like me. I imagined I had the ability to look in the Teacher's roll book, and I concluded people had a nerve pointing a finger at me...

If the Jewish Bible is about fruit stolen from God's Tree of Knowledge, the Christian Bible is about Her Son being plucked in an untimely manner from the Tree of Life. People had a lot of nerve

3,000 years ago. They had a lot of nerve 2,000 years ago. And there are many who still have a lot of nerve today.

People may start out as adorable babies you want to cuddle, but they grow to become nasty, smelly, juvenile delinquents hell-bent on letting the world know how spiteful life has made them. They become malicious, mean and vindictive. They grow from little babies into big babies.

It was quite a surprise when I got clean and sober that the Teacher made me a teacher. I never had any interest in children. In fact, I blamed people for having children. Becoming a teacher was just-desserts. It forced me to try controlling other people's children in a veiled attempt to show me that I was a spiritual, juvenile delinquent who needed to learn control, too. When I walked into my classroom for the first time that late summer day, empty of students, but filled with desks gouged and defiled with gum, I knew there was a reason for me being there that was greater than anything I could then put into words.

The Bible may be the world's greatest textbook, but reading the Bible is a waste of time if you haven't been prepared for it in the school of life. The words float on the page unless your own expectations have been dashed and your disappointment with humanity has become personal. Only then do the words of the Bible ring true. The deeper you've dived down into your heart, the more the Bible will come true for you, and the less you'll need to declare what it ought to mean to others.

Spoiled brats come in every age bracket. You only have to have been "*sweet sixteen*" yourself to know that teenagers are terribly *sour*. And if you've got any brains left in your head after your penis makes pudding out of them, you'll see that that sourness doesn't simply go away. It simply seeps down somewhere inside where others don't see it.

When I felt tested in life, my anger and resentment quickly rose up from my heart and spilled out into my mind. I was incensed at the unfairness of trying situations. I'd unconsciously worked out the *ideal* solution to the metaphor of life as a school by becoming a teacher. But then I ran into trouble when the *ideal* met the *real*. When push came to shove, I didn't want to learn; I didn't really even want to teach. That's why I'd become "controlling."

Learning is frightening. Learning requires humility. Learning demands you admit that you don't know what you don't know. Learning requires that you turn your back on the sun at the end of each

day and face the night willingly because you want to learn about what you *can't* see.

Learning requires that you *feel* enrolled in school, not just *profess* the idea to be. Learning requires you admit the Teacher sent you to her public school to get *ahead*, and that She's sending you to Her private college to get a *heart*. With more education, you should assume you'll be enrolled in the post-graduate studies to develop your conscience into a soul.

Self-ignorance is shameful. Self-ignorance made me feel incredibly small and insignificant, like the awe I felt when I looked up at the night sky to behold the Milky Way. "Learning" is what Lewis Carroll colorfully inferred happened to Alice when she ate the cake that said "eat me" and drank the drink that said "drink me." Her adventures in wonderland on the other side of the looking glass were all about self-love.

In truth, I wanted to learn as little as possible because I didn't like the feeling of my ego expanding and contracting suddenly and sharply in size. Learning led to fear of being wrong about myself. Learning led to guilt, and guilt led to questions asked too late to make a difference. I wanted to cut the corner and learn as little as I possibly could. And as a consequence of that strategy, I knew next to nothing about myself after many years of being me.

After decades being in a human body, I couldn't even tell you how I operate. I couldn't tell you when my penis was doing the talking or when it was colluding with my heart to overwhelm my head. I couldn't even tell you why the following two equations are equal and true even though they look different:

$$(x + y) = 1$$

$$(x + x) = 1$$

There's no spiritual difference between men ($x + y$) and women ($x + x$). Men may have a snake in their tree, but women have a worm in their fruit. Needs, wants, desires, urges and impulses in males and females may be different, but they aren't *that* different.

Outwardly, I promoted education for all, but I wasn't seeing to it that I got as good an education as I possibly could in "being myself." I couldn't solve for "x" or "y." I could only tell you that I intuitively knew that each "1" of us is different and the same as all the others.

Naturally, I entered every new experience like I was entering a classroom - with hope of success. But inevitably I dropped out after the midterm. What's the point of completing a class if you already know you're going to fail it? If I could have looked at the Teacher's roll book honestly, I'd have seen years of classes that were marked as

“incomplete.” I didn’t really have a clue what I was doing. I didn’t even know what a “clue” looked like in the school of self-love.

31. After Exams

The quizzes, tests and exams that were being passed back to me began to take on more importance when I didn’t just look at the grade and throw them away. I had to look at each answer I missed and listen to the Teacher and the class as She reviewed the answers to learn after the fact what I didn’t know before or during the test.

This kind of interest in myself was a challenge that could only be averted if I approached my mistakes in very small, steps in which I examined all my emotions. When I began to solve for “y” (thoughts) separately from “x” (feelings), I began to feel differently, but positively, about the male and female sides of me.

I began to realize how attracted I was to women because they mirror the “x” factor in me. I don’t have to want to go to bed with them to appreciate them. I only have to be willing to acknowledge how much I’m like a woman. I found I had good reason to be curious about what it’s like to have twice the “x” factor that I have.

In one sense, we’re all victims of our parents’ ignorance. Nobody is an apple that falls far from the tree. We’re all the product of a flower and pollen from a bee that made us the way we are.

But we’re the produce of a new season. It’s only a matter of time before each of us gets up the nerve to pick our self, whether we discover we’re plastic, green, unripened, wormy, dried, desiccated, spoiled or rotten. It’s the choices we once had in common that create compassion, not always the outcome of those choices.

Contentment is a process of ripening in which we have to learn to shine our own rays of loving light onto ourselves. If we act like stars, we might as well use our light to make our days a little brighter. Learning from our mistakes teaches us to warm up to ourselves.

Arguing with yourself will ultimately become far preferable to arguing with others. Thoughts (y) and feelings (x) that lead to greater moral regard (1) for your self will ripen you over time. “Intimacy” is the result of sharing your tender feelings with yourself, not just with one special, other individual.

Your inner world is your textbook; your outer world is your workbook. Your personal theories about self-love require study and practice before you’re able to pass your tests each week with flying colors. You’re a *subject* with feelings, not an *object* floating in space.

The greater emotional regard you show for yourself, the better you're going to do in life.

I was a perfect example of someone controlled by my head some of the time and by my penis, at other times. It was as if I could play the piano with my right hand *or* my left. But I couldn't imagine how both hands could do different things simultaneously and still make music...

Doing two things at once is harder than it looks if you don't put your heart into it. That's why people rely on habits. But in the school of self-love you have to love both hands at the same time while each of them is striving to play something different. Only when you practice using your head and penis in tandem with your heart does your conscience come to you're your self-love.

32. Advanced Placement

When I was in high school, they offered the brightest seniors the opportunity to take undergraduate, college courses concurrently with their high school curriculum. The program was called "Advanced Placement," "A.P." for short.

But I didn't qualify for A.P. classes. My attendance record was poor because I ditched school so often, and the mere thought of taking on extra coursework made my blood run cold. By the twelfth grade, I decided to take the easiest classes possible to avoid having to study altogether. I wanted to coast through the last year of high school without effort. I had a bad case of senioritice. (I still do....)

Because I was smart enough to keep my grades up despite my poor attendance, my teachers probably thought I had a problem staying intellectually challenged. But that wasn't the case. The problem was that I was consumed with beauty; all I could think about at the time was having sex with the boys in my classes.

But while my fantasy world was growing by leaps and bounds, I was terribly distressed about the acne spreading all over my face. I didn't want to go to school, especially on those days when my pimples were erupting like volcanoes on my face, leaving what looked like a red lava flow that covered the valleys of my forehead, nose, cheeks and chin.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, my dissatisfaction with my body came from my disdain in having to be in a human body altogether. It didn't seem fair to have a body, especially when all I could think about was sex and I was too embarrassed to do anything about it.

I wanted to rip off the clothes of every good-looking boy I saw at school to revel at his nudity. I wanted to look at him and touch him all over, but I didn't want *him* to see or touch *me*. I wanted to know him, to have and to hold him, but I didn't want him to look me in the face.

I was all consumed with the male container, but I knew nothing about the concept of male contents. I knew nothing about what those boys had inside them or how to appreciate it. I was young, horny, inexperienced and terrified of getting laid for reasons I couldn't then put into words.

There was no reason for me to feel stupid or lazy for not having taken A.P. classes in high school. A.P. would have been easy in comparison to the spiritual classes *I* was enrolled in. Matters of the mind didn't challenge me, but I was completely stumped by matters of the heart.

It turns out that life is a school that offers advanced placement classes to everyone. And everyone is enrolled in some A.P. classes that are held on the college campus of life while they're still going to spiritual high school.

In truth, we're all enrolled in some Special Ed. classes as well, but figuring out which was which was a big challenge for me. I couldn't tell what I did well and what I did poorly.

When I was a teenager, I decided to forgo the A.P. classes offered by my high school. I later decided to skip out of academia altogether and become a dancer instead. What I didn't realize in making that decision was that ballet is a *social art* that required *socials* skills as well as physical dexterity. The art of dance requires enormous dedication and devotion to social discipline. A dancer who can't deal with the world of people is on the wrong footing from the start. You have to be grounded with social dexterity to leap in the air without coming crashing down on somebody's ego. The *stage* may be a good place for a class clown in addition to a gifted performer, but it's no place for a *sage*.

This world is more like an army than it appears to be. We all start out as a "private," but everyone is given the opportunity to raise in rank. This is what A.P. classes in the school of self-love are metaphorically for.

Peaceniks may want to end all armies in the world, and I have no problem with humanity literally arriving at that conclusion. But figuratively speaking, we're all members of the world's defense force with an outfit we're assigned to and units we're responsible for

protecting. We all have company leaders we answer to and a military-like discipline we have to learn to take when training our self.

The metaphor of life as an army and me as a soldier in its ranks is as real as the metaphor of life as a school and me as a student. In order to appreciate the position I was in, in life, I should have thought about my Teacher also as my Commander in Chief.

I was drafted at birth, and my tour of duty doesn't end until I'll die on the battlefield. I didn't particularly like this metaphor at first, but I had to get over it. There was a time when I didn't much like the idea of life being like a school. Life can be adequately described through many similes and metaphors, and by extending those analogies, I was able to expand my understanding of life.

Advanced placement class in the school of life is like office training school. Everybody is enrolled in special classes in the school of life that makes him an expert in a certain sense, but everyone is still answerable to others who hold an even high rank. If you think you're responsible only to the Teacher or in a special unit that answers only to our Commander in Chief, you don't understand the depth or complexity of God's plan.

My Teacher's spiritual curriculum for me was far greater than my modest aspiration in living the bohemian lifestyle and becoming a ballet dancer. Wherever I went, there She was in the form of happenstance and circumstance. I was Her artist in training, and She was my Ballet Mistress, giving me what seemed like one correction after another.

We literally speak to God, but *She* doesn't literally speak to us. Her comments come in the form of many feelings, but mainly guilt (sticks) and love (carrots). We have to use these feelings like "0" and "1" motivations to create software that run on our hardware. Our interactions with God make Her much more like our Lieutenant when we're a captain and our Colonel when we're in officer's training school to become a lieutenant. As we advance, so do our perceptions of God.

Allowing gays and transgender persons to enlist in the military has much greater *metaphoric* consequences than it does in the *literal* sense. With the boundaries between males and females finally blurred, it becomes easier for women to rise in rank in every area of society. And this is extremely important to the running of the world, for without women in positions of leadership previously held only by men, men would continue with their declaration of their domination and control over what each of us determines is guilt (0) and what each of us determines is love (1).

If the world today is proving anything to us it's that God may think like a man, but She feels a lot more like a woman, despite the fact that men choose to think of Her more like our Father than our Mother. Grown men don't want to feel small, young and needy, and the idea of God being a woman does that to them. So far, only gay men among men have the courage to treat God like the Woman they see in their heart.

Life is like a tour of duty. Life is an enlistment in which there will always be those who account to you and those to whom you must account. You can't just quit. You have to be discharged. A dishonorable discharge from life is a shameful thing. You're expected to prove your worth through your commitment to your unit. And you're expected to show your loyalty to your country through your loyalty to yourself.

Matters of the heart are the most important matters in the world when you enlist in life. It's through your heart that God talks to you – although She's also fond of intellectual puns and spiritual “fill in the blanks” to tease you about the meaning of the “WORD of God.”

Some men feel at *fault* because of intellectual challenges that are over their head. Other feel *broken* by emotional problems they can't solve. And many feel *flawed* by a life that's taken a terrible toll on their being. Whether you feel that you've been tampered with intellectually, emotionally or spiritually, you surely understand that we can all relate to what you're going through.

As an adolescent, I wanted to avoid A.P. classes that would have advanced me academically. But that doesn't mean I wasn't enrolled in other advanced placement classes in the school of self-love. Looking back on my decisions then should have taught me to like myself all the more, not berate myself for decisions I made in those days with less information about myself than I have now.

The Teacher has infants enrolled in a.p. classes working on college level assignments in one area and has them slogging through lower levels of learning, in others. It's possible to be enrolled in remedial classes in some areas of the school of self-love and college level classes in others. The spiritual adolescent discovers he's great at some things and really awful at others. The high school of self-love is a mixture of on and off campus learning for the idiot and savant in us all. You discover you know *some* things, and others know *others*.

33. After School Activities

Growing up, I didn't once join an after-school activity during elementary or junior high. I was far too afraid I'd be beaten up on the quad, behind a bungalow or on my way home from school. I sought safety in numbers. I arrived on time in the morning and left at the dot of 3:00 P.M. with the crowd, racing to get home, the only place in the world where I felt a modicum of safety.

At school, I stepped gingerly into the social swimming pool each morning, and bobbed on the surface of social intercourse with the emotionally youngest and least powerful swimmers, afraid to swim to the deep end where the more powerful social swimmers splashed and made waves. I was as blind as the others in my emotional age group, calling out "Marco" wherever I could to connect with those around me. But I was ashamed to befriend those who replied "Polo." (I had enough self-worth to see myself as a "marco," but not enough to identify as a "polo.")

Those socially stronger and more mature were usually at the other end of the social pool with what seemed like an ocean between us. They were agilely working on building emotional teams, while I watched from the shallow end of social intercourse, wiping my eyes if they swam through and happened to splash me.

I wanted to learn how to get to the deep end where I imagined acceptance and friendship was the norm. But bullies were everywhere beneath the surface, ready to drag me down just for the sport of it. So I stayed at the shallow end of social discourse where I could bounce up and down, flail about, and try to find someone to hold me as I practiced swimming through school society despite the splashing, noise and waves others were making.

I made lots of acquaintances growing up because I went to one elementary school from the fourth grade on and two junior highs that all fed the high school where I graduated. But I had no friends. And my sense of social insecurity remained with me until I graduated *spiritual* high school at the age of 50 and was admitted into the university campus of self-love. I had to learn to make *me* my best friend before I could connect meaningfully with all others.

Now I can say, "I'll never again meet a stranger." Now I can say, "I'm a friend to the world." Friendship wasn't something I could achieve from the outside in, only from the inside out.

Once I felt popular from within, I was amazed when I looked back and discovered I hadn't been as much of a social pariah as I'd thought. My whole belief system had been predicated on the assumption that I'd been unlikable and unliked. Once I transformed

my feelings for myself, it was a sudden and unexpected surprise to discover I'd also changed my mind about me.

Your mind always pursues your heart. It doesn't precede it. Your likability to others is determined by the sincerity of your likability to yourself. If you're consumed about what others think of you, it's time to get out of your head and start exploring your feelings for you.

All my life, I dreamed of becoming a world-class olympic social swimmer; I yearned to glide through social discourse like a seal. Deciding to become a ballet dancer had been an unconscious choice based, in part, on being close to men with gorgeous legs and small hips, but it was also a choice also made because I dreamed of one day being adored. (Little did I know then that I'd fail in being loved by one man; I'd fail in being liked by everyone; but I'd succeed in becoming adored. I came to adore myself.)

I choked when I was with people most of my life. I was terrified of drowning in their criticism or disapproval. Once judged, I never seemed to be able to catch my breath in the company of that person again.

"Admiration" came easily to me. I could admire most people for the things they could do that I couldn't. It was "adoration" that came so hard to me because I had to admit it would be possible to cherish life if I started by adoring myself.

Although I often ditched class in high school because I felt so out of my element, I went back faithfully in the afternoons for the after school programs. There, I found myself eager to be involved in that learning environment. After the bullies and socialites left school, I didn't have to fit in to be accepted. The social tension seemed to dissipate. The place calmed down.

The kids in the after school clubs *voluntarily* chose to stay in school to learn. They worked cooperatively with one another because they wanted to be there, not because they had to. And I was starved for their attitude of gratitude and acceptance. After 3:00 P.M., the kids at school figuratively held out their arms for me to rest on so I could float socially without sinking. They weren't in competition to get to the other end of the pool. Their standing in the popularity contest from 8:00-3:00 didn't seem to matter to them anymore. It was self-understood that we were all at different levels of social abilities, each with unique skills that we were willing to use to help keep one another afloat.

Years later, when my second boyfriend converted to Catholicism and I'd go to church with him on Sundays, it would feel

like the afterschool program in high school. I felt that all were welcome. I felt I wasn't there for the grade or for social status. I wasn't even there to impress the Coach. I could demonstrate a simple crawl through social intercourse. I could swim alone or together. I could pray with my Christian brothers and sisters together.

But the reason why his church was so inclusive was that most of the parishioners were gay. They knew the feelings of exclusion my parents had gone through in Europe. They knew the feelings of exclusion all gay people have felt in America. I felt like a cripple who didn't have to be ashamed of the way I looked anymore. (And even though two priests there asked me if I wanted to convert to Christianity, deep down inside, I know they knew that they were much better off having a Jew attending their services since Jesus almost certainly, in my opinion, had been a gay-Jew.)

Public school had only increased my worry about drowning socially as an adult. I began to see life as a dangerous ocean I'd one day have to swim cross by myself. I was worried I'd never be able to do it alone. But it turned out life wasn't any bigger than what we now refer to as the "pond" the separates New England from Northern Europe.

As a youngster in the Sixties, I didn't realize that life was going to be a long crawl for us all. I had no idea as a teenager in high school that one day I'd come to love the feeling of buoyancy that comes with seeing how similar and different I am to everyone. We're all in the pool together.

34. Cutting Class

Getting away with murder by ditching school as a teenager wasn't hard. But when I literally tried to kill myself as a young man I *got away with murder* on a far more serious scale. Attempting suicide was a hateful way of trying to get out of the school of self-love. Looking back, my grades were so bad I didn't think I had any option. Looking back, I'm amazed I didn't succeed in hating myself to the degree that I tried.

My thoughts have always been fluid, not rigid. I've always prided myself on being able to change my mind about almost anything, if not from one moment to the next, then certainly in a reasonable amount of time. But my feelings were the opposite in formation. They were stiff and unyielding. What I needed, figuratively speaking, was a heart transplant to replace my calcified emotions. My head could take care of itself.

I was a dorothy in oz: lost, upset and trying to make the best of things while on an unanticipated adventure. Deep down inside, I was always thinking about going home. I just didn't talk about it, not even to myself.

When I started to look deeply inside myself, I couldn't tell the first part of myself I made as a friend to settle with the straw for brains I'd been given. I needed a wizard to fill my head with pins and needles to finally believe I had a sharp mind.

I didn't have the heart to hurt my feelings with unkind criticism, so, like the tin man, I pretended the silence in my chest could be best overcome with the assurance that I had a good ticker. I raced around as though there really was a clock ticking. I could feel anxious easily. I could feel nervous, worried and frustrated as though I were born to express those feelings. I just couldn't feel anything else inside of me.

I didn't have the courage to love myself as I was. I needed to get a medal for doing so. And now that I have that medal, I profess my loyalty for myself loud and often instead of roaring at others.

Who could possibly believe in someone who doesn't himself believe he has brains? Who could possibly believe in someone who doesn't himself believe he has a heart? And who could possibly believe in someone who doesn't have the courage to be himself? I may still be a dorothy who can't wait to get home, but I believe there's a wizard in me today in a way I never did before.

But at first I was crushed to discover I was a wizard like all the others, professing great magic and muscle, hiding all the while behind a curtain terrifying everyone. I must have been waiting for that part of me that was a "toto" to pull back the curtain to reveal what a fraud I really was.

To discover that that part of me also wanted to go home opened me up to the possibility that life really was a magical experience. I'm not alone in wanting to get the hell out of here, but now I'm more curious to see how my story will end.

Even before I attempted to kill myself the first time, something told me I'd be happier dead because I had no idea what it really meant to be alive. Death seemed more authentic, more real, for someone like me. Life seemed like such a bad fit.

The anxiety I felt when I was alone was just the tip of an emotional iceberg. And even though I could dive down much deeper within than anyone I knew, I wasn't thankful for the immenseness of my inner sea or the cold and dark at its depth. As I went down deeper and deeper into me, the pressure mounted, and my life became unimaginably frightening and surreal. I was willing to use everything

at my disposal to complain about the situation, but I wasn't willing to use metaphors, symbols and similes to make sense of what I was going through.

The very idea of *me* becoming *my* life partner was ludicrous; I had no idea how to spend quality time with myself. When I was alone, I emotionally debased myself. I beat myself up with bad thoughts or tortured my self with feelings that exacerbated my worthlessness. I wasn't able to *tolerate* me, let alone *marry* me! Who wouldn't be depressed with a partner for a lifetime like that? Because I felt the way I did about myself, for me death signified everything good about God.

My crimes against my own humanity went on for years, and I never became the wiser for it. When I finally made the decision to kill myself, I actually felt incredibly relieved. The cruelty I'd perpetrating against me would finally be over. I was going to be freed. I was going to be rid of my relationship with a monster.

Cynicism is founded upon hopelessness. Cynicism is arrogant. The "cynic" claims to know the outcome of every action before he takes it. A "skeptic" knows he's ignorant and therefore he's doubtful of the possibility for a positive outcome. I was both arrogant and ignorant, a cynic and a skeptic. I felt hopelessly unable to educate myself in matters of self-love. I was stuck where I was and I believed with all my heart that I wasn't going anywhere.

I was out in the hallway of the school of self-love making excuses why I'd ruin it for others if I went in to class. I didn't enter for *their* sake. I sacrificed my life for "them." And I didn't even know who "they" were. I was a sadistic, Islamic terrorist and a Jewish yenta all wrapped up in one. I was the personification of self-sacrifice.

I hated my life when I was in my twenties because I was a spiritual toddler. Life wasn't a school; it was a penitentiary. I was locked up inside myself, and I didn't know how to get out except through death. Every time I felt rejection from someone, I retaliated by beating myself up for being so stupid as to have "provoked" him to hurt me in the first place.

I felt life was a prison. I was the prisoner and I was the sadistic jailer. I felt I'd been judged by a jury of my peers who confirmed I belonged right where I was. I didn't think I'd ever get out because I truly believed my release depended on what others thought of me.

But I was already *free*. What I needed was to be *liberated*. The problem was in my heart, not my head. The problem was that I didn't know that "freedom" is an idea and "liberation" is an emotion.

I wasn't faulty. I wasn't broken. I was flawed. I'd been flawed by life because my conscience (more than my head or heart) was in

need of repair. There was nothing that wrong with my thinking or my ability to feel. I felt about myself the way anyone would who thought the way I did. I just didn't have the moral motivation to do anything about it.

All the Christian homophobes who claimed that I was faulty and all the Muslim anti-Semites who said that I was broken were wrong. I was just a flawed gay-Jew. I just couldn't believe in myself. I just couldn't believe in being someone made by God like me.

So I became a ballet dancer, and when that didn't work out, I became an English teacher. And when that didn't work out, I became a businessman. And when I'd been through 27 jobs and 18 addresses, I ran out of hats to wear and hat racks to put them on. The freedom to change my mind didn't get me to where I wanted to go.

I loathed my life. But that mystery of my life wouldn't go away by pretending to be straight or converting to another religion. I had to find answers for myself. I had to question myself morally to determine what was immoral about the way I was treating myself. I had to go to the places inside nobody could see. But I didn't want to. I cut class instead.

35. Insubordination

I didn't have the ability to perceive, let alone question, the rationale with which my spiritual lessons were unfolding. The only thing I could conclude was that the Teacher wasn't able to maintain order in Her classroom; I thought the students had taken over the school. I looked at the headlines in newspapers as evidence that life was just a fight to the finish.

I could only believe in luck because luck was the only answer that didn't require my input. Once I realized that God created my luck, I had to pause at how little I knew about how the universe really works.

My imagination could only go as far as I could perceive. If anything blocked my view, then, as far as I was concerned, what I was looking at had simply disappeared. I drew the kind of conclusions about life that a baby would make about people. I played peek-a-boo with reality. When I closed my eyes to my Teacher's participation in my "luck," it was as if my place in the world disappeared.

Somehow I kept making my way to the school of self-love despite the traffic on the streets; the people on the sidewalks, potholes and puddles; despite all the kids running every which way on the school grounds and all the reasons I found for going elsewhere. I

eventually found my way to the front steps of the school and walked through the building and then out onto the quad, looking for others for relief from the loneliness and emptiness I felt inside. But how could anyone know what I'd been through just to get as far as the quad? How could I have known that I was lucky?

The one thing my friends on the quad in the school of self-love and I could all agree on was our dismay in having to go to class. We fought anyone who challenged our authority in putting the underdogs of life before the students of life. The bells rang and rang, but we ignored them. We didn't want a Teacher telling *us* what to do. We didn't want all the work involved in studying our motives. Just surviving in this world was work enough. We pitied the underdogs still out there on the streets instead of pitying ourselves on school grounds.

As a young man in my late teens in the early 1970's, I sought a life abroad in disgust with national politics and the war in Vietnam. I convinced myself I'd be better off in Europe (even Israel) than in a country that went to war without a cogent reason to have to fight.

While I lived abroad, I was ashamed of calling myself "American." I wasn't ashamed of being gay or Jewish, but I wanted to carry any other passport than the blue one with the eagle on it. My nationality exposed feelings I buried that I couldn't talk about.

Loyalty to myself was so undeveloped in me that "patriotism" meant nothing to me at all. I had to develop loyalty to my religious and sexuality identity before I could feel strong enough to speak lovingly from my heart about my country.

I was a gay man who was far more feminized than even *I* realized. In terms of algebra, most straight men express their personality as $(x + Y)$. I saw my personality as $(X + y)$. The emphasis on feminized traits was more pronounced in me. Because of the way I was, it took 50 years of working on the "X" side of myself before I was ready to start working on "y."

As my relationship to myself became more and more complex in the 1970's and 80's, my sanity and the quality of my life declined. The lines between the literal and metaphoric began to blur. My thoughts, feelings and sensations were no longer being weighed in my conscience. Each was doing exactly as it pleased.

One day I stripped naked in a ballet class in a metaphoric attempt to remove the false, emotional garments that clothed me. Another time, I screamed at some people on the street in an effort to get the attention of the symbolic stranger within me. I even tried to

defecate in bed once in defiance of the adage that *as I made my bed so would I have to sleep in it*.

Unconsciously, the philosophy I lived by was that life was unfair, and I was the world's greatest victim. I was the underdog, and the people I pitied were my masters. And the more they pitied me back, the more it reinforced my conviction that life was unfair. I thought the school of self-love was a sham; the Teacher was a myth; and anybody who talked about such things was a fraud.

But the attitude I held was that I didn't think I should have to repeat a spiritual lesson just because the Teacher didn't like the "way" I'd answered Her question. I couldn't see why my attitude toward myself should have anything to do with my grades in this place, whether or not this was a "school." And because all the voices in my head agreed with me, I gave myself an "A." I thought I was very clever...

What good is free speech if you've got nothing wise or loving to say about *yourself*, I told myself? (And then I gave myself an "E" for excellent in work habits.) What's the point of having a head and a heart if you can't give yourself permission to say something good about *you*? (And I gave myself another "E" for cooperation.)

In my mind's eye, I could imagine the Teacher looking out Her classroom window at us huddled in groups out on the quad. I could see Her oddly amused at us pretending we were in school, even if we had nothing good to say about the system because we weren't participating in it. First She'd let us find our way *to* school. Then She gave us an inordinate amount of time to slowly make our way to class. I had to wonder what She knew that I did not.

But as I made my way to class to find out, I realized that my thoughts about the Teacher were merely an aspect of myself She let me believe to be true about Her. Each step I took in Her direction led me to see that what I thought was true about *God* was really a part of *me* I had to live through before I could own it in myself.

In this way, God was present as well as out of sight. She was with me and She was ahead of me. She was working within me, and She was making me do the work around me for myself. She was in two places at once.

But I didn't perceive that then. I was still precocious, and I didn't know it. I figuratively stomped off the quad and all the kids wasting their time, into the building, down the hallway and barged into the classroom of self-love to face off with the class and the Teacher. (How wise and loving of me was that!) I behaved arrogantly,

inappropriately and defiantly in my demeanor with Everyone, God and man. I was rude without feeling bad about it, and They could sense it.

But in this way, I created a witness in my conscience who could attest to my demeanor. I still wasn't willing to admit I had a guilty conscience because I didn't feel guilty. My feelings of guilt and self-love were happening at a subconscious level of awareness.

Being womanly was easy for me. Being sensitive to other people's feelings, being attentive, listening and showing care and concern for others were the stereotypes I had of women. And I wasn't afraid to show off what I believed to be true about the "x" factor in me.

Being "manly" in the best sense of the word was a little harder. I didn't like the idea of standing up *for* myself or *to* myself. I didn't like confronting people who trespassed against me or me when I trespassed against myself. I didn't like flexing my moral muscle if it wasn't in *my* (best) interest.

Over the course of many decades, I did become a more cooperative and congenial person, but I didn't know how to consciously receive with my heart with heartfelt expression. I could let people in. I could open myself to other-love. I just couldn't give of myself to me. And the reason for this was because I couldn't discuss with myself what was happening inside me in words.

Becoming a man brought up the question "y." When I'd been unconsciously studying the "x" factor in me, I believed that all women want respect, attention, care, concern, gentleness, kindness and appreciation. But these were archetypes of what the woman in *me* had concluded about *myself*. It had nothing to do with "real" women. I don't have a clue what anyone wants, man or woman. I only know what I want (and even that I'm not always sure about).

After two suicide attempts and countless broken promises, the "x" side of me didn't have any more expectations about what it could expect to get from the "y" side of me. Making claims of my unending love for me was unrealistic, impractical and undesirable. I had to get real. If life was a miraculous experience with God, I'd have to approach that miracle very slowly. I couldn't see it happening.

I knew my selves well enough to know what I could and couldn't *give* and what I could and couldn't *receive*. I finally knew myself well enough to like my truth more than my delusions of perfection. But the real reason I became comfortable in my skin was because my head (y) and heart (x) were building the plus sign (+) together they needed to form the equation $(x + y) = 1$. (Nothing is free in this world.)

When I finally took a seat at the *back* of the elementary school classroom with the bozos, the Teacher politely asked me to move my seat to the *middle* of the room, and I did what I was told without any feeling of haughtiness or expectation. From that, I learned that I could never know what was expected of me. I couldn't ever anticipate what would come next in life. Sometimes I was miraculously prepared for the next lesson. Sometimes I was not...

Learning about yourself in the school of self-love is always a mysterious enterprise because the goals you've set may make you happy, but there's much more to self-knowledge than can be achieved through goals in the outside world. Man moves like a snake in the direction he's going. He zigzags. He doesn't move directly toward his outside goals because he makes mistakes along the way and because there are always impediments that will take him off course.

"Insubordination" is the title of this chapter, and yet, insubordination isn't at all what I was consciously trying to express in my twenties. In my twenties, I finally entered my first classroom in the school of self-love and was asked to take a seat in the middle of the classroom after I instinctively chose a seat at the back of the room.

In my twenties, I felt like I was expanding and contracting wildly despite anything I consciously did or didn't do. One moment, I felt like Gulliver in Lilliput, like a giant. The next moment, I felt like Gulliver in Blefuscu, the size of a mouse. I looked like the same fellow on the outside, but my ego expanded and contracted because of my awareness of the tremendous variances in my emotional size.

But it was all happening between the lines. I couldn't yet read the WORDS the Teacher was writing. I still didn't know how to read myself because I hadn't learned how to read people. They were good books brought to me by the Teacher, but I could only admire the cover and open them up and gawk at the contents.

Arrogance blew me up like a balloon, and meekness shriveled me up as though I'd been pricked with a pin. But at least I knew the problem was no longer caused entirely by events outside or inside of me. I realized that there was a Teacher in the room at all times giving me moral instruction whether I understood it or not.

I started out life spiritually hollow and emotionally empty. I was a vacuum in space long before I made it my goal to fill myself with wisdom, love and generosity of spirit. I was born like the big bang before the bang. If I didn't see myself as the very definition of "nothing" how would I later know that I had a universe filling the empty space within me? I had to start with nothing to compare what I *had* with what I now *have*.

I felt it very unfair that my dreams of true love with another person had eluded me in the myriad, entertaining ways Hollywood had promised. Even the fame and fortune I'd expected to receive from the world had not arrived. I was a victim of my own *autonomy* and an outlaw to my own *authority*. But I kept telling myself that good luck was just around the corner. And I kept responding to that by telling myself that I was full of shit.

Unbeknownst to me, I was enrolled in a three-part spiritual course called "Humiliation." In the first class, I found myself humiliated by others. In the second, I humiliated them back. In the third, I humiliated myself in the privacy of my mind's eye by creating MeTube videos of "What I was going to do instead..." (And then I watched as my intentions crumbled.)

I had no idea that even self-humiliation could lead to wisdom. I had no idea then that the road *out* of hell is also paved.

"Empathy" comes to those who love the joy of loving others. Empathy is an appreciation of the world because you can see that everyone's going through the same lessons of fear, anger and sorrow that you're going through. Empathy is bittersweet. Empathy is the joy of learning about the world we share by being an emotional part of everything around you.

But the humiliation I suffered at the hands of others and the humiliation I exacted on them in return only taught me to "sympathize" with myself, not to "empathize" with others. "Sympathy" comes to those who suffer the sorrow of being far away from themselves. Sympathy usually arrives unconsciously in the form of self-pity projected out onto others. It seldom strikes home. Sympathy is also bittersweet because very few people feel sympathy for themselves until something drastic happens to them. People don't want to waste their sympathy on themselves for all the little things that happen to them each day. Sympathy is the joy of learning about the world we *don't* share.

The lessons of life only get tougher if you refuse to reflect on the personal importance of the experiences you go through. When you become disobedient, defiant, incorrigible and insubordinate about learning about *you*, you unconsciously express your apathy of yourself. You unconsciously express your disdain of having to tolerate someone as odious to you as you.

You move in this direction, going from mature to immature, juvenile to childish, and from childish to infantile. You go insane. And if you don't lose your mind like I did, you usually end up losing some other part of yourself, like a limb or an organ.

The Teacher will tempt the students sitting in the middle of the room to sympathize with themselves. She wisely chooses to leave the bozos alone.

When you've entered the first grade classroom of the school of self-love and the Teacher has seated you in the middle of the room, you head back toward the womb, not forward toward the grave, you know in your heart you can't do anything about it. And each time God miraculously makes your lesson into a wakening moment, you grab the truth without being able to empathize with all the other fools around you who also don't have a clue what to do. You think you're the only one who knows what it's like to be challenged to such a degree. And the self-pity grows although you'd never put the truth of your heart into words. God forbid anyone would be able to quote you...

I tried to shame my parents into paying for their mistakes in raising me by squeezing cold cash out of them. But they wouldn't even come to the bargaining table. All they were willing to do was apologize for anything they hadn't taught me that I still needed to know. But I wasn't ready to take their apology seriously. I wanted a *piece* of their pie, not a *peace* of my own.

My mother had been thrown out of school by the Nazis in Germany at the age of thirteen because she was Jewish and never completed her schooling after the War. All her life, she compared herself to those with a formal education and felt ashamed and stupid in comparison to them.

She wasn't. She was well schooled in many matters of the heart. She was a very courteous person with a great deal of regard for the feelings of others. She wasn't hateful. She'd simply become impatient with me when, as a child, I didn't do as I'd been told.

My father graduated from a German gymnasium (two-year college). His parents gave him a private school education in the dominant, foreign country of his day. He was accustomed to money and privilege without having to work for them. And, although he was very generous by nature, his formal education didn't give him the training he needed to earn a living.

He behaved arrogantly toward people of color, gays and the poor. And yet he made elaborate excuses for becoming impoverished in America, for being a deadbeat dad and for treating my mother disrespectfully. He didn't seem to think he had to prove his worth. He seemed to think he had to prove others' worthlessness. It was just desserts that his son turned out poor, gay and disrespected.

My mother was a working class, Western European from Munich who was schooled in the arts from an early age to become a concert violinist. Her parents were cutting edge, modern Europeans even though they were working class. My grandparents chose to marry Judaism and Christianity into their children in a day-and-age when Christians were about to divorce themselves from their Jewish roots altogether.

My father was an anti-authoritarian from the privileged class. He grew up in an Eastern European small town (Kaunas, Lithuania), the youngest of eight children. But he wanted to show his observant, traditional, Jewish family he could embrace the modernity of the 20th Century, so convinced them to send him to America on the Queen Mary just to learn English.

My mother treated me like the returning son in the story of “The Prodigal Son”. She gave tough love to the child who stayed by her side (my sister) and gave tender love to the child who’d strayed far from home (me). My mother defended her decision, claiming she gave just as much love to both her children, even though my sister still doesn’t forgive her for loving me.

My father was like the stereotypic, Jewish mother. He dispensed love generously, but without wisdom. He worried where there was no cause, and didn’t worry when he should have. He slapped me first, and asked questions later. He told me to put a sweater on because he was cold. And if I did what he asked, he filled me with figurative sweets that figuratively rotted my teeth.

My parents came from a Christian world in Europe where people had little regard for the sanctity of Jewish life. The morality of European Christians toward the Jews who lived in their countries was no thicker than paint. And my parents saw that paint peel off in the heat of wartime, exposing a rough cut of wood beneath the veneer of what they chose to believe was *civilized* culture.

Granted, my parents weren’t the Teacher’s star pupils. They, too, were seated in the middle of the classroom. They, too, were humiliated, and then humiliated others in return. I don’t know what God was teaching their graduating class, but the whole generation certainly was given far tougher assignments than anything I had to go through in my day.

By the time I completed junior high school at the age of fourteen, I’d completed more of a formal education than either of my parents had received, and therefore I looked down on them with intellectual superiority. I couldn’t see their humanity, maybe because they never brought their spiritual homework to the table to discuss it.

They never told me what they were studying in life or how they were managing with the test grades they were receiving. We only talked about the world around us, never about the world within.

During my youth, I could tell you in detail how my parents had failed me. I saw them as social misfits and spiritual delinquents when, in fact, they were just as frail and human as anyone then, or now. When I was young, I was angry with them in an attempt to cover up my unwillingness to do the hard work of accepting them as they were. Now I'm just sad about my past. It's a shame they didn't understand life more deeply, or they might have done better.

I saw my parents as secretive because anything having to do with the War had been hidden from me. I saw them as having something to hide because so many of their feelings were buried deep within them. I could only guess what they'd gone through.

I didn't realize that my own journey to the heart hinged on how much I could forgive them for their grades in the school of self-love. It was easy to expose my father's bigotry with the red pen of blame. But getting through *my* anger at *his* essays on "the ignorance of others" with forgiveness took me a lifetime. Ridiculing my mother's love of money was just as easy, so long as I didn't have to compare her fear of returning to poverty and homelessness to my own financial insecurity.

I grew up feeling emotionally abandoned and abused by my parents. So I pointed my index finger at them. But when I abandoned and abused myself in adulthood; when I gave up personal ownership of my own governance; when I distained my Jewish heritage – I began to see that the other, three fingers were pointed back at me. And even that wasn't enough for me to realize I'd been *insubordinate*.

I thought I had the evidence I needed to hate whomever I liked. It didn't occur to me to look more deeply at my past as an unrealized *opportunity* rather than a *disadvantage*. I was my problem, not my parents, my people or my lifestyle.

I should have honored my parents by *copying* those character traits of theirs that were virtues. And I should have honored them by *rejecting* those character traits of theirs that were vices. *Those were my* ethical choices. But nobody ever explained my choices to me.

As a teenager, I was just a fountain of information, spouting facts. I wasn't yet able to be thankful for my feelings. I was an expert only at expressing resentment and pointing fingers at others. I knew nothing of appreciation of the self or gratitude to God.

And so my insubordination in the school of self-love increased and humiliation turned out to be the only way to teach me what I

needed to learn. My grades plummeted. And my relationship with the Teacher, who didn't even exist as far as I was concerned, deteriorated.

36. Detention

The Teacher let me out of class to go back onto the quad many times to give more time to think about my attitude of ingratitude. But it didn't do any good. I walked through life's lessons without inner purpose or direction. Sexual disappointments, financial frustrations and depression kept me wrapped up inside, spiritually constricted.

I could see no reason to apply myself spiritually to the lessons of the *breadth* and *depth* of self-love. Like others, I was only interested in making exaggerated claims about how *long* my love would last.

I carried myself as though I were already an alumnus of reality, a graduate magna cum laud with all my schooling behind me. I thought I knew it all. I thought I'd felt everything. I thought I already believed in all that mattered. I thought God, if there even was one, should always and only be on *my* side.

In my case, mental illness was like spiritual detention in the school of self-love. Whenever I went to class, my mind turned into a blackboard I watched myself erase. I saw a lifetime of preferences; opinions; hypotheses; theories; and conclusions get wiped away, ultimately leaving me with a blank slate. I watched myself stand in front of the whole class and make a fool of myself.

Finally, it made no difference to me whether life was a school or not. I *couldn't* come to class. First I became forgetful. Then my thoughts became incoherent. Because of that, I distanced myself from others and isolated rather than allow my feelings to be exposed. Lastly, I was unable to participate in the simplest, social interactions people take for granted. I was losing my mind, and I was watching it happening before my eyes. It was as though every time I turned around, like a beach at high tide, a little more of my mind was being submerged by more feelings.

I couldn't hold down jobs; then I couldn't keep up friendships; in the end I could barely care for myself. Being free *not* to know myself had been my goal, and I'd achieved it. But not having the mental acuity to find any good reasons to like myself turned into a waking nightmare.

One night in my twenties, I arranged for a drug dealer to deliver some dope to my house. While conducting "business," he said something that added to my already lengthy list of feelings of

inadequacy. And I decided I'd had enough; that if I couldn't get the respect I deserved from my drug dealer, there was no reason to live. (*That's what it's like when you're crazy.*)

I went to the neighborhood grocery store and bought a bottle of aspirins, went home and swallowed all 100 pills. A few hours later, I had to call my sister and be taken to the hospital. She called an ambulance, but before they came she hugged me and told me how much she loved me.

There, in the emergency room, the physical pain of the treatment for the overdose was so torturous that I begged God to let me die. When I finally needed Her and prayed for Her intervention, She was deaf to my pleas...

It's very likely that the hearing loss I suffer from today was caused by that intentional overdose of aspirin. But I had a *spiritual* hearing problem all my life that was far worse. I couldn't hear *myself* think, even though God could and had to put up with listening to *me*.

After that incident, I saw my first therapist who figuratively told me that I wasn't such a bad student of life, that school was simply a little harder for me than for most people; and that I just needed a little extra help to pass my classes.

She was young and well intentioned, but had little experience with the kind of deep-seated spiritual laziness I presented. What I really needed (in addition to psychiatric medication which she couldn't prescribe) was a swift kick in the pants and a lecture on getting my butt into spiritual gear.

I was a class clown in the school of self-love. I'd moved my seat from the middle of the room to the back, and I chose to disrupt the students in every spiritual course I was enrolled in. I showed no desire for learning anything that would teach me to love myself, and I had nothing but scorn and ridicule for the many, good students of self-love who made an effort to love those around them.

My shoddy ethics when it came to self-intimacy had been shaped by my desire for retribution against my parents. And that human failing went all the way back to Adam who pointed a finger at God and Eve when he got in Dutch for what he did. I saw myself as the victim of a conspiracy.

It was the fruit in the Creation Story that was the victim, not Adam or Eve. Like them, I was a perpetrator of knowledge who wouldn't account for what I knew. Like Adam, I refused to take responsibility for my actions. Like Eve, I decided to blame the snake in the tree.

I didn't need any more fingers pointing at me for being a Jew or a gay man. I didn't need any more fingers pointed at me for being mentally challenged. I needed to make my conscience my guide and set an example of how everyone could live life without complaining about those things we cannot change.

But I could hardly string a coherent sentence together in my compromised state. I ate and slept all day, and sat alone staring mindlessly at TV at night. I conjured up a magical system for people to learn to communicate with one another without words. It involved an elaborate, abstract game that would achieve intimacy through feelings. But then I concluded I was retarded and unable to teach myself how to play it.

I was out of my mind, but far from my heart. And my hatred of myself was only growing because I was so critical of everything I thought and felt. I was physically alive, but mentally, emotionally and spiritually in a coma. I was dying inside even though my body was in good health.

I couldn't yet use my innate goodness to fashion my own special key to the Kingdom. I was locked out of heaven in a living hell.

37. Probation

From time to time, I felt my detention from the school of self-love lift. I felt let back in on probation, but probation never seemed to last very long. I could feel miserable for weeks on end, and then it would suddenly lift, and everything was normal again. But then I was on detention again and forced out of class without an explanation.

My foul moods were slowly turning into something more severe than just depression. I was imaginative, inventive and creative by nature, but now these virtues were changing, drying out, curling up, turning - like leaves - from green to red to brown. It wasn't the same, anymore. The temperature inside me was getting chilly. The light was dimming. Some days it was *really* cold inside. This was turning into my winter of self-discontent.

After my first suicide attempt, it was as though I'd had my first serious spiritual run-in with the law. That left me feeling like an emotional outlaw. I felt I had a record, but I didn't feel guilty about it. I just decided I didn't want to be associated with anyone who might threaten to expose me, so I looked for clever ways to circumvent the medical help I needed, thereby avoiding having to admit to myself that I was mentally ill.

I dressed for each season on the outside, but within I was shivering from the cold. The branches in my mind were finally bare. The ground of my being was soggy and slippery from the endless rain. And the color of the sky in my imagination was a dull gray that never parted. There wasn't a ray of sunshine anywhere within me.

I didn't see people as agents of moral change. I didn't see them as opportunities from the Teacher to prove to me that I was capable of emotional transformation. I saw them as officers of a law I had to outsmart. There was nothing left for me to learn from anyone. I was all on my own. I was a fugitive from my own inner law, and I was running to get away from winter...

I looked at people as edifices constructed of cement and glass. I saw no light inside them. In their eyes (the windows to their soul) I saw only darkness. They were empty and uninhabited inside. Their face, like the façade of a building, was stony cold to me. There was nobody at home inside anyone. They were abandoned structures that the people inside had fled.

I could see them; I could hear them; I could touch them. But it was I who was the empty edifice, the abandoned building. I saw everyone as a projection of what was happening to me.

People took on the appearance of condemned housing that I naturally would want to avoid. I saw them as rotting, putrid dwellings that only bred contagion. Crowds turned into living, breathing slums. The masses were tenements filled with squatters who had no right to come near me.

Insanity is crazy making, maddening and disorienting. But ironically, it can also be intensely, poetically precise. I wasn't motivated to construct a synagogue in my soul, a house of learning where I could pray. I was a prisoner in my mind, looking out at the world through barred windows, living in a hell of my own making, which I then projected out onto others.

And I thought the metaphor of me as a prisoner was far preferable to the metaphor of me as a student of myself, religiously studying me as I moved along on the journey of life.

Fear, anger and sorrow were the feelings at the foundation of my being that needed repair. My feelings were why the building had been condemned. But I was afraid of my fears, angry about my anger and sad for my sorrows. My feelings were being reflected back to me because I was staring at my heart as though I were looking in a mirror. By then, I was accustomed to being out of my mind. I just wasn't oriented in having to face my heart and soul.

I struck out at myself in horror at what I looked like, but as my heart shattered into millions of shards of glass, my head turned into one of those abandoned houses I previously saw in others, and the voices in my head, into bums who unlawfully lived there.

The building went up in flames, including the foundation. I finally realized I was homeless. I was a beggar. I'd lost my head and heart. I had nowhere else to go but to my conscience. I had nowhere to go but to a moral reckoning of what I'd become.

Thirty years before 9/11, I looked at my mother and father as the Twin Towers, the tallest buildings in the skyline of my Manhattan. I saw them as the tallest skyscrapers on the skyline looking down on me from that great height. But I looked up at them without awe or interest. If they came down, too, so be it. It would be no fault of mine. I couldn't care less.

This psychosis coincided with my attempt to study ballet in New York in the hopes of getting a job in one of the world's most prestigious companies. I had to taken to Bellevue Hospital, restrained with drugs and housed on a locked ward. I had to be reasoned with by those with stronger hearts and minds. I had to be loved by my family and friends because I was incapable of loving myself.

I was too self-righteous to love myself. I couldn't abide the idea of devoting myself to me. I was disdainful of my modesty, humility and grace because they were the products of guilt, and I was too good to be guilty of anything. I rejected my own wisdom, love and generosity of spirit as though they were the skin, meat and core of forbidden fruit, foreign substances in my system.

There's only one good reason to help others. Helping them is the precursor that teaches you how to help yourself. Helping others makes you a witness to your own self-love and the wisdom you have to bestow on others. Giving to others returns tenfold to you. You just have to be sure to commend yourself for every little thing you do. Giving through others recycles all your goodness on yet an even more deserving person: you.

Although you've got to tell yourself ten times a day what a wonderful person you are, you've got to keep your opinion of yourself a secret from everyone. Giving away this secret diminishes your gift to yourself. Only crazy people are spiritually licensed to love themselves out loud...

The Teacher didn't ask me to tolerate or accept my parents the way they were. She didn't ask me to reason with them. She asked me to "honor" them, to empathize with them whenever possible, and when I couldn't, to sympathize with myself, instead.

She asked me to *tolerate* myself for the tests I was failing. She asked me to *accept* myself for the tests I'd passed. She asked me to *honor* the one I was always with as a work in progress.

God put me on probation in the school of self-love to give me a chance to figure out what I was doing wrong. I was left alone in a corner of Her school to work out my relationship with my self. But I continued to cry out from the quad with rhetorical questions I assumed would never be answered, questions such as, "Why me?" and "Why *not* me?" These were questions She could answer. But they were questions She would only answer in class...

Even if I'd told myself then that I was sorry, I'm sure I wouldn't have believed my own apology because I couldn't *feel* sorry for myself. I could only feel *afraid* of me or *angry* with myself. I was terrified of me. I was a terror, and I was a terrorist years before so many Muslims decided to follow my lead.

Probation in the school of love was just a momentary respite, a brief return to class between suspensions, a calm before the next storm. I continued to refuse to put any effort into doing the assignments the Teacher gave me. I continued to insist that life wasn't a school, and I wasn't here to learn.

38. Expulsion

I never tried to glean hope from the way my parents had carried their grief. I was in denial of *my* lessons from *their* Holocaust.

I woke up every morning without so much as a "good morning" for the Teacher. I never considered trying to imagine how She and others might feel about me. I chose, instead, to curse Her and everyone on earth for the way I felt about my self.

Without offering me my own love, I couldn't receive it. And in so doing, I consciously cut myself off from the Source of all love. I thought gay liberation gave me license to use, abuse and complain about men. No one had told me gays were in my life to teach me to love myself like only a man can love a man.

I didn't appreciate the efforts of the gay community to liberate me from the outside, in. And I certainly had no reasons yet to appreciate myself for liberating me from the inside, in.

I saw my generation of gays as a bunch of emotionally juvenile delinquents having wild sex without any sense of loyalty to one another. I saw gays as underage children in the emotional sense. I saw sex with men as spiritual, statutory rape. It was all a projection.

I couldn't separate the men from the boys because I was a man-boy turning into a big baby. I wasn't ready to love any man because I wasn't emotional old enough to love, period.

Somehow I'd decided I'd become a graduate of the school of self-love as soon as I'd achieved my first orgasm. I know I thought I was terrific in bed with good *reason*, but what I didn't know was that I was without any great depth of *feeling*. I could only moan and groan with the best of them. I had no idea that the lessons of the body were signs pointing to deeper lessons to come.

I was drunk on lust for others without ever having tasted the elixir of self-love. I was masturbating emotionally, and I hated the partner I'd been given. I never would have chosen to be me. I didn't yet have the ability to spiritually penetrate me, and yet I thought myself the world's greatest lover of men on men.

The alarm on my biological clock and my emotional clock had gone off at different times. I woke up *physically* at puberty. But I was still asleep *emotionally* ten years later. And it would take me another couple of decades for me to open my eyes *spiritually*.

I thought I'd graduated the school of self-love when I learned from my mother how to look both ways before crossing the street. I was sure I'd learned all there was to know about the way I felt because I felt betrayed. I was bruised fruit, a grape on its way to being crushed. I was a bottle of wine in the making. I was fermented, not ripening.

I was a class clown in the school of self-love who'd have been shocked had I seen my grades in the Teacher's roll book. Just because I felt *bad* didn't signal I had the courage to put my feelings on the scale in my conscience to weigh them against my thoughts for moral acuity. Most of the time, I only felt self-righteous indignation, and I thought that gave me the moral authority to do as I pleased.

"Mercy" is an important attribute to give others, but it isn't possible if you haven't practiced being merciful to yourself. *Indulging* yourself isn't the same thing as *forgiving* yourself. If you've been pampered, pandered to, coddled and humored all your life, you probably feel like bruised fruit looks. But if you could see yourself from the outside, you'd see that you look spoiled in others' eyes.

I was really just a spiritual high school student of self-love with delusions of having already earned my Ph.D. in "me." I was ready to dispense my spiritual education on others. I thought I knew enough to profess, not just guide and instruct.

Although I was so sick of me failing that I couldn't stand living with myself any longer, I wasn't going to try to end my life with pills again. I was smarter than that...

I got out of Belleview, went back to L.A. and lived with my mother and her second husband for a year. But after I left them in a huff after an argument, I drove around in search of a cliff to drive my car off. I thought that would be a painless, yet certain, way to die. I finally found a cliff close to a road in the Santa Monica Mountains, steep enough that the fall would kill me and secluded enough not to hurt anyone other than me. I drove back to the site on a quiet Sunday morning in 1977, determined to end the farce once and for all.

But before my foot slammed down on the accelerator, I took a moment to make sure I'd done what I needed to insure that my death would be painless and swift; I filled the tank with gas; I remembered to unfasten my seat belt; I was glad of my decision not to write a will or suicide note; and I felt truly relieved that I finally found a solution that would end my suffering once and for all.

When the pedal hit the metal, my car sailed off the ground into thin air. But at that moment, I suddenly also felt something unexpected - the embarrassment and shame I'd been accelerating away from all my life. I momentarily sensed that what I was doing to myself would be humiliating if I didn't "succeed" (so to speak).

As the car nose-dived over the edge of the cliff, I angrily realized that the grade wasn't as steep as it had looked from the top. The car tumbled and flipped over again and again. It didn't come crashing down as I'd expected.

From the sheer force of the fall downward, I was propelled by inertia out of the driver's seat in a backwards summersault. I must have lost consciousness when my head hit the roof of the car. When I came to, I was facing the cliff although there wasn't any glass in the windshield. I looked around stupefied until it finally dawned on me that I was in the middle of the backseat.

I remember feeling a seething anger mixed with humiliation shoot through me. I couldn't even kill myself without botching the job - twice! I was such a loser...

I crawled out of the shattered backseat window in the door and fell asleep on the ground. I later learned that I'd called out for help and someone had heard me. The paramedics found me asleep next to my car, bruised, with a few superficial cuts and scrapes. The medical team at the hospital discovered two broken ribs.

In the fall down the mountainside, the engine was slammed toward the dashboard, forcing the steering wheel right through the driver's seat. Only because my seatbelt hadn't been secured did the steering wheel not crush me. Somehow I ended up on the passenger side of the back seat, which turned out to be the only spot in the car

where the roof and doors hadn't been crushed. And since the gas tank was completely full there was no oxygen in it to set the vehicle ablaze.

When I came to in the hospital, my heart felt like my car looked: a wreck. But I wasn't ashamed of what I thought of myself. My anger concealed my shame. The greater, moral issue was that I was in denial of what my *conscience* had to say about what my *head* and *heart* had agreed to do to me. There was a moral issue in what I'd done to me that would take me decades to unravel.

At the time, I believed a wreck like me was beyond repair, but I didn't know what I was going to do about it. I should have been crushed in that accident. But instead I found myself in a worse place than I'd been in before. There had been a hell below the hell I'd been in. And I'd sunk down into it.

Whatever Her reason, the Teacher wouldn't allow me to leave the school grounds. She chose to make me remain on campus even though She refused to allow me to come to class. I was furious with Her decision. It made no sense. It seemed totally irrational on Her part; I'd say, even cruel.

I certainly couldn't tell myself I was *sincerely sorry* for what I'd done because there was no way I could be "sincere" about anything. I didn't know the meaning of the word. And I didn't know the meaning of the word "sorrow" either. And I certainly didn't have a clue to the meaning of the words "embarrassment," "shame" or "humiliation." Asking me to feel guilty about what I'd done would have been laughable.

I was a poet who didn't yet know the *emotional* meaning of words. I didn't know the *spiritual* meaning of them, either. I only knew what words meant when spoken from the head, not the heart or soul. I was a spiritual wordsmith who had to begin learning the English language anew.

I had to figuratively go into special ed. spiritual classes out in the bungalows for fools in the school of self-love. (They obviously didn't want people like me walking around in the main building...)

I had to experience the discomfort of being an adult who felt like he was sitting in a child's chair, writing on a child's desk. I felt like an adult enrolled in nursery school, doing classwork I thought I'd completed years ago. I endured a living nightmare I've never seen depicted in a movie except in jest. And I couldn't tell anyone what I was going through because my description would only have confirmed I was still crazy.

Mercy is important, but it isn't enough. You've also got to learn how to *judge*. Without mercy you can't love, but without the ability to

judge, your decisions will be unwise. You've got to be able to weigh justice and mercy, and you've got to be told about the scale in your conscience where wisdom (justice) and self-love (mercy) are weighed *before* and *after* you take every step in life.

My car "incident" should have left me in unending sorrow. I should have had good reason to cry every hour of every day for what I'd tried to do to myself. I should have been turned into a physical cripple in addition to being an emotional cripple. The shades of sorrow - pity, disappointment, distress, grief and torment - should have darkened my inner room with shadows of regret every day for the rest of my life.

But it's impossible to regret something when you haven't paid a price for it or learned anything from it. It's useless to open or close the shades in a room when they've been hung in front of a wall. Sometimes "experience" is your one and only teacher. Sometimes you have to ask yourself what it is you did and what you could learn from what you did.

Even though I failed one test after another in spiritual nursery school because I didn't understand the point of the lessons, I somehow managed to graduate and found myself advanced to spiritual kindergarten. But what good was that when I'd someday have to face all the assignments still incomplete and the piles of homework waiting for me in emotional high school? The consequences of twice trying to murder a gay man and a Jew were simple: I had to learn to love all gay men and Jews. And, believe me, that wasn't easy with the self-hate I was filled to the brim with...

Three years after my second suicide attempt, when my landlord threatened to evict me for not paying my rent, I decided to look for a freeway overpass to live under, a decision that certainly would have led to a third suicide attempt. But I knew a loser like me could never bank on getting away with a third suicide attempt physically unimpaired. I was more afraid of becoming a *physical* cripple than remaining an *emotional* cripple. (I still didn't give a damn about my spiritual infirmities.)

I didn't have the courage my mother had shown when she entered the Gestapo headquarters alone to plead with the Nazis to let her stay with her mother. Nor did I have the bravado necessary to face the homelessness she endured for two years during the War. I just didn't have what she had. I wasn't a man like my mother.

Before I got evicted, I telephoned my mother and asked for her help. I admitted I was wrong and apologized for having treated her

disrespectfully. Would that she could have made a phone call to solve all her problems in 1942...

I'd turned my back in disrespect on my Teacher; I'd walked out of Her classes in self-love with a one-finger salute; I'd been allowed back in on a trial basis; and when I was asked to leave, I tried to get myself expelled altogether.

I was given a second chance. I was given a third chance. But each opportunity came at a higher price. Tuition in the school of self-love goes up and up and up. If you think you're in debt because of your college education, that's nothing compared to your debt to society. I don't believe in reincarnation, but coming back many times would be the only way I could pay off the cost of my education in this lifetime...

By finally perceiving that I'd been majoring in self-hatred, I came round full-circle, ready to learn to embrace self-love with a realistic attitude about what my heart really wanted. I really wanted to love myself. I really wanted to be my own best friend.

39. Getting Sick at School

I was rarely sick during elementary school and junior high; I almost never missed a day of class. When I was sick and couldn't go in, I felt as though I was missing something extremely important in my life. It felt almost as though I were abandoning my teachers and classmates if I didn't show up. I thought they wouldn't be able to get through a day without me.

But by high school, my sense of connection to my education shriveled up and died. Public school dried me out like a grape unpicked on the vine at the end of autumn. School endeavored to improve my mind, but it withered my heart. I was an emotional raisin by the end of twelve years in their hands. I was emotionally senile and cynical before my time.

I did the bare minimum to get through my senior year of high school, but I was truant more days than I attended class. I only came to school to take tests. I lost patience with facts and figures, but I was too naïve to realize that the source of my apathy wasn't them.

I was in the springtime of my life and a frown from a stranger's face would start a downpour within me. A word spoken in a tone of disregard would thunder through me. My anger flashed within like lightning across a cloud-filled sky before I knew what had happened. Outwardly, I made sure that nobody saw a thing. But a bad thought or unkind feeling could turn a whole day gray and leave me with a chill

that made me think an New England winter had come to L.A. My clouds *had* no silver linings...

I needed my teachers at school to inspire me, but they weren't paid to inspire. They were paid to cram my head full of facts. Most of them didn't even have the training to use humor and inspiration as teaching tools. In those days, education wasn't supposed to be personal or meaningful. And my friends and family certainly weren't up to the task of teaching me the meaning of life.

The problem, in a nutshell, could be summed up in the words "justice" and "mercy" which I didn't yet know *by heart*. I had no idea how to administer either of them on *me*.

I was still too young to parent my inner child. He was an orphan alone in my inner world, guided by his inner father who was as bad at child rearing as my real father had been with me. I wasn't ready to join the "pTa" (parent/Teacher association). I had no one to parent me, and I had no Teacher to guide me. I wasn't just sick *of* school. I was sick *at school*.

40. Behind the Bleachers

Reaching orgasm was the most incredible and fantastic experience of my adolescence, a secret that came upon me at the late age of sixteen because I didn't know my way around myself to discover it any sooner. Sex with me brought a joy into my life that I could never have anticipated, a pleasure that I'll never be able to describe in words. It was like man landing on the moon. It was like discovering there *is* a God.

Neither the spoken nor the written word can describe the wonderful sensation of orgasm. Your eyes can massage and caress the words I present you in black on white on this page, but my words will never do sex justice. Even the words of Scripture are a poor substitute for the depth of the experience God gives us through orgasm.

Words are flat until they leave your mind and move into your body. Words are no substitute for the throb of sensations that come with touch. The clinical term "masturbation" and the experience of your first "orgasm with yourself" are words that have nothing at all in common when heard from your heart.

Words have the potential of being deeply personal. No two people read them with the same eyes; perceive them in their imagination in the same way; or act on them with the same feelings. We're all in life separately, together. We're all learning how to share

words as gifts from God with one another. We have no right to fight over words because they aren't ours to begin with...

My first sexual experience with another person occurred on the night of my eighteenth birthday. My girlfriend (who was ten years older than me) offered to give herself to me as a birthday present. I enjoyed unwrapping her like colorful wrapping and I enjoyed exploring her like an unexpected offering in my hands. But I quickly realized she wasn't at all what I'd really hoped for as a gift. She disappointed me, not because her contents weren't just what I wanted; only because she was a present in a wrapping that didn't appeal to me. I couldn't cum in her. She didn't have the type of container I wanted to reach orgasm in my first time.

It wasn't until I had my first sexual experience with a man a few months later that I knew I could look at a man's package with real anticipation; open his lips and legs like the flaps of a box; take him out of a commonplace state of mind with real excitement; and hold him in my hands like a gift given to me from God. I can appreciate a man as a present in the present in a way that no woman will ever be physically special to me.

Once I'd lost my virginity, I could sense there was something mysterious that had happened to me. There was something apart from orgasms I wanted to share with another person without embarrassment or shame. But I couldn't put that desire into words. The loss of my virginity made me aware of something else missing.

I wanted to say I knew somebody "in the Biblical sense of the WORD." Even though I'd had sex with myself, I couldn't even say I knew myself "in the Biblical sense of the WORD" because I hadn't yet allowed me to penetrate myself emotionally or spiritually. And that unanticipated emptiness had an enormous affect on my relationships with others.

Sex isn't just about sex, and the Bible isn't just about God. To know someone "in the Biblical sense of the word" means that you've penetrated him physically, emotionally and spiritually. It means you've gotten *all* the way in.

Without yet having learned Hebrew, I couldn't even say I could understand the Bible. The WORD of God was given to the Jews in Hebrew. Even Jesus quoted Moses in Hebrew! Words matter. Imagine reading this book in a foreign language if you're a native speaker of English. You know the English ties you to the message in a way no other reader will ever fathom.

I had *newlywed* feelings of excitement for men as a young man; I fell in love easily and often. I married them at night and divorced

them the next morning. Loving men was titillating and exciting. But it always felt like there was something missing.

Although men were my emotional tutors bringing me myriad lessons in learning to love, they were still just living metaphors taking me in the direction of the wedding march down the aisle by myself. I walked short distances with them, but I was never able to make it all the way to the altar. Sooner or later, I always took a seat in the pews and let them continue the march without me. The altar was always there straight ahead of me. It was the right guy who was missing.

It was as if I'd been in engaged with myself before my head and heart finally realized they were perfect for one another and were ready to tie the knot. I had to experience their joining within me before I could feel a connection to anyone. I had to love the one I was with when I wasn't with anyone else.

The real "perverts" are the straight people who insist that the only marriage that can be spiritually meaningful has to happen between a man and a woman. They pervert God's nature by not realizing the depth of their own nature. They insist on stopping everyone from knowing himself "in the Biblical sense of the WORD."

What differentiates "the WORD of God" from every other "word" is something you can see, but you can't hear. In my book, The Forbidden Fruit's Perspective, Torah for Straight People, you'll see what that is.

The marriage of any two people shouldn't be a *prelude* to the marriage of their head and heart. People should join *themselves* in holy matrimony *before* they try to do so with another person. Love and marriage is like a horse and carriage. Your heart is the horse and your head is the carriage. Once you've got the concept of marriage in place from the inside in, you'll have a lot more of a chance to make it work from the outside in.

I should have encouraged *me* to emotionally embrace *myself* years before I pursued the charm out of the prince in every other guy I slept with. Only in knowing my own love and wisdom in the deepest sense could I come to appreciate my self. Only in uniting my head and heart in my conscience could I create the moral atmosphere within that I wanted to share with everyone around me.

Through my unconscious infatuation with myself in youth, I couldn't feel grateful to me for my guidance and constancy. I thought self-love was synonymous with a fixation on myself, and I didn't bother to check out that assumption. Therefore I was fixated on finding someone else to love and was repelled by the thought of loving "only" myself.

I have no use for religious dogma that compels me to love or hate anyone. The source of love isn't around me in any religious edifice or institution; it's within me. Love comes from the heart, not from Jesus. He was just the first gay-Jew to describe what He had discovered.

They don't teach wisdom in synagogues, love in churches and generosity in mosques because there's wisdom, love and generosity in everyone. We need religious leaders who are unique blends of heads, hearts and souls that hold all three. We need religious followers who affirm this Abrahamic trinity of God's gifts to humanity. We need people whose head works like a Jew's, whose heart works like a Christian's and whose soul works like a Muslim's.

By resolving to do all my undone, spiritual homework for God, I left my spot out on the bleachers of life where I was watched others perform in mindless synchronicity. I gave up the games people play to play the game with and against myself. As hard as it was to walk off the quad where social conformity to "Life, the Sport" was the rule, I turned my back on common sense and went to spiritual class in the most private of schools on earth. I went within.

The nice thing about having been locked up in a mental institution is that it forever allows you to be a little *crazy* without worrying about ever again going *insane*. "Been there, done that." I know the difference between the words "crazy" and "insane." I won't make that mistake again...

The direction my earthly goals were taking me in would, from then on, also include lessons from my Teacher in self-love. All knowledge leads to self-love by way of the path of hard-earned wisdom. This is the key to generosity of spirit. All the rest is commentary.

The path of self-love will take you in the direction of all the other goals you dream of. You can still dream of having good health, a loving partner, financial security and all the rest. There's no guarantee you're going to get them, but if you have faith that these goals can be better achieved if you stay on the path of self-love, you'll at least be guaranteed greater self-love when it's all over.

It isn't easy to defy the voices of convention. It isn't easy to give up the practical benefits of conformity for the delights of learning about your self. Each and every test life presents you with will become a test in your major. Even survival in the harshest of conditions will become a lesson in self-love because the moral reason for love is beyond question. Every moment will become a clue to the mystery in learning to go from good to better. You only have go to class, stay

awake in class and pay attention to what you're thinking and feeling to succeed in coming to know and love yourself.

When my conscience brings guilt (sticks) or love (carrots) to mind, I allow them to affect me. I lower my defenses – not to others – but to myself. I give myself permission to feel loving or guilty about what I thought and felt. I give myself permission to judge me. Only in this way can I find the mercy to forgive myself.

Thinking I'd be a good student of life if I were popular was no longer important to me. I don't need a mob at my marriage or a parade at my funeral. I married me for better or worse; in sickness or in health; until death when we'd part. And God was the only witness I needed for that union.

My death will be an equally private, graduation ceremony and celebration that only God and I will definitely attend. God enrolled me alone into the school of self-love, despite the fact that my mother and others were there when I entered the classroom. And I'll graduate alone with Her by my side no matter who may be at my bedside.

Today I don't have to deny my faults or excuse my weaknesses. I can readily admit my mistakes and make up for them happily knowing doing so will only improve my relationship with me. Once I learned to apologize to myself, I could apologize to everyone. My sincerity was restored. "Sorry" no longer seemed to be the hardest word.

I don't need the Nobel Prize in Literature. I need the Barry Emanuel Zeve award for poetic justice. I don't need to be the first dancer in his sixties hired by San Francisco Ballet; I only need to dance with all my heart and soul.

Here is the poem I wrote to me for my wedding day. When I married myself that Friday night at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, this was my only vow.

A Year of Love

The season of innocence ended

In the late winter of childhood

When the brilliant light of my sexuality rose

Bathing my virginity in feelings of yellows and reds

That left me blue

Primary colors within I'd never before seen or imagined

This sensuous palette was an unexpected dawn

From beyond all horizons seen

A liquid light that promised new hope through physicality

In this, the early springtime of my life
 I enjoyed friendships with strangers all morning
 But sought a lover to share that afternoon
 And found a companion late in the day
 Waiting for me with open arms

 And with him intimacy through others walked into my life
 Kissed me, and I felt like a prince
 - Falling in love with love as if in a fairy tale -
 I look back on my youth as a red-hot, summer day
 And a summer night in a milky way of endlessly spilling stars

 But early one autumn morn
 A diaphanous, pale-yellow light rose within me
 From a mysterious inner East
 Beyond all visible
 Beyond the horizons of anything I'd ever before seen

 And without thought of what time, this time, would tell
 I watched this new insight rise like a broken heart
 Radiating me in a cautious light that asked me to slow down
 It bathed all my light-blue experiences
 Stroking them with its faint, fair-haired fingers
 Melting that frost within that so reminded me of childhood-gray

 And in that inner, autumn light of my self-love
 I found something evergreen
 That made it possible
 To harvest the courage of life's greatest allure
 Frightened, shivering and blushing
 I disrobed my soul
 And looked admiringly into it
 And there I saw a man who was sensuous and younger than
 ever
 Who'd been waiting patiently with me for me with open arms.

41. After School Sports

I never participated in the after school sports programs in high school. They wouldn't have wanted a gay boy on their teams in those days. The attitude held by the psychiatric world in the 1960's was that

homosexuality was a mental illness and most religious communities considered it a moral disease. We were called perverts and were the objects of ridicule who were afraid to speak our mind. We weren't considered the stuff that heroes could be made of. You can imagine the unhealthy atmosphere of fear and intimidation at school in those days.

The sports teams in my high school wouldn't even have wanted me as a cheerleader. They didn't want my admiration any more than they wanted me playing on their team. So, even though I was impressed by the physical strength and emotional perseverance of the boys playing sports for my school, I learned to withhold my enthusiasm to protect *their* fragile egos.

I was too polite to tell them how crude and rude they were. I thought they would have been lucky to have a loyal friend like me on their side. They would have been rewarded in many ways had they been willing to teach me how to play sports. But they were not, and so they missed the opportunity to have a great guy like me participating with them.

When I was in high school, I played by myself and did my best to cheer myself on. And over a lifetime, my loneliness and disappointment with others slowly turned into a peaceful solitude that made it a joy to be alone. I learned to watch myself as if from the outside, in. And in doing so, I learned how to mature.

It's not like I had a selfie stick in those days to capture images of myself. I listened to the words that came out of my mouth as though someone else were uttering them. I imagined I was looking at someone else when I looked at myself in the mirror. I taught myself American body language so I didn't stand out as the weird kid with the foreign-born parents. I forced myself to watch that my Jewish intonation didn't affect my inflection.

"I" is the pronoun that comes from my soul. "I" comes from the place where my thoughts and feelings are weighed. "I" is my conscience. "I" is the "eye" that watches me. "I" see me. "I" hear myself. "I" love me, myself and "I." It was terribly important for me to identify "me" as my head, "my self" as my heart and "I" as my soul. I needed to separate the forces within me to unite them.

I had a dream one night not many years ago that I was in a woman's bedroom and had just had sex with a man in her bed. I then got out of the bed without making it and went into the closet where I was going through her dresses when she walked into the room. She looked at her unmade bed and then at me rummaging through her

clothes. I could see the anger, suspicion and scorn on her face. But she said nothing.

I suddenly felt terrible about what I'd done. So when she turned around without a word and walked out of the room, I decided to make the bed. But then I went back to rummaging through her closet. (I obviously didn't feel guilty enough to stop snooping around to see what she wore.)

In the next scene in my dream, she reentered the bedroom, and I casually apologized for having had sex in her bed and for going through the clothes in her closet. But I remember thinking I hadn't really mean what I said. I'd said it more to assuage her in the hopes it would change her mood. And then I woke up.

Upon reflecting on the meaning of the dream, I realized that the importance of the incident was in what *hadn't* been said. *My* side of the story hadn't been told because the only feelings I acted on had been reactions to hers. I wasn't able to express how I *really* felt.

The woman in my dream was the feminine side of me, (x) and *her* bedroom was actually *our* bedroom (x + y), a symbol of the space in my soul that the masculine (y) and feminine (x) sides of me had to learn to share. The male side of me had the right to let someone into our soul, even if the female side of me wanted to keep it exclusively for us.

Only after I woke up did I remember that I'd really gone through her wardrobe trying to look for some space for *my* clothes. Her closet was, after all, mine, too! I had as much right to use that closet as she did.

The feminine side of me (X) had crowded me (y) out of *our* closet, and the masculine side of me (Y) had crowded her (x) out of our bed. We both had an equal right to everything in that room. This was an internal struggle between my head and heart that would have to be settled before I could proceed.

From the dream, I could see that I'd been on speaking terms with her, but she'd only expressed herself with body language. The male side of me got the verbal language and the female side of me got the body language. The left side of my brain was doing all the talking and the right side got her opinions stated through feelings, moods and gestures.

Here I was, a gay man having a fight over inner space. It was a fight over my masculinity and femininity, not my sexuality. It was an issue of accommodation between the two aspects of myself [left brain, head (y) and right brain, heart (x)] that needed to be addressed before I

could speak authentically about my relationship to others. I needed to learn to take up inner space with more awareness and fairness.

Gay men of my generation had to come out of the closet, not just for our own wellbeing, but to bring a new, moral view of the self to the world. If not for us, women would not have had an ally in proving to straight men how many men think and feel about themselves. It took gay men struggling with our feelings to enlighten straight men on how they could make a better, more lasting peace with one another. If we can help straight men understand and control themselves, women and children worldwide would reap the rewards.

There had been in a bad marriage between the masculine and feminine sides of my self. But it was something I couldn't talk about until I knew how to put it into words.

Because of my confusion about what was going on inside of me, I behaved like a wild child publically in defiance of my inner parents ($x + y$) who were constantly bickering. In the dream, "I" was their child looking down into their bedroom. I was the personification of a moral position that was itself too young and undeveloped in me to be put into words. I could only observe what was happening inside me.

By learning how to internalize my inner parents as "wisdom" (y) and "love" (x) rather than "*slob*" and "*bitch*," I was able to guide my self toward greater self-esteem.

Family values begin with your inner family. You have to pursue the voices of your "me" "myself" and "I" despite the darkness within you. You have to learn to live together with your *selves* in peace. The inner "we" has to face the world as a nuclear family of cooperative voices.

That little man in my dream who cheated on his quarrelsome wife, the woman who only argued using silent gestures of disapproval that filled the room with negativity, were my inner parents, and I looked down on them in my dream.

I was bigger than that. I was bigger than them. But there are many people who are acting out the " x " or " y " side of themselves in society, not in their dreams. They're playing out the roles of their head and heart, unaware of that their wise, inner child is watching. They're trying to work out their inner issues on the outside world so that their inner child will see what they're doing and stop it.

Although I was a sissy growing up; afraid of my own shadow; afraid to speak out and take responsibility for my opinions – I've come to see myself as much more than male or female today. Now I identify with the "1" in the equation $(y + x) = 1$, not the variables. For me today $(x + y) < 1$. My soul is greater than the combined force of my

thoughts and feelings. My belief in me is stronger than any other force within me.

Granted, I may use body language to express myself in ways that may come across as feminine to some. My voice may be smooth and silky rather than rough and gruff. My feelings may be more colorful, nurturing and motherly than most men express. My head may sit above my heart, like a dominant male towering over a manipulative female. But my soul is bigger than them both.

42. Spiritual Chemistry 101

Until high school, I'd been a straight "A" student. But in the eleventh grade I hit a class I just couldn't ace – chemistry. And it was then that I realized there were subjects in *life* I'd never be able to master. I'd be lucky if I'd just squeak through some subjects in the school of self-love with a passing grade.

Although I felt guilty for breaking my straight "A" streak in the eleventh grade, I'm over the need to be outstanding at everything I do. I'm content to be fantastic at what I do best. For all the rest, I make sure I have money enough to buy the services I need or reliable friends to help out when I can't do what has to be done.

"Common" sense always made me believe I could do anything if I tried, and I did get a "B" in chemistry because I tried. But with my kind of problems in perfectionism, living a meaningful life meant having to develop "uncommon" sense.

I was never one who sought too much in the way of knowledge; I wanted wisdom, and, fortunately, with the number of mistakes I made in life, corrected and learned from, I found myself with plenty of wisdom to draw on. But wisdom wasn't enough. You can know what *not* to do, and still be miserable. You can be brilliant in telling people what doesn't work, without knowing what does.

My class in sophomore, high school chemistry ruined my perception of me as someone who could intellectually master anything I put my mind to. My best thinking got me into problems I couldn't solve in my head. The really hard problems have to be solved from your conscience, not your head or heart. I couldn't only *think* well of myself; I had to *feel* good about myself to motivate me to do what's right.

Foresight brought me financial security. But my mind couldn't anticipate fluctuations in the stock market or health issues caused by pollutants. My mind couldn't anticipate every act of God. There were

sides to life I couldn't control. Life is like a war that has to be fought on many fronts if you're going to come out a winner.

My heart was a whole, other subject I needed to elect to study to master life. I had to learn to feel good about myself because I couldn't believe in myself or make morally sound decisions if I didn't love myself.

You can do moderately well in high school chemistry and still come away feeling bad about yourself. You can have standards so high that you'll never be able to meet them. You can graduate your K-12 spiritual education and even commit to a higher education without liking the one you're with.

Anyone can get "a head" in life. Not everyone gets a heart. For that, you have to want to go to spiritual college and major in "you." You have to want to learn more about yourself than your mind can ever know.

The emotional tests of life are difficult because they have moral components connected to them. It may be immoral to hate yourself, but many smart people find themselves in difficult situations without being able to figure out what they're doing wrong. If you see yourself behaving unkindly toward others, that's a sure sign of some way in which you're betraying yourself. Conspiring with others is another sure sign that you're conspiring against yourself.

The only way to fight a war and win it is to fight your enemies with your heart open, not closed. You have to seek peace because your heart wants it. So long as you fight to express your enmity and spite, you're going to lose. And God will make sure that She makes your hateful attitude apparent to everyone to set an example.

Feelings are their own form of inner illumination. They're the *colored* lights of the heart, not the *white* light of intellectual illumination. These colored lights burn at differing emotional degrees of intensity. Some are hot; others are warm; some feelings are even quite cool. Shining these colored lights appropriately to each situation are moral decisions you have to learn to elicit. Your success in this regard will turn you into the personification of a rainbow. It'll give people hope.

It's a lot more morally complex to be spiritually colorful than it looks. It's easy to shine black (guilt) or white (love). It's easy to live in a world of shades of gray. Becoming a rainbow of hope is a privilege that has to be earned. Flashes of emotional color will enter your imagination unexpectedly, so watch for them. They're very important in proving to you that you're moving toward your destiny and not your fate.

If you feel sad, you should consciously endeavor to perceive the exact shade of blue you wish to express. If you feel anxious you should mix your emotional yellow (fear) and red (anger) until you have the burnt or bright orange that's most authentically describes you in that moment.

The chemistry class I took in the eleventh grade was a reminder that I couldn't solve my problems in life with a formal education. The swirling orange of "anxiety" and green of "envy" that created the sickening "worry" I suffered from getting a "B" in high school chemistry was recreated in adulthood when I had to take classes in *emotional* chemistry with men without blowing up every laboratory of love with inappropriate feelings.

We go into romantic relationships just to see what our experiments will produce. But the "theory" of the chemistry between two people is useless if you don't get into the lab alone to test your theories on your self. Do unto others as you would have *you* do unto *you*.

You can't learn about life from a book. Not even the Bible can turn the black and white of words on the page into colorful images that are emotionally meaningful and personal to you. You have to live life to come to know and love yourself.

What you won't learn from a book is that the experiments of romance begin in your soul where you mix your black and white thoughts (guilt and love) with your colorful feelings (fear, anger and sadness).

You're probably going to try making many people your soul mate before you realize you're the soul mate God gave you for life. You're learning to be comfortable with yourself *through* your relationships with others.

After experiments in youth in the laboratories of romantic love that made my ego grow and shrink wildly, like Alice in the rabbit hole, I chanced upon a formula of cake and cocktail at the age of 37 with my former partner that kept us together in a relatively stable relationship for quite some time. But by then, I wasn't a novice student of self-love anymore. I'd learned a bit about self-esteem and the greater responsibility to myself that only comes through trial and error.

Our separation fourteen years later felt like a looking glass shattered before my eyes. I watched my image of me break into a million shards. It wasn't just our relationship that was shattered. *I* was shattered.

There were pieces of me strewn all around, all with sharp edges. But they became a puzzle I never thought I'd be able to put

back together again, without cutting myself and bleeding inside even more.

The end of that relationship didn't spell the end of my feelings for him. He'd been a witness and contributor to a level of self-awareness I'd never want to deny, albeit now a level of self-love I've long since surpassed.

He was my partner for the lab work given me in my first class in romantic chemistry, a class I passed, albeit not with an outstanding grade. I'll never forget what I learned about me thanks to him. I'll always be grateful to the Teacher for putting us together for our lab assignments in the chemistry class of self-love.

But graduating that spiritual class enrolled me in the next, deeper level of self-love. In graduating *spiritual* high school with a "B" in *romantic* chemistry, I realized the world around me was a clue to the world transforming me within.

Although my boyfriend and I had been spiritual high school sweethearts, figuratively speaking, it was as if we had been accepted to different spiritual universities. Ironically, our paths had to part so we could continue to learn about ourselves separately.

Love never dies; it's always reborn onto higher levels of learning. A particular image you may have of yourself may shatter, but in the shards of glass you'll see yourself like a puzzle. You'll give up the perfect image you had of yourself when you looked in the mirror. You'll move on to a new metaphor the Teacher has prepared just for you.

43. Spiritual History

My father was like prince charming. He had good looks, money, power and a winning smile. He came from one of the wealthiest families in Lithuania and his whole family was treated like royalty by the Jewish community. In the 1930's, only two men in Lithuania had automobiles, the president of the country and my father. Women adored him; men envied him. He went to New York in the 1930's just to visit this country to learn English. But after a year here, the political situation became so bad at home that his family begged him to return to Lithuania to be with them. So, of course, he did.

After Poland was invaded in 1939, the Nazis and Christian-Lithuanian sympathizers with the Nazis worked together to round up the Jews into ghettos. My father's family found a secret hiding place

in the attic of a house in the Kaunas ghetto for themselves and the president of the Jewish community and his family.

Thanks to my father's family wealth and position, he was able to bribe Nazi guards into smuggling his two children and a niece out of the ghetto and into Catholic orphanages. Later, the ghetto was burned to the ground and those hiding out were captured, but the three children were saved. The rest were taken to concentration camp where everyone was sent up in smoke except my father and his nephew, the sixteen year-old brother of the niece he'd been able to smuggle into an orphanage.

The two of them were taken to Dachau Concentration Camp in southern Germany to labor in the Nazi war factory. And thanks to gold coins my father had swallowed before he was captured, he was able to bribe the guards in Dachau into changing his status from "Jew" to "Russian Political Dissident," and was given a job in a kitchen.

He still lost all his teeth to malnutrition in concentration camp, but he was at least able to stave off starvation. And he managed to keep his nephew alive as well by getting the boy an extra meal from time to time.

I remember that my father always walked proudly, head high, body erect, despite age and infirmity. He was always impeccably dressed, with a relaxed smile on his lips in spite of his porcelain teeth that shined a bit too brightly. Strangers immediately sensed his aura of strength and determination.

But his airs embarrassed me. I thought he stuck out in the crowd. I thought he stood *too* tall. I thought his smile shined a little too bright to be sincere. I thought he laughed very loud, as though death and Nazis couldn't outsmart him.

He wasn't what I'd call a happy man. He was a bundle of inconsistencies. His ego vacillated because of the Alice in Wonderland "cake and cocktail" he consumed without rational rhyme or good reason for his emotional size at any moment in time. He took up all the space in a room one minute and disappeared completely out of sight the next.

My mother grew up in a working class home in Munich, Germany. Her father was Protestant, a farmer's son who came to the big city and became a tram driver. Her mother was an Austrian-Jewish businesswoman, the daughter of a school principal. My grandmother had her family in Vienna moved to Munich and opened a cigar shop on her own.

My grandmother started my mother on the violin when my mother was just five years old in the hope that by becoming a

professional musician my mother would ascend the rigid class system in Germany to better herself. My mother was extremely gifted and excelled in her classical music studies, becoming a member of the Bavarian Youth Orchestra as a young child, a very prestigious achievement for anyone in those days, but especially for a girl and a Jew.

She was thrown out of public school and the youth orchestra at the age of thirteen for the “crime” of being Jewish. (And she didn’t even learn she was Jewish until a few weeks prior to that happening. Her mother had never told her of her religious origins. My mother was rudely awakened to her Jewish identity in 1933 at the age of thirteen, before Krystallnacht in 1938, the German pogrom in which 95 Jews were reported killed, 30,000 Jews were arrested, 1,000 synagogues were burned, 7,000 Jewish businesses were destroyed and all Jews were expelled from public schools and public service.)

In 1942, she refused to submit to the Nazis when they ordered her to show up for transport to concentration camp on a train scheduled to leave Munich a day after her mother was scheduled for transport. Instead, she tore off the yellow star she’d been ordered to wear at all times in public and ran from village to village during the War to evade the Gestapo. For the most part, it was Polish refugee girls working on farms in Germany who befriended her.

She made her way back to Munich in 1945 when she saw the war was near an end. Dachau was a concentration camp located in a village of the same name. Dachau is virtually a suburb of Munich today. My mother and father met two months after the War at a makeshift Jewish organization in Munich to reunite survivors.

Their romance was the fairy tale dream of a prince and a princess surrounded by the chars of the world’s most horrible conflagration. It was a story of two people who didn’t come together; they were flung together. They, like most other Jews who survived the War, were desperate for intimacy, for someone to share their pain and suffering with.

My parents couldn’t see then how poorly suited they were for one another. They just needed someone, anyone, to have and to hold. Had it not been for those horrible circumstances, they never would have met and probably would never have been attracted to one another. They came from two different worlds.

I was born in New York in 1952. But by the time I was three years old, my mother was already very upset with their marriage. But she got physically sick rather than admit the emotional pain she was in and the mistaken choice of husbands she’d made. When the doctors

told her she needed a thyroid operation, she assumed it would solve her marital problems as well. But the problem figuratively started in her throat, and it got stuck there.

Her emotional problem was that she had no voice in her marriage. The problem was that she couldn't tell herself how disappointed she was with the domineering husband she'd chosen. The *real* problem was that women in those days couldn't speak up.

The operation turned out to be a disaster because the doctor mistakenly cut a nerve to her vocal chords. That left her mute. While *I* was in the process of learning to speak, *she* lost her voice. And the emotional result of her trauma was that I concluded that *her* inability to literally speak constrained my ability to express myself from my heart. She became *literally* mute; I became *emotional* mute.

Although my mother's voice miraculously returned a few years later, my ability to retrieve my feelings did not. It took a lifetime for me to heal the chord I figuratively severed that kept me from speaking from my heart. It took me decades to equate *her* emotional problems with *mine*.

There was so much I wanted to say, but I had no way to say it. Learning to speak from my heart was terribly difficult for me; but it's probably difficult for a lot of people. For people like us, emotional fluency is like learning a foreign language. It takes years of practice. It takes years of studying lists of words to find their deeper, emotional meaning. It takes a whole new syntax superimposed upon what we could say before.

Spiritual history repeats itself. The lessons of mothers and sons continue down through the ages. Spiritual history is a relay race. Your mother passes you the baton, and you run with it to the finish line. There isn't a son on earth who isn't, in his own crazy way, trying to make his mother proud.

44. Walking to School

As a child I didn't have to walk long distances to get to school as previous generations had done. Society made it easy for me to get my intellectual needs met; the quality of my public school education was not only adequate; it and convenient.

The ease with which I got a public school education and my success as a student of the mind made me think I was well prepared for a good future. But in fact, my mother's training and my public school education didn't help me conquer suffering or prepare me for the meaning of my life. My mother's training and my public school

education taught me how to make a living. They didn't teach me to live as though my life mattered to the world.

My mother provided me with a safe home in which to shelter my body. Public school gave me a moderately safe environment in which to explore my mind. And yet my heart felt woefully vulnerable and unprepared for what life threw me. I concluded that "feeling" was the most dangerous and seditious can of worms anyone could open. If the meaning of life was to learn to love *myself*, then I wanted nothing to do with the "love" of life because I was so afraid to feel.

As a child, I slept well, but woke up in terror every morning in having to go to school. As an adult, I learned to save my fears for the middle of the night. But fear doesn't frighten me anymore. I'm used to being afraid. It's anger and sorrow that frighten me. Anger makes me spiteful and sorrow makes me go crazy. I can't deal with large doses of anger or sorrow.

The heart is a muscle you need to *use* to develop control over it. Physical activity exercises the heart and makes it stronger. But I needed to bench-press my feelings, and that I was too lazy to do. The muscles of the body that I developed while in high school to make me a strong ballet dancer did nothing to overcome my *emotional* weaknesses. I held myself in such a tight, habitual, emotional grip that I had no clue what it felt like to be in the moment without becoming "drunk" on the power of the present.

Only after I lost my mind was I free to feel my feelings. Only once I lost all restraint and did exactly as I pleased, did I realize what an enormous relief it was to be insane. Relaxing the mental grip I held over my heart gave me a tremendous high and sense of autonomy. It was the "manic" in me that pushed me out of my "depressions." And then it was the depression that made me strive to become manic again.

"Feeling" became crazy making because I'd been so unused to feeling anything at all. But feeling the powerful urges that were being unleashed in me was still better than the low-level anxiety, worry and resentment that had filled every moment until then.

I had to learn about the "power of the present" in gradual stages just not to get stupid. Like most people, I allowed drugs and alcohol to slide me gently into the moment, but I didn't learn how to get there without external help. Unfortunately, drugs and alcohol only exacerbate the stupidity the ensued when my thoughts, feelings, desires and beliefs collided unconsciously inside me.

When my feelings began to surface, there was really no other option for me other than to go crazy. Even though I didn't like the experience of feeling, I swore I'd never allow myself to go back to that

iron grip I'd held on my heart that had left me apathetic to almost everything. After a childhood that had taught me to feel *embarrassed* by my body; *ashamed* of my behavior; and *humiliated* by my desire to feel clean inside and out – embracing my feelings brought all that guilt to consciousness in the form of a wild, whirlwind of inner, dark forces.

My inner environment came to life like the weather. “Tornado,” “hurricane” and “monsoon” were words that suddenly took on personal meaning. Even the words “flood” “drought” and “volcanic eruption” said something about the world around me that I could suddenly take personally.

| | | |
|--------------------|---|-------------------|
| Sunshine | = | Happiness |
| Clouds | = | Problems/Concerns |
| Wind | = | Unseen Forces |
| Rain | = | Sorrow |
| Snow | = | Apathy |
| Tornado | = | Frustration |
| Hurricane /Typhoon | = | Indignation |
| Monsoon | = | Exasperation |
| Flood | = | Rage |
| Drought | = | Depression |
| Volcanic Eruption | = | Anger |
| Rainbow | = | Hope |

Once drugs opened me up to my feelings, I could be an emotional prince one moment and an emotional pauper the next. I went emotionally bankrupt on “fun” and then borrowed “good cheer” from others with heartfelt promises to repay them back when “happiness” would arrive and I felt like a millionaire again. I lived on the emotional credit of anyone I could find who'd pay the bills my heart was accruing.

I was an emotionally poor man who looked for any opportunity to feel rich. I felt disenfranchised and was therefore jealous of the emotionally enfranchised. I loved the guy at the top because I so hated being one of the guys at the bottom. I loved anyone with authority because he signified the wealth and power I hoped to someday attain. Nobody can know the poverty I felt in my heart once I began to feel, and nobody can know how powerless I later felt over my feelings.

I didn't want to have to tell myself *what* to feel, but feeling “vindictive” was certainly a very strong feeling that came up after so long having felt nothing at all. I didn't have the heart to tell myself sternly what to feel after the childhood I'd been through. I needed to

indulge myself emotionally. After a lifetime of feeling next to nothing at all, I wasn't in any mood to put my heart through the same kind of discipline my mother had put my head through. I had a laundry list of feelings inside me that weren't charitable or kind. And they needed to come out.

You can't be a member of the Judeo-Christian culture and profess to be a good Jew or Christian if you're emotionally impoverished or using drugs and alcohol to slip quietly into or out of the moment. You can't claim to have the head of a Jew or the heart of a Christian if you can't bridge the Hebrew and Christian Bibles with personal application of their meaning in your life.

Religion isn't something that happens only on the weekends. Religion has to be a Monday to Sunday belief system that moves you through the week from the inside, out. Believing in God isn't like a stroll through the park or like walking to school. It's more like the Israelite, 40-year journey than non-believers will ever be able to understand.

Naturally, I liked myself better when I felt like an emotional tycoon than a beggar. I particularly liked the power I felt when I felt an injustice was being perpetrated against someone who didn't deserve it. Because all my sorrow for me was projected onto others, when I felt sorry for other person, my sorrow made it to what I thought was the surface of my feelings.

Feeling that I was fair to *myself* wasn't yet of interest to me. Helping others overcome *their* unfair, calloused or prejudiced feelings was easier to fight for because with it came a sense of emotional rectitude. I didn't think there'd be much profit or interest in me fighting with my conscience over the right feeling for me in any particular moment.

I couldn't really trust my conscience to be *my* guide because I made other people's suffering the frame around everything I believed in. I couldn't ask myself if there was a perpetrator in me doing to me what those I felt sorry for were suffering from. Self-ignorance is our greatest enemy. I had to internalize the perpetrator and victim of every situation around me to teach my conscience to become *my* guide.

I didn't have to walk to school growing up in L.A. There was my mother with the car when I was little, and there was a school bus later on. I wasn't thrown out of school for being Jewish, and so long as I kept my homosexuality a deep, dark secret that nobody could know, I was assured of getting through public school intact.

But to accomplish that, I had to beat myself up unmercifully... I had to hate that part of me until only my own death would insure that my hateful feelings toward myself wouldn't get out.

45. New Math

There were certain classes in public school it was easy to see built one upon the other, that one level needed to be mastered before I could continue on to the next. Math was a good example of that sort of subject. In the first grade, I learned to add. In the second grade, I learned to subtract. In the third, it was the multiplication table I had to master, and in fourth, long division.

The subject of self-love began like the study of arithmetic. I had to experience learning to love in consecutive stages without fully understanding where my studies would lead me because nobody talked about the process at that time.

My parents had begun my spiritual education by demonstrating love through deeds, and I mirrored back to them what I saw them doing even though I didn't do so because I *felt* like it. I simply did what I had to do out of duty.

The next step was doing the things I'd been taught to do with feeling. I began to feel good about getting "A's" in school because I had a natural ability to do so. And the real reward for good grades was self-love, not the accolades of others. I didn't need to be told that I was smart. I needed to tell myself that I was beloved. But that's the kind of corny crap nobody wants to hear.

As a teenager, I felt good because I could achieve orgasm. Then moving out of my mother's home made me feel good about myself. Drugs and alcohol brought sensations that felt very good as a young man. And, of course, there was dance.

The list of things I felt good about continued to grow until I found I didn't feel that good anymore about the simple things that had given me pleasure growing up. Nothing seemed to work anymore. I felt overloaded. The system failed me.

My mother valued my success in me putting food on my own table, a roof over my own head, clothes on my own back and diplomas on my walls. In giving myself the *things* I needed and wanted, she celebrated all the *things* I did for myself.

But my mother inadvertently also taught me to appreciate even deeper levels of love, even though she couldn't talk about them. She taught me that compliments; attentiveness; good listening skills;

giving of my time; affection; forgiveness; and promises fulfilled - were also tokens of love.

What she couldn't put into words was that appreciation of these abstract aspects of love went beyond duty. I had to practice these abstract virtues on others so I could eventually earn the right to consciously perfect them on myself. Only once I saw how difficult it was to gift *myself* in these virtuous ways could I appreciate these gifts *from* others *to* others and from *others* *to* me.

To honor my mother, I had to gift *myself* with these abstract rewards whether the food on my table was organic, the roof over my head was in a fashionable zip code, the clothes on my back were designer made and there was a doctorate degree on my wall.

My mother did tell me that if I loved *others*, they'd return my love with a love of their own. But that simply wasn't true *enough*. When people haven't learned to gift *themselves* with the immaterial rewards of life, they aren't in a position to give them to *you*. They may take your gifts for granted.

Many people aren't even good at being heartfelt in the ways your mother taught you to be. Becoming a policeman of sincerity, cruising around looking for offenders to arrest, didn't help me in the least. It was *my* sincerity I needed to police, not *others*'.

"Cynicism" is the result of discovering that others don't feel the same way you do. "Hopelessness" is the result of not finding other ways to appreciate their feelings. And "prejudice" is based on the conclusion that they'll never find ways of appreciating you.

Once I was honest enough to admit that I really didn't care much about others because I didn't care whether I lived or died, my authenticity felt oddly refreshing. You can't be authentic if you aren't honest about what you *think* and sincere about how you *feel*.

People who hate me because I'm gay or Jewish have a problem with prejudice, not me. Half the world hates me because I'm gay. The other half hates me because I'm Jewish. So I've had to look for my own way to love myself.

I had to believe God doesn't play dice with *my* universe. I had to come to believe that everything I'm experiencing is a meaningful lesson from Her in bringing me to awareness of my two worlds. The world around me that I share is a clue to my world within. I'm a specialist, not a generalist. I'm here to accomplish certain tasks, but not others. As I compare my inner world to the way other people think, feel and believe, I find that I'm being trained to be a very special way.

There are many who claim to believe in God when they haven't yet developed a viable link to their own soul. They *think* they believe or they *feel* they believe. But they don't realize that there's a level of belief that comes with self-awareness that makes belief even more real. They don't realize they have doubts about whether they *believe* they believe.

The needs of the poor, uneducated and socially disenfranchised begin within. You can't overcome your prejudice against the poor until you've seen your own spiritual poverty. You can't promote education for others until you become the most respected teacher in your life. And you can't appreciate the situation of the disenfranchised until you can admit how separated you became from your self over time.

You can't say you trust God with all your head, heart and soul and then cross your fingers that you'll be able to manage with what you were given below the belt. You're a shmuck if you do. Give all that you've got to your self through thoughtful, emotional and spiritual regard for you, and then dispense what you have left for others. Your desires, wants, impulses and urges aren't nearly as important as you make them.

Most people are living in a San Francisco inner climate and they don't even realize it. It's often foggy inside. They can't see very far ahead. Their thoughts can only just make out the general contour of the ideas before them. And until the fog lifts on those rare sunny days, they have to move slower and more cautiously. If you happen to have an L.A. disposition filled with blue skies overhead most of the time, it's going to be smog, not fog, that clouds your insight, but the rationale remains the same.

My habitual, emotional relationship with myself was the result of a dysfunctional family dynamic I'd copied from my parents and then gave no further thought to. Without questioning the thoughts that came to mind when they came to mind, I was moving forward on automatic pilot.

Today I have to look for something different in the way I think, feel, desire or believe every day. I have to see changes in my behavior, not just my philosophy of life. If I'm not improving myself, I'm standing still. If I'm not growing in some way, I'm withering inside.

There's nothing wrong with habits so long as you appreciate them a little more day-by-day. The accomplishments you achieved in the past will bore you today. Not even the drugs and alcohol you may have used has the same affect anymore. You don't have to spice up

your life with new and exciting ways of doing things if you improve the thoughtful attention you give to yourself each moment of the day.

I grew up to judge myself more for the way I treated *me* than for the way I treated *others*. I wasn't ever that worried about how I treated others because I always felt I treated them much better than I treated me. I had to take the risk of investing more of my attention in me.

To honor my parents, I had to learn to apply their ideas of wisdom and self-love more generously to myself than they dared imagine. I had to believe in myself, not in the accolades others poured on me. I had to give to me until I could see that I was giving, *for* giving, and *forgiving*.

The psychic damage I did to myself by refusing to question my habitual emotional stance turned me into one more member of the walking wounded. Upon the scars I had from my parents' upbringing, I inflicted my own cuts that went even deeper. Was it any wonder I had been so calloused to my emotional wellbeing and had felt so spiritually unclean?

I needed encouragement to go beyond my own emotional boundaries with a new sense of curiosity and wonder. To evolve into a better me, I couldn't just reject, disdain, dismiss or deny myself. I had to learn when to chew myself out and when to accept myself as I was. I had to look at myself *morally* to come to believe in me *emotionally*. I had to push myself to think good thoughts and feel compassionately toward me if I was going to judge myself admirable. Self-respect isn't as easy as it looks. But self-respect is the only agent I've found that's been strong enough to clean up *my* act.

I spent my youth *tolerating* myself; I spent my formative adult years striving to *accept* myself. But in middle age I was ready to face myself with a philosophy that made my life truly exciting. I improved my conscience so that I'd be able to *admire* myself. There was no joy in waking up in the morning being me if I didn't wake up to someone I could admire.

When I forced myself to change my attitude toward me, my mood changed. My inner world warmed up and the fog lifted. Just as the planet is going through a warming process, so did I. And although there were parts of me that had become parched from depression, other parts of me were facing grueling tornadoes, floods and hurricane force winds. Acknowledging these changes to my inner weather was even harder than admitting the planet is undergoing climatic change.

If life is, as Shakespeare concluded, "a dream surrounded by sleep," I had to learn to wake up in the dream state of everyday

thinking and the monotony of habitual feelings. There was something terribly important happening inside me that I hadn't been paying attention to. There was someone inside I hadn't gotten to know who was turning out to be a very important person in my life. "Getting to know myself" was turning into an adventure...

I couldn't yet see the spiritual strategy behind my moves because I couldn't get a greater view of how I was playing life like a game of chess. I couldn't see the intelligence and intuitive brilliance in my choices because I still only felt like a pawn in my own game. I didn't realize that the pieces that moved me forward in outer reality had been fashioned first for the board within.

It was no coincidence they call people like me "queens." We have extraordinary versatility when it comes to moving across our inner board. We may not move like a knight in shining armor, with two steps in one direction and one step to the side, but we can certainly recreate the grandiose advances of any bishop or castle.

Loss is spiritual subtraction. Loss is the Tree of Knowledge with one less fruit on it, a fruit that can never be returned to the tree. I was the personification of loss. I was running out of time. And the frustration, irritation and anxiety of aging were the emotional part of my fall from grace. I was becoming human. I was feeling mortal. I was someday going to die.

When I grew up in the 1960's, being gay forced me to build a secret, spiritual home within me rather than around me. I couldn't live out my dreams of expressing my love for men at that time. Society was too dangerous and cruel to people like me to allow me the freedom to be myself anywhere at anytime. I had no choice but to live in the closet until I determined for myself that it was safe to come out.

Being closeted protected me from the harshness and ridicule of the world. In my secret, hiding place within, I found I could be myself without feeling physically or emotionally threatened. But my closet was emotionally small, spiritually confined and sexually cramped. It was dark and foreboding. But it was the safest space I could find at that time.

I had no idea that when I came out of the closet, I'd have to give up so much of that safety to struggle for tolerance and acceptance from others. I had no idea that once I found the courage to be myself despite the straight world as it was then, I'd graduate to my next higher level in the spiritual coursework I was being given.

Of course I had no opportunity as a gay boy to explore dating; to learn the romantic social skills straights afford themselves; or develop the long-lasting relationships I yearned for with one special

man. My romantic crushes, hopes and desires had to remain in my imagination for many years to come.

In 1971, I came out of the closet despite all the straight bullies around me. I took a stand by approving of gay love despite the jeers, jokes and jabs of the straight world. The ridicule and intolerance of religious people only made me want to band together more closely with others like me for our mutual protection.

The Teacher works in mysterious ways. She brings those students up to the front from the back row who have a deep conviction to love and to following Her teachings in new and creative ways. The hypocrisy of the class clowns at the back of the room is so apparent nowadays that it needs no comment, but the disregard and disrespect for learning of those who sit in the middle of the room is still in need of discussion.

The “C” students of life are no pleasure to be around for very long. They don’t come to class prepared. They don’t care if they learn about themselves, or not. They spend more time wasting time than they’d have to spend studying if they simply applied themselves a little to the subject of self-love.

In the 1990’s, the Teacher matched me up with my former partner and together we worked for a piece of the American pie. We applied for domestic partnership, bought a house on a hill and created a nuclear family made up of just us two. With the love of a good man by my side, we proved to the world that gay love doesn’t have to be tragic.

Coming out began as an exploratory journey out of my head and into my heart. Coming out started the spark in my heart, an ember that grew into a flame. And over time, that ignited into a spiritual fire that would warm me in all inclement weather.

Spiritual math didn’t change the literal result of “one plus one” in the outer world. Survival is always a problem of addition and subtraction, gains and losses. I had to learn to use numbers emotionally rather than just rationally. I had to learn how to feel about $(x + y) < 1$. I had to come to know my thoughts and feelings while still believing that I was more than that. I had to believe that I had a soul.

Losing my mind had been a terrible lesson in *mental* subtraction. Losing my partner had been a terrible lesson in *emotional* subtraction. Not having been given a religious education growing up seemed like a spiritual loss as well. But realizing those losses made it possible for me to see how God was working in my life anyway. I had to add up my losses before I could see all the gains I’d made in other

areas of my life. God has had a special plan for me, and my losses have helped me determine what that plan isn't.

Yes, Einstein came up with the famous equation " $E=MC^2$." But today I can say that the most difficult mathematical equation I've been able to answer thanks to my personal relationship with numbers is:

$$\frac{(1+1)}{1} = 2$$

(A head and a heart balanced by a good conscience will make you twice as successful as you were before.)

46. Spiritual English

As a child, I didn't realize how much I loved languages. Every train of thought was a series of cars filled with meaning that were coupled together into sentences that traveled to mysterious destinations I wanted to visit. And although I learned foreign languages to discover the spiritual importance of speech, English was the system of communication that most inspired me to discover my self.

Studying grammar doesn't have to be a roller coaster ride with sharp bends and precarious plunges. The definition of words doesn't have to be a merry-go-round looking at language from dizzying views with an increasingly nauseating perspective. Through words, you mind can learn to dance. For me, the English language and ballet are equivalent modes of self-expression. Words move me.

I'm fascinated by words. Even the sounds of foreign languages that hold no meaning for me are magical. I intuitively always knew that all language is a gift from God, that the words we use aren't our own. They're tools from God that we learn to assemble. By seeing the power of words for others, we're given the privilege of dreaming how our own words might some day affect our self.

I loved to listen to my parents speak in their native tongues because the boxcars they filled, not only held goods that were so different and unintelligible to the goods in my own trains of thought, but, from what I could tell, their boxcars were coupled together in such a vastly different order on their tracks.

Although I was fascinated by every train of thought that passed me by when my parents spoke to one another in a language I didn't understand, I felt I could perceive the direction of the track on which their trains were going. I was amazed at how I could sense their

emotional messages, the direction their trains were headed. Often, I could even anticipate a train wreck long before it occurred.

Reason never goes in completely logical and predictably straight lines because even the most reasonable of ideas transported by a train of thought have to go where the tracks of emotions have already been laid. I could sense the emotions of my family when they spoke, even if I couldn't speak the languages they were employing. I instinctively knew where they had tracks and where they didn't.

Laying down new track is a painstaking process that begins in infancy, but it continues throughout one's life. Many of the tracks my thoughts habitually used had been going in irrational directions, and I hadn't known it. They'd been laid down long ago based on experiences that had impressed me either positively or negatively, and I later found myself still going in those directions, not realizing that they were taking my thoughts to destinations that weren't where I wanted them to end up anymore.

God may have made us in Her "image," but we can augment that original plan by taking our thoughts in so many new, creative directions to perceive Her ongoing intentions for us. The key to knowing ourselves lies in our imagination where we contemplate our spiritual construction and intellectual production.

Verbal "locomotion" fascinated me as a child because I never really knew where I'd begin a thought and where I'd end up at the end of the trip I'd take on it. So many of my mind's meanderings were like short, train trips with transfers onto other trains, trips strung together without conscious understanding of the myriad emotional directions my thoughts could go in.

The construction of a sentence is a miraculous experience if you listen to your words as they come out of your mouth. But when you contemplate your thinking patterns by observing many sentences uttered internally one after another, the intentions of your subconscious becomes a maddening clue to what your unconscious is really trying to tell you.

Although I was too young to put my inner experiences into words when I first rode these rails as a new commuter, I can now see communication as a railroad system of expression that mirrors everything about what it means to be human. For me, language reflects the image in which God made us. It's easy for me to see that **"IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS THE WORD."** [John 1:1]

I've always been in awe of what I've known was the Supreme intelligence behind speech. I'm amazed at what I now believe to be so, that language is first organized by the right side of the brain

(emotions) and then executed by the left (intellect). In this way, our thoughts tell us more about what we're feeling than the logic of our thinking patterns.

I'm appalled at how man often considers himself to be acting reasonably without realizing he's headed in the wrong direction. Reason without regard to feelings often leads to immoral conduct. Much of the history of the human race is exemplified in this statement.

People who try to rationalize their hatred of Jews don't see how emotionally they hold their argument. People who try to rationalize their hatred of gays using the Bible to defend their position don't see how emotionally they hold that argument either. Prejudice against women and ethnic minorities are also based on a form of logic that's emotionally headed for a train wreck because those tracks are going the wrong way.

The key to overcoming prejudice lies in the heart, not the head. But you can't get people to believe that unless you argue prejudice from a spiritual stance. You can't even fight your own heart from your head. You have to trick your heart into perceiving your hatred of your self from your soul. You have to change your perception of God to change your perception of yourself.

(I recommend you read my books The Forbidden Fruit's Perspective; Torah for Straight People and A Guest at Their Table; My Gay-Jewish Review of Christ's Feast of Self-Love. These books address prejudice from a religious perspective in the hope of moving religious people's *souls* rather than their *head* or *heart*.)

Reason won't end discrimination. Logic won't heal the world. It'll always be crazy individuals who are filled with the spirit of goodness who aren't afraid to speak from their heart who are going to make this world a better place. People who combine rational thoughts with loving feelings to produce soulful beliefs will lead this world toward greater sanity.

As a child, learning to read was frustrating for me, not because I had a hard time with the decoding process that brings thoughts off the page; but because I was so confused by the feelings that accompanied those thoughts. I couldn't understand where the author's thinking was headed because I perceived so many possible emotional directions to go with the thoughts on the page. Unless I could literally hear the nuances of the intonation of the words, I was at a loss as to the emotional message being conveyed.

Ideas in print sometimes sent my trains of thought in directions that were unplanned, irrational or confusing. I got off my trains of thought at stations that I found more interesting than the destination

the author's thoughts were going to, or I took the right train going in the wrong direction and got lost.

I didn't have the same problem with oral communication because the intonation and visual clues on the face of the speaker helped enormously in appreciating the emotional intention being conveyed. The problem I had with oral communication was that my own desires overrode my observations of the emotional content transmitted by the other person.

The "training" process of childhood was nerve-wracking. Being good was harder than it looked. I had to square the truth with my desires, and my desire wasn't to know what people were feeling. It was much easier just to know what they thought and ignore their feelings...

If my mother had had a greater understanding of the operating system behind the human condition, she could have questioned my intentions and lack of emotional response with greater insight, rather than simply punish me for doing what I pleased. She could have discovered the feelings more so than the desires that influenced my decisions. That would have helped me understand myself more holistically. But that was a level of sophistication in parenting that wasn't yet available to humanity, let alone my mother.

As a child, obedience to doing things my mother's way at all times created an inner tension that I struggled with long after I left home. Having my trains of thought "trained" led to exasperation, irritation and weariness on both our parts. But it also led to shame for both of us when I didn't comply with her desires. I may not have been allowed to do as I pleased growing up, but the tension and feelings of shame, exasperation, irritation and weariness of childhood didn't go away when I became an adult.

I didn't realize that complying or not complying with my mother's desires didn't make any conscious difference when it came to understanding how the forces within me worked. I couldn't get a sense of the big picture through obedience or disobedience. I couldn't envision the overall operation of the communication system by being a "good little boy."

As an adult, I eventually made it to the locomotive of my trains of thought to engineer the process myself. Once I could tell my "self" what to think and what to feel, I thought the problem was over. But, in fact, the challenge had just begun. Obeying me wasn't any easier than obeying others.

I derailed many trains of thought when alone because I didn't know what I was doing. I thought too fast, or I chose tracks that didn't

get me to sincere and authentic destinations. Food, drugs, alcohol and people were ways to *manage* my excitement, but they didn't teach me how to *master* it.

In truth, everyone believes that life is "meaningless." They just don't know what that word means or when to use it. "Stainless" steel doesn't mean that the steel doesn't stain. It means that it stains "less." When your cup feels full, your life is meaningful. When your cup feels less than full, your mind comes to the conclusion that life is meaning "less." And you should commend yourself for thinking so...

Paranoia is the result of having no one left to fear but yourself. Once I got through my paranoia, I looked back at what I'd been through, and as painful as it had been, it had been worth the struggle to discover the difference between fear and paranoia from within. Once I could see I was more *paranoid* of myself than I was *afraid* of anyone else on earth, I knew I could deal with both feelings at their source.

The inner winds that bring the rains of sorrow, tornadoes of frustration, hurricanes of indignation and monsoons of exasperation are all internal weather conditions that speak to you from within yourself. Even if you choose to major in emotional meteorology in the school of self-love, you still won't be able to predict the weather within you. But, at least, you'll be able to report it.

"Spiritual English" will prepare you for a job in journalism of the self. You'll be able to report the news about yourself to yourself. And if your inner weather doesn't pan out as you predict, you'll only have yourself to blame.

When you can't figure out the difference between what you're thinking and feeling, you can't do much about differentiating "fear" from "paranoia." You can't tell yourself that you love "yourself" until you can prove to yourself that your feelings for you are sincere. When you find a raincloud suddenly coming toward you from your horizon, and you don't seek shelter, you know you still have a lot to learn about your inner climate.

Being sincere with yourself is just the beginning of a lifelong love affair with you. You often see people who seem very confident in the everyday world who become frightened and morose when unexpected feelings arise. You might expect to see that in children who've only been here on earth a short period of time, but adults should know more about how they feel.

It's understandable that sickness triggers paranoia, fear of our self, on top of our fears of all the other things that can negatively affect us in this world. When we get seriously sick, we suddenly have to deal with the one person we didn't expect to screw us over. "Illness"

and “dying” are important classes in the school of self-love. They teach us to appreciate ourselves. Without a personal understanding of these words, they remain “meaning *less*.”

Defective trains of thought or broken tracks of feelings don’t usually cause the problems behind most aberrant behaviors. Most people conduct themselves without having been given clear instructions on how they operate. They’re trying to play with a spiritual train set without knowing the metaphoric meaning of each of the pieces.

If people spent more time teaching one another to believe in the importance of every choice they make because it has moral meaning, they could then teach themselves to judge their own behavior and fix their trains and tracks themselves. They could figure out the problem they’re having and not step on a boxcar out of anger like a toy they’re sick of playing with or bend a portion of the track out of frustration. The spiritual, transportation system we’ve all been given is an educational toy given to every one of us to discover the moral meaning of life.

When I can look out the window of the locomotive of my trains of thought, I find I’m interested in the tracks ahead of me because others have travelled those same tracks. This is how I found the inspiration to honor my father and mother. When I look out the caboose, I find myself interested in the tracks behind me that others’ trains will some day travel. This is how I learned to express my generosity of spirit to those who’ll come after me.

Our trains of thought carry passengers and goods from one location to another. Some people will do better at constructing ideas, others skyscrapers. Some will love animals. Others will love God. It’s not what you think or do, or whom you love that matters. What matters is that you appreciate the words you use when speaking to yourself.

Some people are optimists. Others are pessimists. I’m an ameliorist. As I improve myself the more hopeful I become about the future of humanity.

The extended metaphor of railroad “switches” that take trains from one track onto another is easy to describe, but difficult to master unless you’re committed to the idea of moving your self forward through the landscape of your imagination to new places using your feelings to guide your thinking.

It’s not difficult to consciously switch from one feeling onto another to take a train of thought in an entirely different direction, even though there’ll be some internal friction caused in the process.

You may even be able to switch back and forth from one track to another for a while. But when that train of thought has moved so far in a particular direction that there's no junction where that thought can go back to a previous feeling it was on before, you have to decide what action you're going to take.

On Saturdays, my day of rest, God often gives me an enhanced picture of my inner landscape that maps the stations I've been to all week. From this bird's eye view of my inner travels the previous week, I can see where I went wrong – what switch I operated that took a particular train of thought to an unintended station. But I can't usually see the moral mistake that caused me to make that choice. That's something I often have to question after the fact. That's a view of my inner landscape that exemplifies importance for me of keeping the Sabbath holy...

These moral "switches" are critical to keeping my trains of thought committed to a time schedule so they arrive and depart in an orderly fashion in accordance with the promises I've made to others. Mistakes that take trains of thought in the wrong direction and bring passengers (concepts) and goods (impulses) to the wrong station may not seem serious when viewed internally, but they can have negative consequences in the external world. When I obsess over these little errors of judgment in my inner world, it really means I need to review the junction where I switched that train of thought onto a track going another way.

These visualization techniques will help you extend the metaphor of 'thoughts as trains' to make you a more intelligent and caring person. Even if you decide not to use this metaphor, you'll find that others will. You'll see how advertising, journalism, politics and religion is subtly influencing you with their understanding of the human landscape. Therefore, it would be better to learn to think in pictures if you want to increase your ability to love yourself. A picture of you is worth a thousand words.

My understanding of the railroad analogy developed very slowly. I'm now accustomed to a certain amount of mystery and surprise when extended views of this metaphor arise week after week. I'm more excited about the discovery process.

There's usually a station or two each week I never previously pulled into. There's usually a switch I used at a particular junction I didn't know about before. I'm a work in progress...

Growing up, I was more interested in grammar than literature. I think that was because "grammar" focuses on the order in which the boxcars of trains of thought are connected to one another (syntax).

“Literature” deals more with the railroad switches that change the direction of trains of thought and loading and unloading the goods in the boxcars (semantics). Both grammar and literature are important topics in an English classroom, although teachers rarely describe these topics using the same metaphor.

“Spiritual Linguistics” is the study of the meaning of life through language. Spiritual Linguistics combines grammar and literature using metaphor, symbol and simile to explain how we use our thoughts, feelings, desires and beliefs to create a morally rich life. Spiritual Linguistics doesn’t profess to know what moral choices to take; but how the most morally moral choices can be made.

Those who suffer from mental illness are generally frustrated about the myriad railroad switches that determine the feelings on which a particular thought will travel to a moral destination. The mentally ill are operating trains of thought through brutal, inner weather conditions to get their thoughts to the designated station in a timely manner. That isn’t easy when you’re compelled to always think about what you’re thinking about...

As someone who’s been certified insane, I had to figure out for myself why I went crazy and what I could do about it from the inside to avoid train wrecks in the future. I had to dedicate my life to learning about myself.

Becoming a ballet dancer to figure out how my body worked wasn’t enough. Becoming an English teacher to discover the mechanics of communication and storytelling wasn’t enough. Becoming an entrepreneur to understand the world through marketing wasn’t enough. Marrying myself to unite me from within wasn’t enough. Ordaining myself a rabbi to develop a spiritual outlook on life wasn’t enough. It was getting “the myriad boxcars filled with goods to market” that proved to me that I knew something about the metaphor of ‘thoughts as trains’ that could be universally useful.

“Success” is the only real measurement of self-love. But the prohibitions on the second tablet of the Ten Commandments of (6) killing, (7) cheating, (8) stealing (9) lying and (10) craving will seriously limit your understanding of the word “success.” You can’t die a “success” without plummeting the depth of the personal meaning of that word.

People like me who are a little “unusual” can be emotionally sophisticated and yet misunderstood by others because we appear too eclectic to be taken seriously. We have gifts to bring to the school of self-love, but our classmates don’t get us because our methods may

come across as coarse, common or vulgar. People are often afraid of unexpected responses from us (and sometimes with good reason).

I may still be a little unpredictable to others, but I'm becoming more predictable to myself. My internal arrival and departure timetable is becoming more reliable because I can now anticipate when a train of thought isn't on schedule, and I can alert others in advance of delays and detours caused by inner weather (feelings beyond my control) or unexpected changes in inner topography (crises of faith).

Certain experiences in the outer world are particularly difficult to get through because they correspond to inner stations that are quite inaccessible. Doctor's appointments; driving home at rush hour; public settings where you can't find a seat; and glitches with technology – are like alpine villages that are hard to reach because of altitude, weather conditions and poorly trained crews. Trains of thoughts to these unpleasant destinations often arrive late, don't depart on time or have to be cancelled entirely. Tension occurs when heavily laden trains of thought struggle with a steep grade that forces the locomotive to work harder and the train has to slow down and because of it arrives late.

My problem with these sorts of commonplace negative occurrences used to be that I didn't visualize these situations using spiritual linguistic techniques, and then I couldn't communicate to myself what was happening inside. The more I used my imagination to get a picture of the landscape of my inner environment, the more I could lay down railroad bridges across chasms (doubts) and blast through inner mountainous terrain (beliefs) to create railroad tunnels that would bring my trains of thought across these impediments more efficiently. Communication with myself became the key to my success.

The Teacher has brought you to school to tutor as well as learn, but you don't get the tools to do either or the respect you might wish for until you earn these skills for your *self*. To do so, you need a head that's screwed on tight, a heart that's open to options and a conscience that can be trained to be *your* guide, not just *other* people's guide.

It wasn't hard for me to see myself as smart. It was a little more challenging to see myself as emotionally open to new options. But it was extremely challenging to train myself to be *my* guide...

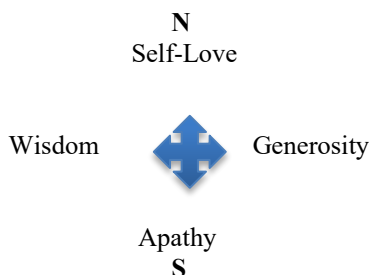
We need the secret service, military and police to keep people from taking their trains of thought the wrong way on a track intended for traffic going one way only. The conductors of these trains going the wrong way know what they're doing is hateful, but they don't care that they're going against the system *externally* because they think

there's no system that correlates to what they're doing *internally*. Using their feelings to achieve positive results in both their worlds is beyond their ken.

There'll always be elementary school students in the school of self-love who'll doubt that anyone could know about God's hopes and dreams for them. They're simply not yet experienced enough to know that She wants what's best for everyone. But that means that each of us has to work out Her intentions for us from the inside out. We have to learn to love our self in order to behave in morally enlightened ways toward one another.

The problem begins with the good and evil "inclination" when viewed visually as an important aspect of your inner terrain. Sometimes it takes willpower to get a particularly long and laden train of thought up a steep grade. Sometimes it takes willpower to slow a train down as it descends from a high altitude. These are your positive (up) and negative (down) inclinations.

People confuse anger with an upwardly inclined track and fear with a track that has a downward slope. The four directions your train of thought can go in are independent of the inclination of the track. Your tracks must go in one of the four directions of the compass as well as follow to the inclination of your inner landscape. Here is what the emotional compass of man looks like:



The "direction" of the track (N,S,E,W) determines the feeling your train of thought is going in. The "inclination" of the track (up or down) corresponds to the moral direction you're going in, good or evil.

"Willpower" corresponds to the *energy* consumption needed to get a train of thought to its destination. Willpower doesn't correspond to your *emotional* direction or *moral* inclination. Willpower comes from your survival instinct only.

The “inclination” of your inner terrain creates the moral slope that corresponds to the journey of right and wrong, up and down, loving and wise. The degree of inclination your train of thought has to ascend or descend in your inner landscape is the result of the mountains, valleys and rivers that flow to the sea in your inner landscape. These inclinations will challenge you to grow in unexpected ways as you traverse them.

I wrote this book for mentally and emotionally disenfranchised people who can’t easily put their abstract issues into words. I often sense that I know what others are feeling, and I often empathize with the problems they describe in trying to express themselves more meaningfully. Their problems often correspond to situations like being lost in a train station in a foreign city or aboard a train, worried they’re headed in the wrong direction and too embarrassed to ask someone if they’re going the right way. Another common abstract issue in life corresponds to the metaphor of not being able to go uphill any faster, or going downhill so fast that you can’t slow down.

If you come to believe that your imagination is the key to taking the most morally appropriate action, self-love will guide you through every circumstance. At this moment in time, we all deserve to be right where we are. We only need to learn how to use our imagination to better solve our problems in words rather than through fighting, preferably words spoken first unto our self.

If you don’t use your imagination to address your feelings with moral regard to the solution your heart wants to hear, your mind isn’t going to be much help to you in figuring out where you’re going. You aren’t going to see your wits sharpen. And you certainly aren’t going to see your conscience turn into a soul that’s guided conscientiously by God.

Not many of the people I’ve met who say they communicate effectively with others know how to communicate well with themselves. Everyone likes to think he’s good at using his mother tongue, but few people practice their language skills on themselves to judge the effectiveness of their communication skills from within.

Americans are particularly averse to learning foreign languages, but I think that may be because they’re embarrassed about admitting to themselves that they prefer talking to themselves in English. Because they don’t improve their communication with themselves, they tend to posture and pose for others rather than learn to put their feelings into imaginative and colorful language that will spiritually bridge the strangers’ ways.

As foreigners who had to consciously learn the rules of the English language, my parents were very proud of their grammar and vocabulary. I sympathized with their struggle to speak English correctly, especially when I moved abroad in adulthood and had to learn to converse in foreign languages myself.

Language is the *key* to the Kingdom. Your heart is the *lock*. And your soul is the *door*.

Filling boxcars with unfamiliar sounds to produce words and concepts in foreign languages and then linking those boxcars together in a strange word order (syntax) on my tracks was a challenging and sometimes even aggravating and irritating experience while living abroad until I got the hang of it. You have no idea how many trains of thought I crashed or hijacked by taking them to the wrong destination...

It was much harder than it looked to send my trains of thought in foreign languages down the same railroad tracks that were pounded into the ground of my being in infancy in English (semantics). Talking is a skill that shouldn't be taken for granted.

People who speak more than one language know a lot more about their inner railroad system than they may consciously realize. The deaf who "speak" two languages (sign language and can read and write a second language) know a great deal about the elegance of body language and emotions when communicating. And the blind who use the cadence of speech to determine emotional nuances instead of physical gesture and facial expression also know something very important about communication.

Because my father spoke seven languages, I was motivated to study language myself. But because of my innate fascination with grammar, I began to question the meaning of common parts of speech taken for granted by native speakers.

The conjugation of verbs especially fascinated me because verbs carry the concept of "time" in western languages. The tense of the verb in a sentence changes your position with regard to that train of thought in your imagination. The verb will make you aware of a train of thought from the outside as it crisscrosses the landscape of your imagination. (1) If the train is moving toward you it's coming from the past. (2) If it's up close and you're looking down on it from above, the train is traveling in the present. (3) And if it's moving away from you toward the horizon it's moving into the future.

Allowing your imagination to expand upon the metaphor of 'a train of thought' will make you aware of (1) your feelings as the "tracks"; (2) the "inclination" of the grade as your moral direction; (3)

“willpower” as the guilt or love you burn to propel your trains; (4) and your perspective of the whole picture as the sense of “time” in which the event is occurring.

The nominative case pronouns (I, you, he, she, it, we, you they) are like different locomotives pulling your trains of thought. Each of these locomotives makes a different sound. To distinguish the subject of one train of thought from another when using pronouns, just listen to the difference you hear internally when talking about yourself (“I”) and talking to yourself (“you”). And if you talk *to* yourself *about* yourself using the pronoun “he,” notice the aural affect that locomotive has on you, too.

Whether you speak to yourself in the first, second or third person, comments and questions will come back to you over time if you’re patient. You wouldn’t input data into a computer and expect an answer instantly if the problem was complex. You shouldn’t expect yourself to come up with solutions to your internal problems immediately either. Often, sleeping on a problem is the best way for the mind to solve it.

When I talk to myself using the word “I,” I unconsciously reinforce my relationship with myself in a soulful way. When I talk to myself using the word “you,” I may have a picture in my mind of someone else I’m thinking about, but I’m simultaneously reinforcing an emotional relationship with myself as I address that picture of the other person I created.

And when I talk to myself using the word “he” or “she” I may have someone else in mind again, with a picture of them in my imagination that I’m *indirectly* referring to, but I’m unconsciously reinforcing a relationship with my mind that will affect my opinion of myself over time.

What you think about others will affect what you think about yourself. If you question your opinions about them, that’ll open you up to new opinions about yourself. I believe many people are so ashamed of their opinion of themselves that they can’t do this simple self-exploration exercise.

You can’t consider yourself a moral person if you don’t even know how you *think* let alone how you come to the *believe* what you believe to be true. Getting to know yourself intimately is harder than it looks. It requires that you engage with metaphor, symbolism and simile to discover how you’re made. And it requires that you have a sufficiently good opinion of yourself that you can stand the emotionality of the process.

The school of self-love begins like an elementary school classroom in which you have one teacher. You may go to a different classroom once a week to write book reports under the supervision of a different teacher or have a musician come to your classroom once a week to work with you on a special subject. But by and large, we're all accustomed to learning in our head with only one voice presiding over the lessons.

Coming out of your head and into your heart can be a very new and disconcerting experience. Feeling is an odd experience when you become aware of your feelings and monitor them closely. It's like going to a different classroom and working with a new teacher on a whole different curriculum.

Thinking about your feelings is more like having a music teacher come to your classroom. Suddenly you find yourself intellectually working on a topic that's emotional. You're working with a discipline that's similar to math and English, yet the symbols you're using are entirely abstract.

Graduating the elementary school classroom experience in the school of self-love and moving on to the experience of learning in many classrooms with many teachers is what life is like externally. But, internally, there's a young child in you at all times who's learning in a more protected environment.

The pronoun "she" when used to describe a woman and the pronoun "She" when speaking about God only look different in writing because of the capitalization of the first letter of the word. The symbolic representation is quite similar, but the intellectual difference and emotional affect is profound.

When you invite a guest teacher into your head to teach you to think about what you don't usually think about, the first thing you discover is that you took a lot of your education for granted when you received it as a child. You were so busy bringing new information in then that you didn't bother to question it.

Thinking about how your mind can differentiate the meaning of two words that are spelled identically, simply by the minute difference in shape of the first letter when capitalizing it, makes you aware of how much care God put into making you in Her image.

I like to express the difference between the words "she" and "She" as a train station that takes your trains of thought through your head and heart when the locomotive represents the word "she," referring to a human being. But when the locomotive represents the word "She," referring to God, the "holy" pronouns takes us to our

soul, a place in inner space we're not accustomed to consciously differentiating from our head and heart.

Those of us who believe in God have to have a way of describing this difference (she/She) and inner classrooms for our head, heart and soul to acknowledge that words hold different meanings when discussed in each of these places.

As an adolescent, I learned to use the pronoun "we" in a new way when I discovered dance. The more I danced with others, the more I discovered the joy of the physicality the pronoun "we" engendered for me. The word "we" began to take on the effects of emotional proximity and distance. The closer I literally was to another dancer in executing choreography, the more powerful the meaning of the word "we" became for me. Such is the heartfelt view of the first person plural pronoun (we) when expressed through the body.

Growing up, the boys at school used the word "we" often, especially when discussing sports and girls. But I didn't consciously realize then that I wasn't feeling that word with the joy of unity-with-community that they were exhibiting. When they talking about "we" "winning" or "scoring," their use of the pronoun "we" was laden with emotionality for them that I couldn't feel. I could only sheepishly grin at their satisfaction.

I had no way to understand how I felt about them using the first person plural pronoun (we) because, in the context in which they used it, it didn't include *me*. I could hear the difference in the locomotive they were using to propel their trains of thought, but I couldn't describe how it changed where they were going.

I strongly felt that my parents had suffered from the pronoun "we" as it had been employed in the War when "we" usually meant everyone except the Jews. And when I was growing up, "we" was used to mean everyone except the blacks. I still hear the word "we" used at times in ways that make me feel that certain groups of people or groups of individuals aren't being included in the speaker's heart.

If $(x + y) + (x + x) = \text{we}$ in the matrimonial sense, then my first understanding of "we" came from my parents. Their sense of "we" as a married couple deeply colored my understanding that word. To this day, I have to remind myself that my "we" is no longer their "we." I can have relationships with others that don't reenact my parents' union.

There has since been a huge fuss made in our society over whether the word "we" (meaning every child's parents) can be morally expressed as $[(x + x) + (x + x)]$ or $[(x + y) + (x + y)]$. The idea that

“we” can refer to a couple of any gender combination is a huge accomplishment for the human heart.

This also means that when your head talks to your inner child, you can envision yourself as an inner parent of either gender speaking to an inner child of either gender. You can love yourself whether you imagine your head *or* heart as having been created male *or* female.

This discussion can only be had if you think of it as the topic of emotional math being discussed in the head of the spiritual student, not in his heart. Our ability to use language with such subtle distinctions rests on our ability to visualize what we’re talking about. Without an inner picture of a classroom in your head where you’re discussing a math problem your heart is working on, you couldn’t hold these ideas to discuss them.

The Nazis certainly tried in their day to prove that a Christian man ($x + y$) wasn’t religiously equal to a Jewish man ($x + y$). This was because the Christians and Jews of that era weren’t able to move freely between these two classrooms, head and heart. The Jews were stuck in their head where Christian “love” made no sense to them at all. And the Christians were stuck in the heart where Jewish wisdom terrified them. And many of today’s Muslims are trying to figure out what the modern world means to *them* without awareness that they’re coming out of a separate classroom (the soul) where they’ve been learning about reality without the benefits of being able to study with our Teacher in Her other two classrooms.

It’s not to say that Jews can’t feel, Christians can’t think or Muslims can’t do anything but believe. We’re all created in God’s image, but Her image is so great that She chose to specialize Her inner forces to give us a chance to learn to work together to pass our tests.

We live in an exciting and dynamic age in which today’s students in the school of self-love have the opportunity to avail themselves of so much more information on how they were each made uniquely by God in Her image. And we have Jews, Christians, Muslims with rich religious traditions to teach us more about our head, heart and soul. (I discuss God’s plans for the East using interrelated metaphors in my other books.)

As a member of three distinct groups (gays, Jews and the disabled community) the word “we” doesn’t leave me with the same feeling at all. These subtle distinctions that employ the same pronoun “we” bring up questions about *how* I feel what I feel and how my identity is more complex than I previously imagined.

The nominative case, first person, singular pronoun (I) becomes more real in solving for “I” if I can first solve for “I¹”. I can only understand what it meant to be an individual to the extent that I can uniquely, honestly, sincerely, authentically, genuinely and frankly be the one individual that I am.

At school growing up, “i” felt small, as though it would have been a mistake to capitalize the pronoun that referred to my relationship with myself. I had low self-esteem. But over a lifetime, my “i” has grown up. My sense of self-worth has grown. “I” feel like “I” speak differently about myself today. I’m proud to be myself. In knowing I¹, I can solve for I^x.

There’s no visual difference in writing the first person pronoun in the sentence “‘I’ went to the store” and “‘I’ AM THE LORD, THY GOD WHO TOOK YOU OUT OF EGYPT.” (I/I) The difference between “I” and “I” can only be made internally, not in the written use of this word. The difference in these meanings lies in the way the mind organizes the meaning of this pronoun in each context. “I went to the store” was stated in my *head*. “I am the Lord, thy God...” was stated in my *soul*. It’s the place in inner space where the word originates that determines the depth of its meaning.

Just as I once perceived my self from my heart to be more like an “i” than an “I” when I was young and less familiar with my self, so, too, do I perceive my “I” as smaller than the “I” God uses when She speaks about Herself.

Our inner world is literally black, so there’s no literal way of differentiating between sentences stated from your head, heart or soul. You can’t see what stations these trains of thought originate from. You have to use your imagination and metaphor to perceive these ideas. You have to entertain these thoughts for the pure pleasure of self-exploration.

Anyone who finds this inner, examination process uncomfortable is, of course, going to avoid doing it. And many of the people who avoid it are deeply religious. They’re as uncomfortable exploring inner space as many religious people were in the 1960’s in exploring outer space. I remember them saying then that we had no right to go to the moon because that was God’s realm. It usually takes more time for deeply religious people to expand their understanding of God because they think they hold a deeply personal relationship with Her.

The symbols we use to writing down what we think aren’t adequately sophisticated to express the subtle distinctions our imagination can make. (This is another reason why we should look

much more carefully when we take the Bible literally. We don't have Moses, Jesus and the Prophet Mohammed to tell us out loud what they meant when they were quoted in writing. We have to rely on the written word, a communication system that uses symbols we don't fully appreciate for the subtle ways in which They used words.)

The *visual* differences between the nominative case pronouns for "man" and "God" begin in written speech with the second person pronoun "You" when we speak to God and "you" when God speaks to man. (You/you) Here we have another example of homonyms, two different meanings that sound identical but which are written slightly differently. The words "You" and "you" are trains of thought that originate from different stations in the inner landscape of man.

The differences between "i" "I" and "I" or "you" and "You" can be stimulated visually, but these symbols don't describe what the imagination has to do to differentiate between their meanings. Our inner world is far more subtle and complex than we're accustomed to crediting it. Extended metaphors aren't enough to describe these differences in ideas. We also need to extend the symbols we're accustomed to using.

We're somewhat blessed in English that the number "1" and the symbol for the first person singular "I" are almost identical symbols. It's easy for speakers of the English language to draw the conclusion that the number "1" and the pronoun "I" are visual symbols that express a poetic idea that would require many words to describe in other languages. Observe the equations:

$$(x + y) = 1 \text{ (the number)}$$

$$(x + x) = 1 \text{ (the number)}$$

These equations suggest that males and females are equal and should therefore be treated equally.

Now observe these equations using the letter "I" in place of the number "1".

$$(x + y) = I \text{ (the pronoun)}$$

$$(x + x) = I \text{ (the pronoun)}$$

These equations express the psychological, political and moral basis for all human beings being created in God's image.

The pronoun you may use to denote yourself (I/i) from your head or heart (if you're insecure) can never come close to the pronoun God uses to denote Himself (I). As our Creator, God is $I > I > i$.

God is the "WE" behind the "we" that human beings are all fighting about for inclusion or exclusion. The essence of this unity, however, can only be perceived through the "we" in me. It's only to the extent that I can fathom the difference of these symbols within

myself that I can understand what it means to be intellectual, emotional and spiritual.

I connect more meaningfully to other people nowadays because I use my imagination to perceive all the words I use. I connect more meaningfully to others because I connect more meaningfully to myself. As I've grown, my understanding of "gOD" has also grown.

I'm going to use this spelling of our Creator (gOD) from now on in this book because I wish to infer that our understanding of gOD grows as we grow. I'm also going to refer to our Creator in the masculine from now on, using the traditional spelling of the pronouns "**He**," and "**Him**" in bold letters when referring to gOD.

I'm through using the word "She" to refer to gOD. I really did that more for shock value. I think I've made my point in helping men see that they assume gOD is a male Teacher who teaches them from their soul. My truth is that **He**'s a male Teacher who teaches *me* from my soul. (But **She** happens to be a female Teacher who also teaches me from my heart.)

The homophones for god, God and gOD have huge distinctions in meaning. They are:

| | | | |
|----|-----|---|--|
| 1. | god | = | a deity |
| 2. | God | = | The I and only Deity |
| 3. | gOD | = | A personal relationship with our Deity |

in which you grow

Peace on earth will be the result of peace from within. Greater gOD-knowledge will be the consequence of greater self-knowledge. The more you intimately know yourself, the more intimately you'll be able to connect with everyone, including gOD.

There are many religious people in this world who make very big claims about who gOD is and what gOD wants. And most of them claim that gOD wants everyone to follow *their* belief system to the exclusion of all others. But their exclusion of other faiths and philosophies is really the result of their limited ability to perceive themselves.

gOD-knowledge comes through self-knowledge and the ensuing self-love that comes with that knowledge. The history of the human race is the history of the inclusivity of gOD, which is the result of the inclusivity of mankind for all humanity and the individual's inclusivity of himself.

You can't communicate effectively in prayer or conversation if you don't experience an increasingly profound depth to the meaning of the words you use when you're communicating with yourself. Taking the *literal* meaning of words to heart is only the beginning of that process. You're going to want to take the meaning of the words you use *emotionally* and *spiritually* as well if you're interested in communicating effectively, especially in prayer.

One of the greatest gifts of *written* language is the ability to communicate subtle differences of intention and feeling that can't be as easily expressed orally. The basic tenet of Christianity is that there's only one gOD, and that **He's** the combination of our Father (1), His Son (1) and the Holy Spirit (1). This would be best expressed in the equation: $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$

Learning to read with a love for the subtle distinctions made by letters and numbers is a great blessing. Learning to use symbols effectively makes you more intelligent, sensitive and holy in your own eyes.

Many cynical people would argue that the spelling of gOD is incorrect, that it really should be spelled GOD, that man's appreciation of **His** influence in our life is waning, not growing. This is a false assumption. The very idea that man can argue about gOD/GOD in such a sophisticated way is evidence for the advancement in his moral authority.

Faith in gOD is growing despite attendance in houses of worship shrinking. People are bringing gOD out of the houses of worship and into their daily lives. The fact that there's evidence that some people believe in "**G**Od," as evidenced by a *decrease* in moral responsibility, tells us more about those individuals than about our Creator.

To teach children that the written word expresses the entirety of the meaning of words denies the truth. And it denies the symbolism inherent in the written word. Words aren't only literal. Words are figurative, emotive, spiritually enriching and personal. And as our understanding of words increases, new symbols will be created to express the subtleties of old ideas.

Each letter of the alphabet is like a fuel tank that emits a tiny bit of power that creates movement in a particular place in inner space that the mind can describe using metaphor.

The more you've been trained to respond to the depth of words, the more they can mean to you and the more effectively you can use them. The more you've been trained to respond to the depth of words,

the more you can learn from the world around you how to enrich your world within.

Holy Scriptures shouldn't be taken *only* literally. But by that I mean that the words in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles and Quran should be plummeted in their original languages for the deepest possible range of meanings using metaphor, symbols and similes. And that will cause contradictions, paradoxes, nuances that will have to be argued about for their moral importance in our understanding of gOD. The depth of the words on the page is far greater than the ink. The depth of gOD's word lies *with* you, *in* you *for* you to discover.

Take for instance, the common Christian description of Jesus as "the son of man." It makes perfect sense in Christian theology to describe Jesus as the "Son of gOD." But it makes no sense at all to describe Him as the "son of man" unless you look at the Hebrew word "ben Adam" which literally translates as "son of man" but which figuratively means "gentleman." Because early Christian translators of Hebrew chose to translate this expression literally, they missed the meaning of it entirely.

What makes my trains of thought meaningful to you is that mine are traveling the same tracks that yours travel. Feelings, not thoughts, are universal. My trains of thought intersect with everyone else's on earth through a worldwide railroad of communication that only works because of the universality of the tracks. If you don't feel good about a certain idea in one language, you aren't going to feel any better about it in another language.

The expression 'train of thought' makes no sense whatsoever in any of the other languages I speak. But that doesn't mean that the ideas I'm talking about aren't worth considering. It's perfectly feasible to translate these notions into every other language using similes instead of metaphors. (Thoughts are *like* trains in that they run on tracks that are *like* feelings.)

When Christianity and Islam stop insisting that every individual on earth believe in gOD in the same way they do, they'll realize their tracks are the same gage for every train of thought on earth. All trains of thought are comprehensible because they all travel on tracks that are of the same gage. All human beings were made in gOD's image using the exact same metaphor.

The "we" in dance is achieved through body language. The "we" we use when we're thinking is achieved through the shared knowledge that comes with the same facts and similar experiences. The "we" we use when loving is achieved through emotional proximity to others. And the "wE" with gOD that inspires us to create

a better world for everyone is achieved through the wisdom, love and generosity that come with spiritual proximity to “**Him**.”

In science, everything must be *literally* true. In religion very little must be literally true. The religious dogma still evident in the Abrahamic faiths is the result of teaching gOD as a science, as the product of the mind. Judaism was the first classroom gOD created in the mind of man. And the Hebrew Testament is therefore a *metaphoric* expression of gOD. But **He** started a second class in the heart. And in that classroom *symbolism* was created. Jesus is a symbol of gOD from the heart: And **He** even started a third class in the soul where abstract similes of gOD abound.

Religion has to be much more complex than science because the head, heart and soul of humanity has to be complex in order to challenge man’s imagination to perceive the miracle of life. Dummying down faith to feed the masses religious pabulum was never a good idea, but it’s particularly egregious today when people are so much more educated in matters of the self.

“Spiritual English” is a class in the school of self-love that’s a requirement for everybody in the English-speaking world. But the ideas described in this chapter can still be translated into other languages in poetically memorable ways.

If you don’t know how to talk to yourself in meaningful ways, you won’t achieve much in the way of intimacy with anyone, least of all gOD. If you can’t perceive that you speak to yourself from your head, heart *and* soul, just imagine what your prayers must sound like when they reach gOD’s ears...

47. Spiritual Art

In my senior year of high school, I took my first art class and experienced the emotional intensity of painting. Art isn’t always casual expression or carefree communication; art can be spiritual work. But in every art form I ever endeavored to explore, I felt a pressure to produce a masterpiece complete with self-revelation right from the start.

It’s been over 40 years since that art class, and I’ve created no masterpieces on canvas. The magnum opus of my life has been in putting a roof over my head and bread on the table. If I accomplished anything at all as an artist, it was in becoming my own medium, in realizing that *I’m* art. My thoughts are sketches of my ideas; my feelings are the palette on which I mix the paints I add to those ideas; my soul is my canvas; and my body is my frame. What others hear

when I speak are mere brushstrokes that allude to my inner artwork. My masterpiece is being created inside me.

We paint the magnum opus of our life within, in our *being* before we actualize it in our *actions*. Even though most of us aren't destined to become famous painters, there's no reason why you can't strive to become an inner "michelangelo," so to speak. Your sistine chapel lies in your soul. Your challenge may only be to build the scaffolding that will get you to the ceiling where you can allow the work to commence. You never know what aspect of your work of art gOD wants you to accomplish on your own.

The greatest achievements of my life have been in my heart where no one ever saw them. I forgave my mother for her scorn and ridicule of the emotional space I needed; I forgave my father for disregarding my bodily needs in not paying child support; I forgave the kids at school growing up who tormented me for being gay and smart; I forgave my first life partner for cheating on me; but most of all, I forgave myself for ignoring me for a lifetime and denying that I'm a work of art in the process of creation. Self-abandonment is the greatest tragedy of any true artist.

The whitewash of forgiveness for others I painted on the canvas in my soul from my heart was there for me to see because it was the foundation I needed before I could start painting my forgiveness of myself. My intention was to simply give to others without any thought to what it might lead to for me. These simple sketches on my whitewashed canvas became the undercoat for a painting that now shines with a universality of colorful emotions.

This process personalized giving to others as a path to forgiving myself. I had no idea how important giving to others was until I needed to forgive *me* and saw that I'd earned a place in that class. It behooves me to love what I've made of myself.

But it was difficult for me to like someone as flawed and imperfect as me until I could forgive myself for my indiscretions through self-improvement. My body is physically flawed and my character is sadly unsound. That may never change as much as I'd like, but every day I find more and more corrections I can make if I want to like myself a little more. And my battle with time, gravity and circumstances beyond my control make it increasingly clear that I won't ever succeed in liking myself as much as I strive to. The best I'm going to be able to show is *thankfulness* to others, *appreciation* of myself, and *gratitude* to gOD for the way my life is turning out.

For the longest time, I didn't allow myself to see all the masterpieces in my spiritual portfolio. I wouldn't allow me to look up

at the ceiling I'd painstakingly painted for others from my heart, or take pictures of it to admire my self with all my soul. I wouldn't acknowledge that the handsome statue I was chiseling out of stone from within wasn't "David," but "Barry." I was working on a masterpiece day-by-day.

I'd been told *pride* would detract from my brilliance. I'd been told it was *vain* to allow even a ray of the light of self-love in. But if I didn't look at what I was doing *right* and commend myself for it, it was unlikely my self-esteem would rise. And if I waited patiently for others to commend me, I'd surely develop resentment as time slowly slipped by and nobody noted anything I was doing right.

There's a *louvre* of love and a *prado* of laughter within me that I'd never bothered to visit. Before I paid visits to the treasure houses of emotional art within me, I simply sold my efforts for a smile on the face of the strangers I'd meet. I yearned only to brighten the walls in other people's museums. I wasn't very good at taking a little joy in being with myself.

The reason I never learned to share myself generously with others was because I hadn't been taught to first share myself generously with me. Had I been taught to share myself with me first, envy of what others "have" and jealousy of who they "are" would have slipped away long ago.

I lived most of my life in denial. I denied myself the best of me because I refused to share me with myself. I subconsciously insisted I wasn't good enough and therefore I was undeserving of being me.

People talk about hunger for food, sex and money, but they don't talk much about their hunger to give back in appreciation for the gift of life. The miracle of life is such an incredible gift, but we spend so much more time craving things around us rather than craving more from ourselves.

As a spiritual sculptor, I should have learned to observe my inner world more carefully before I took out the hammer and chisel and began chipping away at others. I should have looked for an uncommon truth about me. But neither my upbringing nor my academic education had taught me to look *within* to see more clearly *out*.

We're shaped by a culture based on late medieval religious doctrine that still tries to teach us to get out of ourselves - and stay out! It teaches us that we're taboo - forbidden fruit. It's no wonder I found it so difficult to capitalize the first person, singular pronoun (I) or conceive of the personal meaning of the first person, plural pronoun (we).

My universe was gOD's first work of art. My world holds meaning for me. That's where **He** separated my light from my darkness. That's where I became a steward of my earth. My birth was the little bang that makes the Big Bang all the more important to me.

gOD's nature mirrors *my* nature. My art mirrors gOD's artistic endeavors in Mother Nature. I've copied **His** creation by becoming a master portrait artist of my self. I'm a genius in training, a re-creator of life. In the school of self-love, I was enrolled in an elective in "Spiritual Art," and it changed my life.

48. Graduation

I was finally ready to look at my curriculum here on earth as schooling toward a spiritual graduation from life, a graduation I hoped one day to achieve magna cum laud, with highest honors in being myself. And with that philosophy in mind, I looked toward older age as "spiritual finishing school" in which I'd complete my work toward the Ph.D. in "me."

The dizzying, dancing feeling of love I experienced in youth for other men had merely been a mirror of a relationship within myself that I didn't fully understand at the time. Fortunately, as I aged, I began to like myself more and more. (Familiarity of me bred *admiration* as well as *contempt*.) And through improvements to my self-esteem, I developed a "like affair" with my second partner that was so much more relaxed and fulfilling than the "love" affaire I'd had with my first partner.

Suicide had been a devious attempt on my part to get dismissed from all my classes before completing my spiritual, core curriculum. But I simply hadn't realized at the time that the purpose of life is for us to learn to love ourselves. I thought there was no meaning to life if I liked *me*. I'd felt so emotionally dismissed by others that I thought I had to dismiss me, too. That had been a great error of judgment. That's what had made me just another class clown in the school of self-love.

I'm now grateful for all the lessons I've had in love that haven't turned the flame in me up or down. As I've aged, I've found myself feeling self-*like* in addition to self-*love*. The flame may be light blue and it the hottest point at the center, but the yellow, orange and finally red of my flame have illuminated me to the importance of liking myself. My eyes have grown a bit more accustomed to gOD's incredible light. I can now shine that light onto myself.

The problem with religion is that people insist on only having *one*. A world of Jewish "wisdom" would be like every meal consisting

of raw broccoli, turkey meatloaf and spinach patties. But a world of only Christian “love” would be like eating nothing but ice cream sundaes. gOD was wise enough to give us the main course before the dessert.

The Islamic snacks of tahini, hummus, pitta, baklava and mint tea were also given with good reason. Life is a religious meal, but you can’t live a healthy, spiritual life on one diet. A mediterranean, spiritual diet must include all three.

Two thousand years of having banana splits and sundaes stuffed down your throats would negatively affect anybody’s spiritual health. If you want me to enjoy Christian love today, you’d better give me a solid meal of Jewish wisdom before it and in between meal snacks of Islamic generosity to satisfy my spiritual cravings. My spiritual, blood-sugar levels can’t take the kind of abuse Jews and Muslims were subjected to by Christians in the past.

Even though I’m the only one in this world killing himself on a bad spiritual diet, my previous, attempted suicides left me with the conclusion that *I* was the most dangerous man in the world to me, not religious individuals in any of the Abrahamic faiths. Taking 100 aspirins the first time and driving my car off a cliff the second time were drastic, dramatic and disastrous commentaries on what *I* thought about me. They left me believing for quite some time that I couldn’t be trusted with important decisions concerning my life.

There were a million ways to prove to myself how much I hated me, but there were only a few ways I could prove to me that I really liked me. Deep down, my intuition told me that what I most needed was simply to show myself that I cared in a way that self-indulgence wasn’t ever going to prove to me that I did. A world of wisdom without self-love isn’t worth living in. A world of justice without mercy is hell on earth. And real generosity of spirit, without wisdom and love, is the fast track to a train wreck.

The word “holy” in Hebrew means, “to separate.” The word “holy” in Christianity means “to make whole,” “to unite.” The Arabic equivalent is “mukaddas” which means both “pure” and “sacred.”

The combined efforts of the Judeo-Christian culture in America teaches us to recognize the separations and unifications we can make that will make our society holy. But there are also sacred gifts from Islam that will help make us purer if we humble ourselves to learn about the generosity of gOD from them.

Trying to end my spiritual education by getting myself dismissed from class didn’t change the grades already recorded on my transcript. I could only add new grades to those I’d already earned to

improve my GPA. What I really needed were better study habits to get more out of my education. I needed to bring my heart and soul to class with me from the moment I woke up in the morning to the moment my head returned to the pillow at night.

That's what put Mona Lisa's smile on *her* face. That's what would make *me* a di vinci unto myself. And if I could learn to expand upon my spiritual understanding of life from a Christian artist, I could learn from Muslim artists, too...

In childhood, I hated being me. As an adult I only learned how to bear the pain of being around me 24/7 by disliking myself from morning to night. And during those rare moments when I couldn't bear disliking myself any longer, I found reason to dislike others instead. And I have to honestly admit that betting against the goodness inherent in others made me feel, for a time, a little better...

Once I'd achieved a long-term, loving relationship with my former partner, I actually came to *like* myself more because I could love another human being. But when our relationship ended, I realized it was time to learn to *love* myself or all my self-appreciation would be for naught.

It's so easy to be distracted by other people because we can't see inside of them. The only person on earth we can learn to see right through is our self. But we can't claim to be transparent to our self if we don't use other people as mirrors. We're only translucent if we don't look at how others make us feel. We gain inner clarity to our heart in direct proportion to our effort to know our self.

You may be the image in which gOD made you, but others are, too. Only you have the blueprint to the construction of the human being **He** made into you. Only you can see the *universal* principles in the *singular* practice. It makes no sense to love anyone from the outside *in* until you can at least like yourself from the inside *out*. Only then will you be able to approach others with love and understanding for the struggles they're having to go through to know and love themselves.

It's probably hard for blacks to love whites. It's probably hard for conservatives to love gays. It's probably hard for Muslims to love Jews. And it's probably hard for the disabled to love the able-bodied and able-minded. That's why the Teacher puts you in precisely the seat where you're sitting. That's why you have the assignments you've been given.

The time to complain about those seated near you or in your study circle is over. The time to start a dialogue with yourself about your spiritual, educational goals is now. If you want to improve your

grades in self-love, you're going to have to give more of your love away or you'll never witness yourself producing more of it.

For the first five years after my first partnership ended, I dated me. Then I engaged myself fully in everything I did. When I went to Israel in April of 2008, I knew I was ready to pop the question. I was ready to live happily ever after with me until death when I'd part from this physical experience in my body that I'd been given.

In addition to being the bride and the groom, I was ready to become the justice of peace in my life. I went to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem on Friday night, April 11th, 2008 and stood before the Teacher and all the classmates who happened to be there that night. I humbly asked myself to take me for better or worse. I promised myself to love, honor and obey me, to have me to hold me in sickness and in health. And although it felt a bit embarrassing, I surreptitiously kissed my hand in front of the throng to seal the deal.

Learning to accept me as my partner without option of divorce for a lifetime became the greatest commitment to my life I'd ever made. It gave me the *social* security I'd yearned for my whole life. I suddenly became the most popular kid at school, the smartest nerd, the star quarterback and the gorgeous cheerleader all rolled into one.

When I recently had a very minor stroke (T.I.A.), I realized that although I was a member of the disabled community because of *mental* illness, there was a possibility I'd renew my membership if I were *physically* disabled in any way. Not willing to divorce myself under *those* circumstances would be even more challenging for me.

As the member of three communities, the Jewish, gay and disabled community, I had to want to marry all three of "me." I had to love myself like forbidden fruit: the skin, the meat and the core.

People irritate me easily. I write my books in coffee shops because I need to look at my inner reactions to the people around me. I realize that every time I walk out of the house, I'm engaged in *classwork*. But I also know that every time I stay at home, I'm engaged in *homework*. School is in session everywhere and at all times.

My marriage to me was just the beginning in getting to "know" myself in the Biblical sense of the word. My marriage to me gave me the freedom to face myself with an open-ended plan of self-improvement. It gave me a way of "being" internally that was so much more valuable than all the ways I'd learned through "doing" as a younger man.

I only wish young people today would marry themselves sooner than I did. I wish they'd get through the issue of *gay* rights and put

self-rights on the table. I wish the Catholic Church would advocate the importance of not divorcing *yourself* and get their nose out of marriage and divorce to *others* altogether. I wish women would debate the right to be born, I wish and men would step away from the question entirely. I wish corporations were treated like people and had to pay as much in taxes as the rest of us.

I wish the world would concern itself ten times more with children, the poor and underprivileged and ten times less with criticizing the moral standards set by Israel. I wish people would become so cheap and miserly that they ate half as much food, used half as much electricity and water and bought half as many luxuries.

Waking up to the intimacy of *self-like* didn't happen like Sleeping Beauty, with a simple kiss on the lips. It took years of wooing myself until I could see that I was never going to succeed in becoming my own Prince Charming if I didn't start to think of life like a fairy and wish for what I really wanted with all my heart.

I'm great at charming myself. I should have kissed my self and woken up to liking myself sooner. I should have realized that **gOD** gave me a special magic that no one else has. What's the point of **Him** creating fairies if we don't sprinkle our magic liberally over ourselves?

I certainly don't plan on asking **gOD** if I can keep this body for all eternity, but I do want to learn to love my body and all that I've filled it with spiritually while I'm here in school.

I'd been a terrified gay-Jewish, sleeping beauty, afraid of figuratively kissing myself and opening my eyes after what seemed like a 100 years of sleeping through life. I was afraid to really look at the deeper ways in which **gOD** planned to bring **His** wisdom, love and generosity into "oUR" world, **His** and mine.

The best way I could change the world was to begin by changing *my* world. The best way I could move the world toward accepting gay marriage and gay-rights was to break down the concept of my marriage to myself with **gOD** into its *surreal* components. I think about what **gOD** wants of me at all times in order to practice caring about **His** feelings in order to reveal how I feel about myself.

In the past, those who insist that **gOD** doesn't want me to be gay would have insisted they have the right to own slaves because the Hebrew Testament goes into such detail about how to treat slaves. But I use the Bible *personally*. I decide for myself how I'm going to treat others as a mirror of how I believe I should treat myself. If I only make my conscience *other* people's guide, it's a good indication that I'm not my *own* best friend.

If you find slavery abhorrent, you're in good company because our forefathers did so too. And, so, in their classroom in the school of self-love, they eradicated slavery in America. In today's classroom, we're working on gay rights as the way for us to love ourselves. Each generation is given a syllabus that's different from previous classes.

gOD needs me to be good to myself much more than He needs me to be good to Him or other people. But I need to be good to gOD and others in order to witness my goodness. Without evidence of my goodness, how can I believe in myself? I *have* to worry about pleasing gOD. What I don't have to worry about is pleasing people who quote Scripture to me. My beliefs are personal.

Every issue is a moral issue. Life is a moral school and gender and sexuality are just two of the ways in which I have to determine that I'm not behaving like a hypocrite. The double standards I see in others are reminders to me to check for double standards in my self. Hateful people always help me remember to love myself.

Don't worry about *who* you don't like. Worry about *why* you don't like them. The more you question why you dislike gays, Jews, blacks, Muslims or little, green Martians – the more you'll discover your problems with your self. The more you question why you dislike fat people, loud people, messy people and childish people – the more you'll discover aspects of yourself who behave like those around you, you don't like. Being a human being is difficult, not because you have to deal with people who irritate you, but because you have to deal with a head, heart, penis (or clitoris) and a conscience. That's a lot to think about...

Now that I've married myself for better or worse, I've found a new depth to the meaning of my words. I'm in a covenant with myself. My words matter more to me than they did before. When I speak, I listen.

Wisdom has given me *reason* to act more judiciously toward others. Self-love has given me reason to act more mercifully toward others. These godly virtues make my life magical. This is the fairy tale ending that has made me my own prince charming and sleeping beauty.

Self-love has given me the inner vision to look in the mirror and *love* how I see myself unfolding. And apart from wisdom and love, generosity of spirit has helped me believe that gOD has a plan for all of us, a plan I can see hinges on me believing in me.

49. Summer Vacation

The summer I graduated from high school, I went on my first trip by myself. It was a three-month trek to Europe and Israel at the tender age of seventeen. I paid for the entire trip with my savings from teaching folk dancing and working as a gofer in the accounting firm where my mother was a secretary. It was an intrepid adventure because I'd never even been on a cross-town bus by myself. Exploring other continents by myself was a big deal to me.

When I came back, I was extremely pleased with myself. It was my fear of entering university a couple of weeks later that overwhelmed me. As had been the case going into junior high and high school, the transition from one academic environment to another was hard for me. My bravado abroad had been easy in comparison to the transition from high school to college. I found myself, once again, facing my fear of the bully. But this time, the bully was an intellectual like me, not a tough guy.

I'd earned a partial scholarship to UCLA, but instead of becoming the "nice, Jewish doctor" my mother wanted, I used the money to major in dance. But I went to the dance department for just a few weeks my first quarter at college before I quit. I didn't really want to *study* dance in a university setting. I wanted to *dance!* I wanted to live the "bohemian life" I'd read about in books...

When I was middle aged, the thought of graduating spiritual high school to become intra-dependent on myself as well as emotionally interdependent on the world filled me with consternation. I could see that I'd never really succeeded in becoming "bohemian." I'd never really been a "hippy." I'd never been an "outcast." I'd always been juvenile. I'd been waiting for me to grow up.

Being Jewish isn't a problem of being spiritually immature. Mature Jews don't convert to Christianity. Being gay isn't a problem of being emotionally immature. Mature men don't become straight. And being mentally ill isn't a problem of being immature, either. Maturity doesn't correlate to *mental* health. Maturity correlates to *emotional* health.

Graduating the spiritual high school of self-love gave me the diploma I needed to then connect matters of the mind to my heart and soul. I was ready to become a college-level student of self-love to learn to *like* myself through anything and everything I had to go through.

Summer vacations growing up always rejuvenated me for new challenges at the next higher level of my public school education. Summer vacations were well-needed valleys I traversed with a sense

of rest; ready to climb the next mountain with a renewed sense of hope and wellbeing. Summer vacations weren't vistas of insight. But they were filled with beautiful meadows and inspiring looks at majestic horizons.

When you're in the midst of a spiritual ascent in life, you really can't see much along the way. Most of the time, you see only what's just a few feet ahead of you. Your vision is focused on every step you take. If you look anywhere, you look up to see how steep the going is getting and how far you have to go to get to the top.

But there come moments on every climb when you need to rest, when you turn around, stretch, and look back on where you've been. It's then that you suddenly see the trail you took to get where you are now and the vast panorama below. These are special moments that make every journey worthwhile.

The summer vacations in the valleys of my love of life were more important to me when I chose to look back on them later in life. I'm a climber. I like the thin, spiritual air where few dare to go. I like being in the clouds where I can't see a thing most of the time. I like the cold, disciplined hikes in which I only give thought to putting one foot in front of the other, whether that's on a trail others have walked before or virgin ground. I like the view at every summit. I like the feeling of accomplishment in getting to the top. And I like the ease of the descent to the next valley on the other side.

I met my first partner at a "Gay Men's Spiritual Retreat" that turned out to be one of those summer's of love. We committed to one another to uphold a monogamous, lifelong relationship together. But our partnership began in 1990 when we were both 37 and had to end in 2004 because of irreconcilable differences when we were 50. He died of AIDS eight years later.

From my bond with him, I learned about a brotherhood of love I'd never known before. At the time, I thought that the illumination of his wisdom and the warmth of his love would shine down on me forever. Life in San Francisco with that man brought me further along on my spiritual journey than I could ever have gotten alone and on my own. He brought great "joy" (happiness and sorrow) into my life.

The City of San Francisco is outrageously, spiritually adolescent, holding to the 1967 dream of an unending "Summer of Love." San Franciscans don't just insist that the Summer of Love never ended; they claim "today" is an eternal late May. Perhaps because San Francisco is naturally air-conditioned with wind and fog, we're spiritually disposed here to being really *cool*.

Here is a story of San Francisco I wrote that was published in The San Francisco Gay Times in 2007. It embodies my graduation from spiritual high school with a major in gay love.

Protecting My Holy Land from Terrorists

The screen at the Castro Theater in San Francisco is my Wailing Wall. How often I've sat before it and wept! The Castro Theater is an emotional reenactment of the Temple in Jerusalem destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. At the Castro Theater my heart prays before a sacred wall of celluloid stories; there I'm given help in understanding and accepting a world so hateful of people like me.

San Francisco is my *other* "Jerusalem," my other "city of peace" (which is the meaning of the word). I feel I'm in my homeland in San Francisco. Here I live in a sanctuary from people who want to destroy me, and my way of life.

"Israel" means "to struggle with gOD." San Francisco is my *other* Israel. My spiritual struggle with gOD is happening here. And I won't give up my struggle to terrorists who'd like to take it from me.

While growing up in L.A. in the 1960's, I hated America, politics, hippies and rock music. I was intimidated by denim! To me "cool" described weather, not a state of mind. I thought it was unnatural to have sex in the same city my mother lived in. I was uptight about everything. I felt guilty for inhaling without paying for the air.

I left America when I graduated high school to learn how to find love through movement. I got a gig in Israel dancing in a modern ballet company and came out of the closet at Independence Park in Tel Aviv the next year where I sat with young Israeli soldiers at picnic tables chatting late into the night. Someone would bring a thermos of coffee, and we'd drink and talk or cruise among the trees. In those days, the police would raid the park to catch us and write "homo" in our identity booklet, which would be devastating to our reputation. When we had to scatter and run from the police, I thought of my parents, both Holocaust survivors, and asked myself how it was possible I was in Israel running in fear from Jews. Had the world gone mad?

I'd run away from America because I wanted to *stop* running from bullies. But instead of finding a refuge in Israel, I found myself facing the same challenge there. In disappointment, I ran for comfort into the arms of cigarettes, drugs, alcohol and the embraces of other immature, young men like me.

I came back to America five years later having tried living in Israel and then Holland. I came back feeling quite arrogant and condescending of American life. I was more wounded and confused than before I left.

My first suicide attempt was in my twenties, shortly after I returned to L.A. There was a homophobic side of me that wanted to kill a queer. In my second attempt a couple of years later, I discovered there was a nazi within with a final solution to the problem of my identity as a jew. Thanks to gay A.A. in L.A. I was held in loving arms until I was able to embrace myself.

When my only long-term gay relationship ended at the age of 50 in 2004, I experienced a disappointment with gay love that went far deeper than anything that had saddened me about the world before. My bitterness came home to rest within me. Yet where else could I go with my identity issues if not to the gay and Jewish communities?

Today, gay Israelis (and that includes Israel's gay-Muslim citizens) enjoy more political rights than anywhere else in the Middle East. Palestinian gays have an organization in Jerusalem to go to, to escape discrimination from their families and the homophobia in their own society. It pains me that some Muslims would like to see Jews and gays eradicated from this earth. They're going to need to get through their K-6 spiritual education in the school of self-love before they'll be able to consider themselves civilized by today's standards.

To find the source of their hatred of gays and Jews, people should look within. Hatred isn't going to earn anyone a spiritual transcript that they're going to be proud of from the school of self-love. And our Teacher isn't going to commend them for their faith in **Him** if they can't be inspired by their religious faith to put greater faith in gays and Jews.

Anti-Zionism and homophobia are wounds that cut deeply into the body politic. They've even made me cut in my self. Everyone bleeds from these wounds. Humanity is all one student-body, so we have to work together to heal our wounds.

Today, I see young people in America *meandering* out of the closet compared to 40 years ago when I *shot* out like a canon. I see queers walking nonchalantly through the Castro as if freedom were free, not realizing the high price some of us paid for sexual liberation.

There are terrorists today in *my* holy land, the Castro, blowing themselves up with unprotected sex and recreational drugs, and they don't give a damn what their behavior does to the rest of us. We've tried to convince them to make peace with themselves, as so many of us did with the terrorists in our own heart. But it hasn't done much

good. We only need to teach terrorists how to love one terrorist, and that education has to begin within.

The terrorists in the Castro are bullies that threaten the self-love the gay community has worked so hard to attain collectively. These terrorists collude in our mind, conspire in our heart and betray our body. But every moment of every day, everywhere, there are opportunities to act against them with the courage and conviction that comes of loving ourselves sincerely.

Although there are days I have to watch destructive behavior around me, I'm so glad I'm devoted to my devotion to myself. It's more than my *right* to protect myself from anyone who'd deny me my right to live in peace and flourish. It's my *privilege*.

A Spiritual Higher Education

50. Introduction to Spiritual University

I had a terrible nightmare. It was painful, and yet somehow sobering. I dreamt I woke up suddenly and found myself hovering in mid air in front of a scorched rock wall devoid of life. And as I floated in front of it, I intuitively knew it was a mirror of my psyche; built with boulders of fear, rocks of pain, stones of dread and myriad pebbles of suffering. I was standing before a wailing wall of negativity piled high, one grievance upon the other.

There was no feeling coming back to me from this wall. It was like the wall I faced when I woke up in my car that Sunday morning at the bottom of the cliff. The wall in my dream was my inner world devoid of any kind feelings for me. It was a depiction of that side of my inner world that holds none of the good feelings for others I'd been projecting onto them. It was a stark depiction of who I am using the metaphor of geology to infer feeling. It was the "me" I see when I look at myself as a rock.

This wall was also made up of all the stones the bullies of life had thrown at me. I couldn't see past it to remember the joy of the good people, places and things I'd also experienced. There I was, as I was, staring at that part of me that was hard, cold and seemingly insurmountable. And I was terrified at the thought of having to find a way to go around it.

And as I looked away from the seared, parched wall out into the blackness of the space surrounding it, I felt an emptiness within that was immense. And in that emptiness, I couldn't stand myself because I was bereft of hope. I felt like absence personified. At the core of my being, I saw scorched earth, land without promise; a place that fosters no life; dust turning inexorably to dust in a vast void.

But when I was able to acclimate to this inner environment and accept my despondency with a modicum of curiosity, I magically found myself floating up and back away from the wall. And then I saw that it was really a cliff that continued around in a complete circle, creating the perimeter of a crater.

Curiosity continued to propel me from that first place where I'd been hovering until I could see myself floating above the center of an empty hole, an explosion in the terrain of my reality. The crater was now down around me, and I was suddenly afraid I'd fall back into it and never come out alive. The only evidence of my existence in that

moment was in that huge hole of devastating feelings surrounded by vacuum and utter silence.

I clung to my sanity with no more than survival instinct, through feelings of annihilation that felt like they'd rip me apart. But hope for a better future, like a solar wind, propelled me in yet a new direction. I found myself moving through inner space thanks to that momentary, positive attitude of self-regard and concern for how I felt.

I slowly floated up and out of the crater entirely. And from a new vantage point, I saw I'd been in one crater, but that there were thousands, perhaps millions, more craters around me, all shimmering in an eerie twilight. And although I was lost and confused in my nightmare, I knew I was on an important adventure in coming to know myself by moving through my fear of me.

The craters were the consequences of every negative thought I'd ever had. I was looking at my psychic terrain, and it was pot-holed with the meteoric effects of feelings that had scarred me for life. And they were all shimmering from sunlight that was reflecting off them.

When I remembered that all I had was my love of adventure, I saw myself rise even higher into the inky, black space in my dream to an abyss of darkness filled with myriad, tiny points of light. And then I realized I was hovering above a horizon down onto what looked like the surface of the moon. And I felt like a fool for taking so long to realize where I was.

When I thought about where I'd ended up in relation to where I came from, a meteor-like rock flew through inner space and crashed on the surface of where I was, producing a silent explosion and another crater. And I realized then that my own negative thinking was the gravity attracting meteors, causing them to crash on the surface and scar it.

I realized how barren and exposed I was to my own thinking. My mind was like the moon, a brittle, barren surface of all that I could rationally perceive. But this rationality produced only a terror I had to control.

Although I couldn't quite believe my mind was capable of so much psychic damage, I was propelled by this inner truth in a new direction, from where I saw the good earth an immense distance away. And then I felt for the first time how important that blue-green ball of life is to me. The earth was like my soul, the ground of my inner being where I was born and where I belonged.

My mind might be a psychic terrain that looks like a barren moon with a dark side and a light, an inner world that bears the scars of a lifetime of pain and suffering, revolving silently in a cold, harsh

vacuum. But my mind revolves around a greater world, a world half my mind is always facing that's bathed in sunshine an immense distance away. And when I saw the earth shining in the night sky hundreds of thousands of miles away, I shed a tear for my soul, so far and out of reach.

As the result of this sorrow, my body was propelled away from both moon and earth, further into the darkness of inner space to a place where I could see both celestial bodies within me - with the sun, like my heart, shining out onto them both. And I knew then that the sun is the source of all my spiritual nourishment. Self-love is the answer that shines like every star in the universe.

And with a new, found joy, I set out to explore the mysteries and vastness of the celestial bodies in my inner universe: mind (moon), heart (sun) and soul (earth).

There were galaxies within I wanted to reach; other stars I wanted to know to appreciate their light from other points of view. There was a milky way spilling its seeds of self-love across the universe within me.

My soul identifies with our earth, this blue planet revolving around our small, yellow sun. I can't survive without the sun's illumination and warmth. But my soul, like the earth, rotates through day and night, first facing my heart that shines at all times, and then away to perceive the vast universe within me. Twelve times my mind (moon) circles my soul (earth) as my soul (earth) revolves around my heart (sun) each year.

The universe around me mirrors my universe within. It's no coincidence I live on the third planet from the sun, in this, the third dimension. My soul is but a fragile, heavenly body vibrating, rotating and revolving in a set pattern since the beginning of time, moving through a sea of inner blackness with millions of eyes twinkling through the dark.

I'm not alone in my solitude. Everyone's inner world can be described using astronomy as a metaphor. Everyone has an inner telescope to perceive the majesty of his creation and an inner microscope to do the same.

Everyone can be inspired to become a spiritual explorer, a columbus who'll travel west in his soul in search of riches. He'll come to a strange, new land, a new world of promise. Anyone can become a magellan who'll circumnavigate his own soul. He'll embrace more than he now holds dear. He'll learn to embrace life with his imagination.

I'm an explorer in my own time and space. I've proved to myself that my soul is religiously round, that I don't have to fear falling off it. I don't need the silly dogmas that keep other men huddled side by side, looking yearningly out to sea. I see. I know. I've been to that flat-earth view of reality. My horizons go past their horizon.

I'm an american eagle, an armstrong who's flown above other men's limited vistas of experiences. I've found a mysterious, new view of me within to explore. I'm no longer on the precipice of my spiritual awakening. I'm awakened.

The odyssey of that nightmare in slumber was unpleasant, but it brought me a new perspective of myself. And, although I was terrified by that trip, I've made many subsequent voyages into inner space that have given me much more confidence in my ability to know and love myself.

My imagination is a vehicle that can take me all the way back to the big bang of my creation, when my parents came together with desire to make a baby. My imagination is a ship I can maneuver with curiosity and propel with courage. I'm no longer huddled on the edge of my soul. I move through physical space, which mirrors my vast, inner space. I'm on two adventures at once, discovering the mystery of the universe around me as I discover my world within.

51. Running for Classes

I chose ballet as my life's devotion because I love the body gOD gave me, even though I didn't always know that about myself. I've always thought the human body is an amazing instrument. Therefore, I wanted to learn how to operate the one I got to the best of my ability.

I chose ballet as my life's devotion, albeit with a modicum of resentment because my family wouldn't embrace my choice of a career in dance. I danced out of defiance because male dancers were ridiculed in those days for dancing at all. I danced with anger more than love. I needed insolence and insubordination to get me through the humiliation I was subjected to for being a man who loved to dance more than he loved anything else on earth. I needed spite to do what was right.

Once I was a professional dancer who earned a living at my craft, it was as though I'd put my foot down and showed the world I could lead my life my way. I was stiff-necked. I didn't turn a cheek to unkindness or shrug my shoulders at ignorance because, in my heart, I

was unkind to me and ignorant of myself. It took many more decades before I was ready to bend over backwards in an effort to love myself and give up the spite that had inspired my life's love.

Through ballet, I began to see my special gift as a communicator. I could translate insignificant gestures into words and words into body language. Through ballet, I could feel gracious about the body I'd been given. I could stretch myself and balance my head and heart in my conscience.

In having been given the ability to express emotion through motion, I discovered that every step I took toward inner authenticity revealed something to me about the process of self-transcendence. I knew that this is what dreamers meant when they talked about earning their wings or learning to fly.

But it took decades of doing dance steps mindfully before I could imbue them with emotional regard for myself with equal spiritual dedication to my Teacher. To come to truly love the body I'd been given and the transformational journey my body was helping me make, I had to dance from my heart *and* my head. In observing the two of them coordinating with one another I began to prove to myself that there were truly two identifiable parts of me: my body and my soul.

I only wish future dancers will learn to draw this conclusion sooner. It doesn't matter whether you dance *with* the music or in *opposition* to it. Just don't stop listening to the music, whatever you do. Don't take the music for granted. The melody is the essence of love and the harmony is the essence of wisdom. If you dance as though your body were singing all the parts of a song, destiny will do the rest.

It took far too long for me to find the spiritual bridge that unites "technique" with "feeling" because my ballet teachers didn't talk in these terms. Because I wasn't taught to dance with an attitude of gratitude just for having a body, I moved only through outer *place* and missed out on the simultaneous adventure through inner *space*. Awareness of the dance of life and the sheer joy of self-expression that self-love can bring to ballet eluded me.

From the outside, I looked like a chick well served by a hard shell, but from within, my ego seemed easy to crush. I was prone to feeling insulted when criticized. I felt people didn't hold me with adequate regard. I felt they were against me, and therefore I was quick to feel ridiculed and scorned when things didn't go my way.

But, at the same time, I was ashamed of describing these reactive feelings to anyone. I was an unborn chick locked in a shell, and I didn't know how to come out without breaking something

important. I didn't want to make a mess. I was afraid of being scrambled by my experiences rather than borne by them. I got caught up in the endless loop of what came first, the feeling or the thought, and then I missed the opportunity to ask the next good question.

I didn't realize my sensitivity to criticism emanated out from within. If I could have criticized myself in areas of my life I was taking for granted, I could have become a better dancer. By avoiding some forms of criticism *within*, I became overly sensitive to all criticism *without*.

At the age of eighteen, after I found the courage to have my first sexual experience with a man, I was incensed because the guy didn't ask me to spend the rest of my life with him... And the following day with only three hours sleep, I went to the ballet studio, danced like I could fly and came crashing down executing tour jetés across the room, and broke my left foot.

I was in a cast for six weeks and in physical rehabilitation for more than a year. I limp *emotionally* to this day from the very first time I had sex with a man. I feel I have *physical* evidence under foot for my *emotional* clumsiness. My left foot is what men would consider their Achilles' heal. My soul was affected by that fall in a way that's left me vulnerable and feeling excruciatingly human. The first sexual experience I had with a man made me realize I have feet of clay.

I wasn't superstitious about the emotional and physical concurrence between my broken heart and my broken foot. I somehow intuited that there's a loving gOD who'd teach me how to dance through life more gracefully the next time I tried to combine my love of men with a leap of faith that would land me on my feet.

I wish there had been someone there then to tell me what I was going through, even though there was nothing anyone could have done to change anything except my attitude. Find someone to elucidate the meaning of your life in a positive way. Find a "poet" you can trust to help you interpret your experiences. Da Vinci chose to make The Last Supper roughly 15 feet high by 30 feet long to magnify the importance of his message. Find someone who can magnify your life's work, so you can see how great you really are.

Because I'd suffered years of loneliness in childhood and early adolescence, I wanted to impart all the love in my heart to the very first man I had sex with. And because he was also the first person I came out to, I wanted him to know how deeply I felt about myself in those special moments we shared.

Something had to give, and instead of a hymen, it was “my left foot” (not to be confused with Daniel Day-Lewis movie “My Left Foot”).

At that time of my life, I thought a ballet class the night after my first sexual experience with a man would have been a great way to start the day. I was ecstatic about having lost my virginity and had every reason to express my elation through dance.

A dancer has to *live* to bring his art *alive*. So when caution and care can't stop you from making a mistake, look for the bard within who can make poetic sense of what might seem, at about that time, unjust, even cruel.

When I twisted my foot in midair and landed on it “sickled” (crooked), I was expressing something twisted the child in me suddenly saw inside myself. I landed off balance. Motion mirrors emotion. Art mirrors life. It was my feelings for me that were off balance. I was very young and clumsy. I'm not anymore. I'm older and more inwardly graceful today.

Life is a magical experience even if some people refuse to believe in the magical mystery our stories bring to our experiences. If you don't come to believe in your own mysterious magic, you may have a much harder time discovering your undying admiration for yourself.

The soul is the part of a man that grounds him, the part of him that's made of the dust of the earth. A man has feet of clay to remind him of his relationship to mother earth, to remind him that he's made of the dust of the earth. And yet he also mirrors gOD's image of **Himself**...

In ballet school, you repeat the same moves hundreds of times. With repetition comes physical strength that brings grace through repetition. But emotional grace is no easier to learn than physical grace. With *emotional* grace comes the dawn of every new day. But with *spiritual* grace, you'll make it through the nights.

gOD made it possible to twist your body in many ways. And your heart and soul are equally flexible. You need to learn to live with the twists and turns on life's journey that any modern dancer would be able to take physically, not avoid them. No one is *that* straight...

I had to repeat the same emotional exercises year after year, getting older and bolder. Sometimes I got frustrated with what seemed like reoccurring, boring exercises of the heart, not seeing that I was making progress in attaining grace on many levels, albeit slowly.

Sometimes I got to see my thoughts emerge in new ways. And when that happened, it was as if I was released from the servitude of

thinking that had previously constrained me. I was suddenly above myself, transcended, looking down.

You may not yet see the subtle distinctions in the way you think now that differ from the way you used to think, but you can look for your own way of perceiving progress that's unique to you. You have a special gift to offer the world that nobody else can give. (You're like a can with something in it that nobody else has inside.) Spend your time looking for that gift from within, and don't give up hope if you don't discover it right away. It took me decades to find my way to contribute to life.

gOD put us on a planet with one sun and one moon as a clue to our nature. We're not in a flat world we need to fear falling off of. Our heart is like the sun that shines its loving feelings onto our soul (earth) during our day, and our heart is like the sun, shining its light onto us in reflection using the moon (mind), in phases, during our nights. All the stars are reminders to us that our heart is always shining, whether we can see it or not.

You reside in your soul, which is like the good earth. You just need to reorient yourself in inner space to observe that your mind is a desolate rock revolving around the real you. Come down to earth where you can appreciate the tug your mind has on your spiritual being. Don't look on with longing and envy at your blue-green home as though you can only see it from afar.

Appreciate how you feel about yourself, like you'd appreciate a summer day. Come to know the eternal light of love in your heart, and you'll see that even your soul is captivated by the gravity of your immense love. Even your soul revolves around your heart...

When you perceive your heart like the sun; your mind like the moon; and your soul like the earth – you'll look at your body differently, and you'll reorient yourself realistically to the dark, vacuum you're moving through within.

Nobody in the dance world ever spoke to me about the emotional poise I'd need to apply to my art. Nor did they mention that jealousy and envy would throw me out of physical, as well as, emotional alignment. (hey spoke only about avoiding cravings.) So I danced competitively and angrily. And I hurt myself over and over doing so.

No man dances like any other. No snowflake moves through the air like the others. Everyone and everything is made with a different pattern to go through space from a different place. Look more closely at *how* you move. Dance with *your* idea of grace in mind. Fall in love

with *your* feelings. Fall for you and you'll come to see that gOD has always been with "yOU" deep down inside.

My feelings of being socially stiff and sexually awkward could have been addressed through dance if someone had described to me the connection between physical and emotional grace. And my jealousy and envy could have been channeled in an affirming direction if I could have recognized the wealth I held within. My cravings could have been redirected toward knowing *me* if I'd had the discipline to know the difference between freedom and autonomy. But I had to discover that for myself...

Because as a child I reacted with indignation, resentment and cynicism to what my parents had tried to teach me, I didn't see that my bad attitude would follow me from their home into the dance studio. But despite the poor methods my parents had employed, their intentions had been honorable. I should have realized that the vindictiveness and resentment I felt towards others was really unfinished business I had with my parents that had followed me from childhood into adulthood. I should have gotten to work on my self at my source by doing more to teach *me* to obey *myself*.

"Autonomy" is the only thing a child is interested in exploring. And big, little boys will try to sell autonomy to the masses when what the masses are really yearning for is "freedom."

"Freedom" is a meaningless word until you discover self-discipline. And until the most self-disciplined among us start to boast about the rewards we're getting from self-discipline and speak more honestly about our challenges, the masses are going to continue to conclude those with power are rogues and thieves stealing their rewards out from under them. To convince the world that we're all getting what we deserve, we have to remove every cookie jar out from prying hands. Each of us has to become his own cookie in his own jar.

If we don't use the word "autonomy" when talking to children, they're never going to discover how much they covet their autonomy as a sign of growing up to become like we are. They're going to blindly seek autonomy in adulthood instead of exploring the mystery and magic of freedom.

I ran away from home *physically* at eighteen, but I couldn't get out of my mother's house *emotionally* until decades later. I left her at the L.A. airport when I went to live in Israel and called myself an adult as soon as I was on the plane. But I carried my negative feelings for her wherever I went. I play acted being an adult. I was still a child at heart. My heart was sickle. So I shouldn't have been surprised to find out that the Israelis didn't like me very much in those days, either.

Now my mother is in her nineties and my father has long since passed on. Now I honor her by teaching her about the spirituality she, long ago, bestowed upon me. She taught me much more than how to tie my shoes and button my shirts. She taught me how to find freedom through self-discipline. The “arbeit macht frei” I later saw above the gate at Dachau visitn her home town of Much said nothing about the German education I’d gotten at home.

Now I repeat back to my mother the essence of what she taught me in the hopes that she’ll die free, liberated and fully emancipated from life. Now I remind her that she’s in the Ph.D. program in the school of self-love. Her husband is deceased. Her children don’t need her, and her grandchildren are off exploring the world. Now she needs to work at loving herself, and it isn’t easy when you’ve devoted your life to loving your family.

In childhood, I couldn’t see how deeply my emotional attitude toward authority would affect my success out in the world, and so I missed the opportunity as a teenage to see how my ballet masters might have contributed to my spiritual development had they played more of a role of surrogate parent by treating me like family. And when I was a young adult I missed the opportunity to see how I could play more of a role of surrogate parent by treating myself like family.

Being a young adult is about not having your mommy with you anymore, but refusing to admit how alone and afraid you are without her. It can be embarrassing whether or not you need help and there’s somebody there to offer it.

Although my need for independence as a young man distanced me from role models, masters, mentors, heroes, heroines, stars and paragons of virtue, the truth is that I needed outside parenting well into my fifties. It wasn’t until I reached my sixties that I could admit to myself that I was truly alone on my own with my mother well-integrated into my inner parent. It wasn’t until male menopause that I could finally embrace my inner child.

When I was young, I danced like an orphan, not like a beloved child of the universe. I looked like I was all alone on stage. My parents never told me that adulthood would be a process of learning how to be with others as though your parents were always secretly by your side. They never told me that jealousy and envy would cripple the child in me unless I had an inner parent who’d help me walk tall. They never told me that gratitude would grow me spiritual wings over time as it had for them. They never told me they’d never leave me if I internalized them, just as *they’d* done with *their* parents. There was so much they couldn’t say that I’ve had to say to myself for them.

And now, to honor my mother, I have to tell her what she didn't tell me in words that I learned from her anyway. Now I have to express my idea of "freedom" first of all to her, and leave my autonomy far behind me. Today the Teacher is giving me lessons from the first tablet of the Ten Commandments, (#5), in how **He** wants me to honor my mother. It's a reward. It's a gift. It's an honor.

There were two Bibles written, a Quran and countless faiths founded upon teaching people how gOD wants us to live. There were prophets who spoke about the importance of such matters. There was one man crucified so that no man would be scapegoated ever again. There's **His** story, **Her** story and the mystery of *my* story. There are myriad ways to teach people how to make the best of life rather than simply settle down and wait until life passes us by.

gOD created chicks in eggs and caterpillars in cocoons to tell us about **His** intentions. Mother Nature *is* **His** nature. **He** gave us a universe filled with millions of galaxies of stars and seemingly empty of any other forms of life to get us to think about why we're here. But most people prefer to spend their time gossiping about what *others* are doing incorrectly. They don't bother to ask themselves why *others'* mistakes are getting under *their* skin.

There were artists who drew European paintings of angels looking back up to gOD. There are cherubs still dancing on the ceilings in palaces, looking down and laughing at people like me. There was a young man named "Mozart" who proved you don't have to grow up to be great. There was another young man who sang a song of farewell to Frank Lloyd Wright. Israel emerged like a phoenix from the flames of the Holocaust, and still some people refuse to believe in the evolution of the species because the evolution of their own soul has figuratively left them with their knuckles dragging on the ground.

Don't tell me *I'm* crazy. I know *I'm* crazy. I'm a world-class expert on crazy. What *I* know is that I'm not the only one...

My ballet teachers couldn't do more than care for my physical training. They were paid to teach me to move from the outside, further out. They could only guide my steps. They couldn't teach me anything of greater, inner importance in having a body. There weren't enough philosophers in those days. There still aren't enough today.

Dance is an art, and an art is a mirror of *your* nature. I had to teach myself to dance as best I could with the tools I had at my disposal. I had to teach myself to be an artist because art, in my case, would always begin as an inside job.

My life has been a dance. The metaphor of man as a dancer has consumed me for most of my life. But now I'm equally consumed

with many metaphors. My life is also a school. My life is a journey. My life is a canvas, a block of marble and a train set.

It was no surprise that for so long the world around me didn't make any sense to me at all. I'd completely separated the world around me from my world within to protect my feelings from me, and others'. I danced to achieve a place for myself out in the world. But I didn't begin to dance in inner space until my bones had begun to creek. Inside, I'd stood perfectly still most of my life inside, frozen in fear, afraid to move, afraid to feel embarrassed, ashamed or humiliated, afraid of losing something both terribly significant and insignificant like a piece of fruit. Looking back, I couldn't call that dance; that's sculpture.

When I entered the university of spiritual self-love, I knew I wanted *deeper*, not *newer*, experiences. In the spiritual college of life, learning about myself from the heart became the love of my life, and love, a continuous expression of learning. I wanted to specialize in what could bring more joy into my life: me.

Perhaps I was born alive, awake and fully conscious. Perhaps my parents, culture and circumstances put me to sleep with their dogmatic insistence about the nature of their reality. Perhaps it was guilt that made me nod off. I'll never know. What I know *now* is that my life became an awakening process in which I learned to feel. But I had to struggle to open my eyes and ears *to* myself, *by* myself and *for* myself. Being awake today is a luxury I worked hard to *attain* and a necessity I now work hard to *maintain*.

If you don't want to do the work needed to wake up to how you feel about yourself, you can simply walk through life asleep. Popes do it; presidents do it; parents do so, too. There's no reason I can give you, for you to wake yourself up. You're welcome to remain a heavenly body, an object hurdling through space without full awareness of your purpose or the star that you revolve around.

The laws of *spiritual* physics are always having an affect on you whether you learn about yourself *consciously* or not. You'll come to know gOD's physical, emotional and spiritual laws as they affect you, and then you'll learn to anticipate them with wisdom, love and generosity of spirit. You'll learn about your place in your universe one way or another.

During the early years of my life, I spent an inordinate amount of time watching others and criticizing what was missing in them (usually to myself). I could almost visualize the lessons they were missing; the tests they'd fail; the classes they hadn't completed; and the degrees they still had to earn.

But I was more worried about *their* grades and attendance than I was, my own. You would have thought I was going to graduate with their transcript in hand, not mine.

Turns out, I had to internalize their mistakes to make the world around me personally meaningful. I had to speak candidly to the characters I created in my mind, as well as comment to myself on what I was learning about myself from these moral discussions I had with myself inside. I had to use these inner dialogues to advance my understanding of myself. (Homeless people do the same thing, but when you have these discussions out loud, it indicates that you don't care anymore about matters of privacy.)

Every terrorist, gangster, hoodlum, liar, thief and cheat can see what's wrong with the world. Even *I* now have 20/20 vision on humanity's failings. It takes no great insight to blame people for what they don't know about themselves. Almost anyone can see how closed people's eyes and ears are to some aspect of life. Almost everyone can relegate others to the level of a dropout in the school of self-love now enrolled in the school of hard knocks.

After two suicide attempts, it was pretty easy for me to see that I hated myself. I just didn't want to admit that I was sane for feeling that way about me when everyone else insisted I was crazy. I was sane enough to see that I was terribly unkind to me, but not sane enough to realize how unfair that was to me. If you hate someone, you'll surely treat him unkindly, but you won't bother to question your behavior.

Hatred of gays in the last century, of blacks until today, and of Jews since the beginning of time is the result of self-hatred projected onto scapegoats. There are plenty of good reasons to hate. And you can quote the Bible or the Quran to assert your hatred of anyone and everyone, especially those who behave differently from you (gays), look different from you (blacks) or believe differently from you (Jews). And you can use, emotional *boundaries* to distain the gays, *territoriality* to keep the blacks at bay and *real estate claims* to hate the Jews.

It took me 50 years to complete my K-12 spiritual education just to reach a level of kindness in which I could admit I was willing to "honor" myself by honoring my parents. But with the high school diploma in hand, I earned the right to go on with a spiritually *higher* education in self-love to honor myself by honoring my inner parent.

While I was in spiritual, primary school, the emphasis had been on group strength. I measured my virtues by my ability to work as a team player. In the middle school years of spiritual awareness, the uniqueness of my mind took hold, and I learned to appreciate my own

authority, my ability to force myself to obey my own rules. In the spiritual, high school of self-love, I found my way to my heart and learned to love myself in brief, sporadic spurts for the way I was.

The university of self-love is about learning not only how to be mindful and emotionally expressive, but soulfully so; to come to believe in myself through small incremental steps. Joy occasionally comes to me in the form of inner rain that nurtures my inner landscape, the desert terrain I come from that can get so dry. Joy is a bittersweet experience that sometimes makes me think life is harder than it looks. But with gOD constantly lifting water out of the oceans and pouring it onto the land somewhere, I have to admit **He's** doing the brunt of the work. My inner experience of "sweet sorrow" is a minor achievement by comparison.

Other people's grades had been so much more important than my own because gOD had sent me out to police the world before He was ready to retire me to police myself instead. I learned a great deal while inadvertently projecting the grades of others onto my transcript and then tutoring *them* to raise *their* grades on *their* report card. I learned I wasn't in this school all by myself. I was responsible for some others, but *in my own way*. Life isn't a test tube experience. It's a laboratory setting with other people, and there are good spiritual reasons for it being this way. Just don't draw any wild conclusions about how you have to behave or how everyone else has to behave.

The Teacher created the human psyche in just such a way that **He** maintains some control over everyone with guilt and love. But we have to recognize these boundaries to live a righteous life. Our Teacher has time on **His** side. **He** can decide to wait with teaching us lessons. **He** doesn't have to choose to correct every mistake as we make it. **He** created us in **His** image and placed us in a timed experience. **He** can touch us when and where He wants without us even knowing it, leaving us to question our choices or be grateful for them. **He** can weave **His** influence in our life through strangers and coincidences in ways we'll never be able to anticipate. We're all here to learn. There are no innocent bystanders watching life occur only for others. There are no victims or perpetrators from gOD's perspective. The lessons we're given have deep, spiritual importance to us all. Our reward and our punishment are **His** to decide.

We are linen in our own hands. Our feelings are the needle and our thoughts are the thread. But gOD can guide our hand as we learn to embroider, or **He** can make us prick ourselves. If we bleed, the question then becomes whom we're going to blame when everyone

claims to be a tailor or a seamstress, and yet it turns out they don't know how to sew.

If you decide to leave this world with a "Why me?" attitude, you'll have learned very little. There are almost seven billion students in this school. "Why me?" isn't the right answer on any of our Teacher's tests. The right answer should always be, "What can I learn about *myself* from this experience?"

And if the answer to that question leaves you feeling arrogant and superior to others, you have a lot more to learn before you can say you passed that class. *Your* grades are *your* business. If you feel proud of yourself, don't use that pride to put others down. Use it to lift yourself further up in the privacy of your heart. This is the essence of the gay experience and our pride parades. This is what our rainbow flag stands for.

Your arm's too short to box with gOD. Box with yourself instead. You can't blame **Him** for the way your life is turning out. You've got to stop the "blame game" altogether. You've got to look for better tools than blame, spite and revenge to get your desires met. You've got to learn to communicate peacefully with terrorists, homegrown and international.

You could say that gOD is coming to *us*, when in fact, we're moving toward **Him**. The closer we get to **Him** the larger **He** appears, the more **He** fills our life with **His** presence. But it's not gOD who's moving. It's humanity. And as each individual moves closer to **Him**, **He** draws the rest of us in that general direction as well.

Our whole solar system is hurling through outer space moving us on a greater journey. We're not just going in circles around the sun. We're going forward in outer space and inner space as well.

The whole idea of "running for classes" is totally outmoded. Your school curriculum is created online nowadays. But those of us who once literally ran around trying to sign up for classes in the gym learned from that experience to appreciate every class we got. It was harder in those days to get into the classes you wanted. In the school of self-love at the university level of life, you don't have to "run" for your classes. You can walk.

52. Undergraduate Requirements

Who wouldn't want to be anyone other than himself (jealous), and who wouldn't want to have other people's things (envious) if others appear to be more comfortable with what they've been given than you are with you and what you have? Why strive to be

yourself when you could cut corners and strive to be someone else who already has everything you want, instead?

A democratic society helps people achieve “fame,” which describes the subjective *length* of your life: goodwill amongst men. A democratic society also helps people achieve “fortune,” its *breadth*: physical comforts. When people have the freedom and opportunity to spread out without stepping on one another’s toes, they flourish naturally.

But *depth* is harder to achieve. Depth is personal. To become deep, you may (like me) first have to acknowledge what a snob you had to become over time to protect yourself from students of self-love you didn’t want to have to learn from. My world was too dangerous and threatening not to build a wall around myself. Once I’d given my love away in childhood and had my heart broken as an adolescent, I believed I had to construct that wall even higher in adulthood so it wouldn’t happen again. Only once my wall felt high enough to keep hurtful people out did I discover that that my security issues also had to be addressed from within.

To develop the depth you need to appreciate your life as a work in progress, you have to become a witness to the wall within you. You have to recognize that you only see the inside of that wall. This isn’t the side that the world sees. You need others to describe to you what it looks like from the outside because you can only see one side of it.

To do as is written in Leviticus, Mark and Matthew, to “LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF” you’re going to first going to have to love your *self*. But you’ve finally found the strangest stranger of them all. You maybe not be “odd” or “queer,” but you’re certainly “strange” to you. You’re the stranger you’re trying to meet and get to know. You’re the neighbor you don’t know yet. You’re the one who has to find more good reasons each day to get to know yourself.

The source of snobbery lies within. The person you may have really been turning your nose up at all these years may have been “you.” If the person on the inside of that inner wall doesn’t see those on the other side of it as crucial to self-discovery, you’re the one who’s been snubbed. Maybe feelings of exclusion are also emanating out from within...

The reason why this world is such a dangerous place is because people can’t tear down the wall within themselves. They’re left having to project their strangeness and disapprove out onto others. If you take your perspective on yourself for granted, you’re not going to have anything to say to yourself. You won’t see any reason to talk to

yourself, and then there'll be little chance that you'll learn to negotiate well with others.

The way I achieved emotional fame and fortune (the feeling of a beautiful container and rich contents) was from the inside *in*, with hard work in digging around inside for my depth of character. I don't say that to impress you, but to instruct you. I'm not interested in your awe of me. I'd much prefer to help you learn to be in awe of yourself.

To be "soulful" your conscience has to feel separate from your head, heart and penis. You have to have practiced scrutinizing your thoughts, feelings and desires for so long that your conscience begins to peel away from them internally. You feel a distinction inside that opens you to the idea of what it means to be a spirit having a human experience. When you become the cookie in the cookie jar, you won't want to go *out* and take anything that doesn't belong to you from others.

This distinction in your conscience feels like a seed becoming aware that it's in a shell. Your conscience feels like the seed and your body, like the shell. This is the emotional birth of self-love deep down in the ground of your being. This is the distinction before your spiritual rebirth with gOD. Everything you think, feel and believe will hold an underlying desire to understand your life. "Claiming to know" and "claiming to want to learn" will become vastly different in their emotional meaning.

You're not just a human being with impulses, urges, wants and desires. You also have needs. Your body has autonomous actions and reactions that you *need* to perform. Sneezing, throwing up and growing your nails are bodily needs that are as spiritually meaningful as your desire for sex. Your container will require you to serve your needs.

It's possible to make peace with everyone in this world (Jews, Christians, Muslims, blacks, whites, males, females, straights, gays and others) if you can make peace with yourself. But to do so, you have to go back to the Creation Story in the Hebrew Testament shared by all the Abrahamic faiths. You have to allow yourself to imagine you're the character of god in the Creation Story. Your thoughts (Adam), feelings (Eve) and desires (serpent) have to bend their will to your beliefs (the god within). You have to teach yourself not to take anything about you for granted, especially not the fruits of your tree of knowledge that hold within themselves the seeds of your spiritual being.

Your desire to *know* is natural and universal. Your desire to *question* is not. Learning to question is a great gift that everybody has

received in some areas of life, but not others. “Dogma” isn’t based on Scripture. Dogma is based on fear of questioning. Every single thing you question is a metaphor for a class in the school of self-love you’re willing to enroll in. Therefore, learn to question the thoughts, feelings, desires and beliefs you refuse to question.

Science isn’t your enemy. The scientific method of analysis can be useful in modernizing your belief system. If you make the mistake that the Catholic Church made by denying Galileo’s findings and insisting the universe revolves around the earth, you’ll miss out on the experience that your inner world doesn’t revolve around you either. Jesus may hold a very important place in your heart, but the *Son* of gOD doesn’t revolve around you anymore than the *sun* does.

Wanting someone’s body (jealousy) or their things (envy) are natural desires if you understand it consciously. Breaking your promises to take someone or something you want can be avoided with self-discipline. Sex and the acquisition of material goods are perfectly normal if done so without injury to others. Questioning why you want *who* you want and why you want *what* you want is important in getting to understand yourself. The more you look at who and what you desire, the more you’ll discover why you should like yourself the way gOD made you without craving outside fixations that aren’t good for you.

My mother didn’t realize until after she survived the War how independent and determined she really was. She didn’t realize that her mother had been the same way, having left *her* parents’ home in Vienna, Austria to open a tobacconist shop by herself in Munich, Germany in 1918. My mother didn’t tell me to be independent and determined like her mother. She just showed me what she’d learned as a child in her parents’ home.

My mother’s mother married one of her customers, a Protestant German from a small village in Bavaria. He was the first in his family to leave the farm to go to the big city where he married a Jew, a foreigner from Vienna, my grandmother. They had two children.

My mother had an older brother who died when she was five at the age of seven. My mother told her grieving parents she was glad he was dead, because she could play with his toys. But her parents both came from very big families, so they surely knew about sibling rivalry and didn’t say anything.

It must have been a nightmare for her father just a few years later when his German daughter (my mother, his only surviving child) was thrown out of school when she was thirteen years old for the “crime” of being Jewish in 1934. My grandfather died four years later

in 1938 from throat cancer, and I'm sure he must have died worried to death about the future of his Jewish wife and their child.

Long before Israel created the honorific "Righteous Among the Nations" used by the State of Israel to first describe non-Jews who risked their lives during the War to save Jews from extermination, my grandfather modeled his righteous intentions without uttering a word or getting any approval. He modeled his righteous, German intentions toward Jews at a time in history when most other Christians in Europe did just the opposite to express their "opinion" of Jews.

Even though I never met either set of grandparents, my mother's family includes a righteous Christian. My mother didn't need to teach me to respect Christians. She walked her walk because her parents modeled how to walk through life righteously. And in 1974 when I told her I was gay, she supported me completely and unequivocally. (She also dated a black man for a time in the 1960's.) She didn't have a prejudiced bone in her body. I learned about hatred *outside* her home. I learned about hatred from others, and then I practiced what I'd learned on myself until I was as hateful as everyone around me...

There's a big difference between "*self-righteous*" and "*self-righteous*." When you put greater emphasis on your *self*, magical things can happen. It's not arrogant or egotistical to simply state the facts. The truth about your goodness doesn't have to be a secret you have to keep from yourself any longer. You can simply state the truth about your virtues and sorrowfully admit your vices. It's not that hard to tell yourself the truth in the privacy of your mind. Nobody will hear your truth in there, but you.

If you want to make your conscience your guide, you have to confess your truth to *yourself*, not others. If you want to build your conscience like a muscle, you have to weigh it down with thoughts, feelings and desires that will exercise it. This isn't an exercise you *have* to share with others. You can do this by yourself.

There's magic in you that can make fairy tales come true, but you've got to believe in yourself to use it. To accomplish this, you'll need to increase your potential for intimacy from within. You've got to be "truthful," which is a combination of honest thinking, sincere feelings and authentic beliefs. Only then will you be able to fearlessly question your conscience for moral efficacy. This is the fairy dust that helped me come out of the closet. This is the magic that will help you bring down your wall.

The sly strategy of Madison Avenue has always been to convince you that they know what your dreams are made of. They tell

you that *they* have what it takes for you to make *your* dreams come true. They say they know what will make you happy. And you should believe them! They're absolutely right about that...

I have nothing against the products they're selling. The stuff they're hawking *will*, no doubt, make you happy if you want it, but it won't ever make you self-loving or contented with yourself. Things can make you feel good about *having* what you have, but they can never make you feel good about *being* who you are. No *thing* and no *one* can make you *feel* better about yourself than you can feel at this moment in time. Only you can make you feel better about you and your future. And that only comes by acting more righteously today than you did yesterday. But righteousness is a *process*. Righteousness isn't a *product*.

Happiness is an outside *out* experience that's achieved with money, property and prestige. Contentment is an inside *in* experience that's achieved with self-love. Everyone should want an outer world that will make him happy, but only a scant few want an inner world that will make them contented being themselves. And you should want that, too.

You should strive to make yourself comfortable while you're here on earth. And you'll certainly make yourself happy with nice, new stuff. But you can't *like* yourself for what you're doing to *you* if you're morally discrediting your *self* to get it.

Driving impatiently, complaining about strangers who live their lives with different values, overeating and going shopping when you don't need anything are examples of things you may be doing that are "morally discrediting your *self*." If you can't pierce your embarrassment at your concentration on the world around you, you'll never experience the guilt that'll help you discover the delight in meeting the stranger within.

You can buy fame for your head with clever thinking and fortune for your heart with popularity. But you can't transfer those purchases to your soul. You can't buy self-love. You can't promise to love your *self* unless you feel you can put your faith in *yourself*.

You can bribe yourself into *liking* you, but you can't bribe yourself into *loving* you. This is the great difference that love makes. But you *can* have it all and even *adore* yourself if you use your moral authority wisely on yourself.

The Constitution guarantees you the pursuit of happiness, but that's a far cry from the pursuit of self-love. Love is a godly virtue that you must earn with gOD's help. Love is a virtue you need to become soulful to express.

Happiness is strictly human. Happiness is fleeting. A good meal, a new car, a fabulous vacation – these are things that can make you happy; but for how long? The material world gets dull, whether quickly or slowly if you don't immediately begin the pursuit of your next material objective. No one can be happy forever. Even heaven is a place I image getting to out of joy, not because you pursued happiness all the days of your life.

Joy is like the live bacterial culture that makes yogurt. You've got to add a bit of it to make more of it. If you don't have any from the start you're out of luck. Joy is a natural feeling, but it only multiplies under very special circumstances.

Indulging yourself will make you *like* you. But that's a far cry from giving to yourself with head, heart and soul. Joy comes from adding a certain something to your experiences that makes them yummier and creamier the next day.

In the university of self-love, you'll be given coursework you can put your whole heart and soul into. Learning about you will become a privilege for which you'll want to give *thanks* to others and *appreciation* to yourself, so that you'll then be able to express your *gratitude* to gOD. But it all hinged on receiving each moment joyously as a gOD-given present. And that takes practice...

Permission to cry will always be granted you, but there are three kinds of tears: tears of joy, tears of sorrow and tears of self-pity. You have to ask yourself each time you cry, why. At funerals, you should ask yourself what sort of tears you're producing. And when people are laughing at you so hard that *they're* almost crying, ask yourself which of these three sort of tears they're emitting. They're not laughing at you with tears of sorrow for the way *you* are. They're laughing at you with tears of self-pity for the way *they* are.

Everyone talks about *freedom* when it's *liberty* that allows you to know what you feel, not freedom. Freedom is greatly underappreciated unless you use freedom to do more than just talk without considering the consequences of your words. To achieve the next steps in the school of self-love, *liberty* in your heart and *emancipation* in your soul, you have to allow yourself the freedom of speech to speak freely to yourself, not exercise your freedom to speak openly to others.

It's easy to convince yourself you're a post-graduate student in the school of self-love. It's easy to delude yourself with all the silly trophies you've collected in the normal course of living. It's easy to tell yourself you're one of the advanced students on earth because you've suffered so greatly in so many ways, lost money in the stock

market or given up a dream and gotten in line with others to work on survival issues. Everyone has cups, medals, pins, plaques and plates that signify something. Everyone finds silly reasons to think he's better off than everyone else. Everyone reinforces snobbery with more self-ignorance.

But you're given have an opportunity in the here-and-now to go beyond that fate. You don't have to stay on the same road you came in on. There are plenty of intersections where you can turn and go in a more positive direction. These roads are internal, not external. There's nothing you have to "do" to take the road up ahead. You just have to let your imagination take you where it wants to go, observe where you were in retrospect, and ask yourself what it means.

I feel blessed for my disobedient nature, not punished for it. I'm glad I went the wrong way in so many ways. Just as civil disobedience is one of the keystones to *political* freedom, *personal* disobedience is a key that will unlock the shackles of an overly obedient mind.

A head and heart in an unconscious conflict will cause turbulent rip tides within that are dangerous. But once your head and heart are working together under the oversight of your conscience, the roar of the waves crashing within your heart and the tide that draws them on and off the shores in your mind will make you feel swell. The seven continents of your mind don't compare to the upsurge of the magnificent currents of the seven seas in your heart. The palaces of Europe can't compare to the home under construction at your shore.

I'm not the Landlord of my spiritual abode; I'm leasing me for an undisclosed number of years. This beach house I find myself blessed with will eventually be demolished by time. All the upgrades I've made to the foundation and the attention I've given to adorning my inner walls with diplomas and mounted trophies will someday be crushed by gOD's wrecking ball.

And then all my efforts at personal upgrades and interior decorating will be over. My renovation and remodeling efforts will end. My California dream will be over. So it behooves me to make the best of my glorious nest before I fly from it.

But before I could improve my abode in my soul, I had to admit I was the one responsible for all the physical, mental and emotional damage already done to the premises. I wrecked me, ruined me and made a mess of me inside. Before the Landlord sends in **His** wrecking crew to make room for a new tenant at this location in outer space, I'm going to make sure my place has been sanctified to the best of my ability. What's the point of beachfront property if you don't bother to enjoy the heavenly view?

I hold a lifelong lease on me. But as a tenant in this body, I'm responsible to the Landlord that all **His** conditions are met while living in it. I'm responsible for the premises within these walls and to the grounds immediately surrounding it. And all the oceans of various emotions outside my mind's door can be a blessing or a curse depending on how I learn to appreciate the view I've been given.

I had to take on the job of spiritual housekeeper and handyman in my inner "dorm room" while I was a novice student of love at the university setting, whether I liked my humble accommodations at that time, or not. Later, when I was a little, spiritually older, I learned to manage my property and pay my bills. But if I hadn't learned to clean up my room when I was a young, spiritual frat. student, it simply wouldn't have gotten done.

Of course, nothing stopped me from leaving my place a pigsty then. Like everyone else, I was free to live any way I liked with any standards I chose for myself. But in the late years of my spiritual adolescence (at about the age of 50), I chose to apply the rules of my mother's home to my inner abode. I wanted to live with her standards in my soul. I was ready to admit that in some ways, I wanted to model her behavior; and recognize that, in fact, I already had.

But to bring that truth to consciousness required that I enroll in an industrial arts education in the college of self-sufficiency; I had to go to spiritual, trade school before college. I could only sweep so much under the rug before I had to admit I was feeling like somebody else's broom. The heart feels what it feels... It may be irrational to feel like a cleaning implement, but such is the heart of man. It'll never be rational.

The world looks as morally filthy as it does because there's a potential slumlord in everyone. The world within and the world around us are parallel schools, but very few choose to enroll in both. We're all going to two institutions of learning with complimentary curriculums whether we know it or not. The world around us mirrors the world within. The pollution in the world around us is a disgusting commentary on our selves because we refuse to admit that we're just as dirty inside as out.

America is the nation closest to heaven while still here on earth. We just don't see our proximity to perfection as a privilege. Americans are angels so well disguised that we don't see our own potential to bring more of heaven down to earth for everyone to enjoy. Yet often, we bring others more reminders of the hell to come than the heaven we're hoping for.

Let's get to work on those fancy, new halos that glow on a dimmer switch. Let's try on those bigger, better wings that'll allow us to fly higher and faster. Let's tear down every ghetto in America. They're blights on the name of our nation. The reason it causes us to feel shame to call ourselves "Americans" is because we're just as segregated from our *selves* as we are from one *another*. We're black and white inside as well as out.

The undergraduate, spiritual requirements at the university level of self-love are a conglomeration of classes that'll teach you how to become a spiritual handyman and housekeeper of your own abode. Take modesty and humility out from your tool belt and use them to make a difference where you know they'll be well served. Clean up your act. Set an example.

It's humbling to serve, especially your self. Wait on you. Clean up after you. Become your own mother. Your inner child will enjoy being spoiled by you if you do, and your inner husband will adore you for it.

53. Correcting Student Papers

After trying to pursue a career in ballet a second time at the age of 24, studying at American Ballet Theater School and Harkness Ballet School in New York City, I ended up in the insane asylum at Bellevue Hospital. After that experience, the idea of getting any of my dreams to come true in life seemed utterly dashed.

I was involuntarily institutionalized yet again in L.A. a year later after my car "incident," and came out of St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica at the age of 25 feeling like my car looked – ready to be used as scrap *mettle*. I felt I was beyond repair.

My mother got me on public assistance because I was incapable of doing much of anything, let alone hold down a job. I enrolled at L.A. City College in the fall of 1978 at the age of 26 to try to better myself after such a dismal start in life. Despite my mental and emotional frailty, my first two years of college turned out to be the most exciting academic time of my life. I walked onto campus with my head somewhat bowed by life. By entering the halls of academia with my eyes figuratively cast down; I saw that I had feet of clay. That was a good start in taking life seriously. I sailed through the City College system with straight "A's."

I got off S.S.I., met a guy I moved in with, and sold fabric and children's toys at swap meets. But then I had another serious bout of mental illness, and I don't even remember anymore what came next.

Somewhere around that time, I ended up taking a weeklong class to become a bank teller (even though I thought counting other people's money was beneath me). I got a job in a bank that I held onto for about a year and a half. From there I tried waiting tables because I thought that would recreate the "bohemian lifestyle" I'd been so attracted to. But I was abysmal at serving other people's needs. I ended up in a dead-end bank job I couldn't stand in a tiny office without even a window. I felt locked in a prison from 9-5. It had been more fun being locked up in mental institution...

I had nothing to hold onto but my arrogant assumption that I was too good for the job I was doing. I saw no reason to feel proud of myself, but I had an inner drive like my mother. I just didn't have the patience to complete anything I started. Something inside made me wanted to succeed, but I couldn't give her credit for the impulse I had to finish what I started.

Taking baby steps in life isn't easy, but it's especially hard when you can't be patient. Getting off public assistance and going back to work had been a great, personal achievement. And there was nothing morally wrong about working in a bank. My problem was with "anticipation." I was impatient with myself.

My freshman and sophomore college education at L.A. City College was my first exercise in learning how to turn my head in new directions to see and hear old things in new ways. It was my first lesson in not being so "stiff-necked."

But academia didn't teach me much about the meaning of my life. Nor did it teach me to listen for the call of my Teacher to come to spiritual class to learn to love myself. The beginning of my higher education at City College only taught me that academia is a great way to begin the transformative process of the heart by first focusing on matters of the mind. Academia helped my head so that my head could help my heart. And, later, when my heart was somewhat healed, my heart was ready to reach out to help lift my soul up out of darkness and despair. But none of that happened overnight.

On an essay test in a sophomore, English class at City College, there was a question I had no idea how to respond to, so I wrote an answer that was complete nonsense, thinking I'd have a better chance if I wrote anything at all rather than leave the space for the answer blank. I'd drawn a blank and therefore should have left a blank; that would have been an honest answer. But I hadn't enrolled in college to learn honesty. I saw my academic education only as an exercise in parroting back to teachers exactly what I thought they wanted.

I had a tendency of passing off guesswork as intellectual scholarship anyway. Even in conversation, I'd exaggerate and embellish facts to look smarter. There were questions both in college and in life I had no idea the answer to, but I thought any answer well stated would sound better than none at all. It never occurred to me that three of the hardest words to string together in the English language are "I don't know."

I remember I got a terrible grade on that test. The professor really tore my answer to shreds with comments on the page. And, when she reviewed the test with the class, while keeping my name anonymous, she read my response to the class, ridiculing it unmercifully before my peers.

I was angry with her for shaming me, and at myself for not telling her how she'd made me feel. But I couldn't see that I was really angry at myself because I'd set myself up for humiliation with the answer I'd given. For years after, I looked back on that professor as having cruelly hurt my feelings. Today I see more accurately that I instigated that feeling of betrayal.

I needed to find wiser ways to look at learning about my self. I needed to turn suffering into a creative challenge. In the undergraduate coursework in the spiritual university of self-love, I received a spiritual, red pen with which to correct my transcript of all that I said out loud. And I was expected to learn to use it humbly on everything that came out of my mouth.

The lessons at the university level only got harder because I wasn't just the Teacher's *student* anymore. I was my own *disciple*. Therefore, I was expected to learn from my mistakes, not just be able to point out other people's.

A "yenta" is a "busybody" in Yiddish. A yenta is a "gossip." But some yentas are the smartest people of all because they don't have to learn as much about life from making their *own* mistakes. They don't always have to figure out what's right and what's wrong on themselves. The best yentas can learn from *other* people's actions. They can both avoid mistakes and replicate virtues. They can talk amongst themselves about what others are doing, and then use their conscience to decide if that's what they'd do, too. A smart yenta doesn't only need first hand experience to improve herself. She does just fine with "used" experiences from others that she then recycles.

54. The Student Body

I'm a student in a body in the university of self-love. I'm a student learning to understand how to love this human body I'm inhabiting. *I'm* the "*student* body" my Teacher is teaching me about.

Beneath the bitterness I'd held in youth because the men I found handsome weren't attracted to me was an even more bitter truth - that *I* didn't find me attractive either. I criticized myself unmercifully for my physical imperfections, and then I was dismayed when others agreed with my conclusion. Rejection became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Others rejected me, which became a mirror of a rejection of myself I wasn't even aware of.

I held secret resentments against others, but the real secret was the resentment I had against myself. And that was unethical and hypocritical of me. I deserved to hold an honest, sincere and authentic appraisal of myself, especially because I thought so highly of *my* opinion of others.

Projecting my dissatisfaction with my container onto those who rejected me wasn't in my best interest. It made me vulnerable to other people's preferences. I made enemies out of people for something gOD had done to me. I had to go back to the Source. I had to recognize that **His** plan was greater than I'd been able to perceive.

My problem was much more emotional than physical. People didn't like me more because of my personality than because of my looks. If I'd liked myself then as much as I do now, I'd have found myself as good looking in my twenties as I feel today in my sixties.

In truth, gOD brought people into my life to reject me as hints to what I was doing to myself. Because I didn't question why I had to go through what I was going through, I didn't get much out of my experiences in real time. It was only in retrospect that I began to see method to **His** madness.

Nobody walked me through the real purpose of all art: to grow. My physical appearance couldn't be drastically changed, but it could be enhanced through the ways I perceived myself. I could have grown as a dancer had I danced with my heart and soul, regardless of my physical stature. It was my emotional regard for myself that had been stuck in a rut.

Since I tried to be good looking (like my mother) while never working at becoming attractive from within, I often came away from social encounters feeling ugly, when, in fact, I was just socially unappealing. I was waiting for *others* to find me attractive so I could agree with their opinion of me. I didn't realize it happens the other way round. You have to find your "self" emotionally attractive, and

then keep an eye out to see who's going to confirm your opinion of you.

It was really my own attitude of unattractiveness to myself that needed the makeover. I had to change how I looked at myself from within to perceive improvement in the people around me. Beauty can't just be skin deep. Your own beauty must go all the way to the bone before you'll be able to perceive the beauty of those around you.

In adulthood, I should have trained myself to become more modest. The job hadn't been completed in childhood when my mother taught me to dress myself and take care of my bodily functions. Once on my own, I slipped into the bad habit of continuing to use embarrassment to whip myself into shape.

But using guilt, even unconsciously, to motivate myself wasn't in my best interest in the long run. Embarrassment would have moved me *naturally* in the direction of modesty had I understood the spiritual process more fully.

In middle age I realized I was no longer a plum enjoying the tree of knowledge I was attached to. Life was turning me into a prune on the Tree of Life. I was a dried out, holding on for dear life to my stem. I thought I knew all about love. I thought I liked myself enough. So, I was ready to be adored. But I didn't want to have to do that for myself. I dreamed of others adoring me, for me.

Prunes may be desiccated, but they're in their own way just as sweet as plums. Prunes may be wrinkled, and the pit is a lot closer to the skin, but have their own reason for being.

Older people know the benefit of having prunes in their life. Prunes don't express their modesty on the outside. They've internalized the process. *Plums* show their modesty with firm plumpness. *Prunes* express *self*-loyalty through their powerful taste and affect on your system.

The stem of the fruit clinging to the Tree of Life isn't made of guilt or fear, but self-adoration. You should learn to hold onto life with a love of life when you're young. You should be taught to hold on to your life by your roots and with your trunk and branches in middle age. But by the time you're an older individual, you're going to want to identify with the desiccated fruit and stem. By then, it's time to reach in, teach and learn from your self.

Even spoiled and rotten fruit hang tenaciously to the tree. It's your utter adoration of your love for life that is your stem. This is the spiritual, umbilical cord that, when cut, will bring you to your reward with joy.

The reason I didn't feel good about myself as a younger man wasn't only because of the slight irregularities of my body that I incessantly compared to other people's bodies. My body was just a reflection of my feelings for me.

Imperfect produce in the market can be just as nutritious and delicious as ideal specimens if you know how to pick them. The problem is that many shoppers are no better at choosing people than they are in choosing fruits and vegetables. They don't know how to look for those that are nutritious.

A "sodomasochist" is someone who can't keep his words to himself. He vacillates between caressing and biting the hand that feeds him. He finds it exciting to project this inner turmoil into a tango of pain and pleasure he dances with his partners. But he's really hearing a complex, syncopated rhythm he's singing to himself. He's really beating himself up inside, and doesn't know it.

Because of my mother's Teutonic upbringing, my house was immaculate, but my heart was a sloppy mess. I left feelings all over the place without putting any of them neatly away. There were sentiments on the floor of my heart that, like dirty clothes in a closet, needed to be placed in a hamper. There were emotions draped over the rod between the walls of my closet that needed to be hung up on hangers. The closet in my house was immaculate. The closet in my heart was a mess.

Coming out of the closet as a gay man was easy. Going back into that closet to straighten it up was a lot harder. I needed to hire a closet organizer to get into my heart to clean it up for me. I tried psychiatrists, psychologists, analysts, therapists, counselors, social workers and trainers, but I couldn't shrink any of them down small enough to get into my closet to clean it up for me.

Thank gOD, nobody could literally envision what my closet looked like on the inside! I had a spiritual problem in feeling like a normal human being that went way beyond the issue some straight people make out of being gay. I didn't have a *bad* heart. I had a *dirty* heart.

I danced for 40 years, staring at myself critically in studio mirrors, unable to look lovingly and encouragingly at how I moved. I danced without a smile on my face. I danced without a twinkle in my eye. I danced for the mirror. I danced for a reflection of myself. I danced for the sodomasochist who insisted I be perfect or suffer the consequences for being a human like all others...

My truth was always around me; it didn't emanate out from within. And if I did become aware of it from within the truth was that I

felt hurt, angry, sad, lonely and tired. I didn't feel alive. I had no idea what "joy" felt like.

I couldn't give myself a break because I couldn't see the modesty, humility and grace I was making such a monumental effort to increase through muscular control dance. Sometimes it's the silence of the music within that a dancer needs to listen for and then dance to. The music coming from the piano is only an indication of a more beautiful music that you have to let yourself know you hear.

In this sense, I see the importance of contemplation as well as meditation. With meditation I can empty my closet. I can take out one item after another until that tiny room in my chest is pleasingly bare. I can release myself from what "they" think of me; all the voices inside my heart dressed up to look like real people I know and care about.

With contemplation, though, I fill that void slowly and neatly. I arrange my emotional clothes on hangers to the passionate rhythms of *my* self-love. I arrange the socks in my inner drawers so that they match, and throw out all that holey, emotional underwear that's an embarrassment when I have to look at it.

Meditation, without contemplation, will leave your heart empty and bare. It'll give you a sense of emotional vacuum, space and room to move. But it won't contribute to the feelings of liking or loving yourself. You'll still be a snob.

Contemplation without meditation will get your dirty feelings off the floor and in the wash. It'll get your emotional garments stuffed into drawers and onto the hooks on your inner door. But it won't help you appreciate the feeling of emptiness inside. You'll still feel like a mess inside. You'll still see yourself as a slob. There has to be an "order" within that you separate from "nothing."

When I was young and beautiful, I treated myself as though I were old and ugly. And I wondered why others didn't treat me as though I was handsome to compensate for my poor opinion of me. Only as I got older and the grape began to look more and more like a raisin did I begin to see the importance of lavishing love on me in the form of willpower (self-discipline). Suddenly the little bit of beauty that was left in my body became very sweet to me. The change of color of my hair from brown to gray and the wrinkles on my sallow skin glistened with self-appeal. I became a joy to behold in my own eyes. Then my wrinkles turned into the roads where my smiles reside. With self-love, I could see myself aging gracefully. And then, ironically, the people around me began to find me sweeter and more appealing than when I'd been young and beautiful.

I'd listened appreciatively to the classical music I danced to, but had forgot to listen lovingly to the instrument that was dancing with the music. Only when I could see my body as an instrument strumming the air with joyous and disciplined intentions did I realize I wouldn't be able to make spiritual music in the silence of inner or outer space forever.

You won't be here that long. You won't be in the body you were given longer than you are alive. And I strongly suspect you won't need your body after your life is over, either. All I know is that you're going to need it every minute in the now.

Your body is an incredibly sensitive device that you need to learn how to metaphorically, symbolically and operate comparatively, repair, grow and arrange. Your body appears to get more sophisticated and complex the longer you have it. Don't try to just *look* young. In the natural world "young" is synonymous with "green." Try to look "good." In nature, "good" is synonymous with "ripe."

Young people *should* be vain. But old people should be *conceited*. If you're young and conceited or old and vain you're going against the natural order of things. Everything in this world ages in stages, so you might as well teach yourself how to age gracefully in the body you were given. Nobody else will...

Don't leave aging up to chance. Leave aging up to nature. Your stem is always being stressed with the weight of your body upon the Tree of Life. You're a natural part of this world. You're no different from anyone else when it comes to applying metaphors to your rendition of self-awareness. Hold on to yourself with self-adoration. (You're not an idol to worship. You're a child of gOD.)

My body became my soul mate and partner through dance. Dance was my weather that graced my nature, and I was a tree whose leaves danced in the springtime with the wind. A great part of me had resolved long ago to sing in harmony with the sunshine and rain that seemed to come down from the heavens above when I moved. It didn't matter in the moment if life happened to be playing my song in a major or minor key. I had to dance with joy - or fear, anger or sorrow. The weather within didn't matter, so long as I was aware of my song and could dance.

As a "yenta" of the spiritual, dance world, I was particularly interested in watching the movements of others and comparing their body language to their verbal messages. By opening my eyes and closing my ears, I could see the feelings they were expressing with their body. I could see fear, anger, sorrow, guilt and love personified.

Guilt is particularly easy to observe in body language when people are embarrassed. (They usually turn away from you when they're embarrassed.) Shame is more difficult to perceive because people are experts at concealing their mistakes of character from other people's prying eyes. (They usually turn red or start to laugh when they're ashamed of themselves.) But humiliation is practically invisible. People don't want anyone to see how humiliated they sometimes feel just about being alive. (They often stand perfectly still, as if frozen in time when they've been humiliated.)

In the university of self-love, my container became as precious as my contents. Suddenly the body that contained the little bits of joy I gleaned from life mattered very much to me. With a new and fresh determination, I danced with the goal of increasing my sense of joy rather than exercising guiltily for the sake of my health. Then my body became a spiritual violin, and I became a fiddler perched precariously on a rooftop. I didn't need a Stradivarius to make my music sound sweet. I needed only play my self from the heart to work at keeping my balance.

Forty years of classical ballet technique had helped me discipline my mind, but it hadn't helped as much in investing consciously in my emotions. Only when I could acknowledge that I was a spirit experiencing a human condition could I use physical space to sculpt the air around me in response to the wonder of the world within. Then I took joy in the body I'd been given as a tool for the creation of a spiritual work of art. Then my body became the chisel I needed to sculpt joy out of the marble of reality. Then there was no space within or around me that my love couldn't carve.

When your body talks, every *body* listens. But jealousy of younger dancers' bodies plagued me because I hadn't been given the body I needed to become a great dancer. I had to learn to take "no" for an answer. I had to learn to dance for joy, not money. I asked my Teacher for lessons in doing so, and I waited patiently for **His** answer.

55. Credit/No Credit

There were some classes in the university of self-love that were just too hard for me. But I didn't have to put my hand in every flame to be reminded of the pain of fire. I could glean the knowledge I needed through metaphor. I could take shortcuts through some of my spiritual classes by applying what I already knew to new experiences. And, although there are many metaphors that can be used to describe the

same experiences, each addresses the issues in ways that some will be able to identify with and others will not.

What a relief it was to coast through some of self-love's trials and tribulations without as much effort as I had to go through my youth when the world and my spiritual education were so new and strange to me. What a relief it was to be able to use many metaphors, symbols and similes to talk about abstract ideas.

There were areas of interest in my life that I wanted to put heart and soul into, but I needed to know I didn't have to put all of me into everything. Sometimes I could just use my imagination to pass the class before me. Figuratively speaking, there were spiritual classes I didn't need a grade to pass. I could take them credit/no credit.

One of those classes was in *worshipping the Teacher*. I was never going to be comfortable worshipping gOD through traditional, Jewish, religious services alone. I'd always have to supplement that. I'd have to pray in my own creative way. Worship simply wasn't a required course in my spiritual major. I could take it without getting an "A" in it according to Jewish law. And by just *passing* the class, it wouldn't add or detract from my spiritual GPA.

The word in Hebrew for "work" and "worship" is the same: "avoda." From Hebrew, I'd learned that all work is worship, and all worship, work. Therefore everything I did in life was a form of veneration.

My mother always thought she wasn't smart because she never finished junior high school. She compared herself to college graduates and assumed they knew more than her. And yet she told me stories about the War, and how, thanks to some German she encountered along the way, she managed to survive, an incredible achievement at a time like that. One woman in a train station forced a sandwich on her when my mother was near starvation. On another occasion, just as she was about to give up and considered jumping in front of the next train that came into the station, some Nazi soldiers dragged my mother up from the train platform into their compartment through the window as people mobbed the doorways of the train she'd wanted to board. Once a dentist pulled a tooth for her. She was in so much pain she threatened to jump out of his fifth story office if he didn't take the tooth out. (He may have realized she was a runaway Jew because she had no papers, and he could easily have turned her in.)

I didn't want to look back on my life like a war in which I found a few kind people who'd made the difference between life and death. I wanted to love all of humanity, but people didn't make it

easy... Therefore I needed a way of living that would make me a winner *within*, regardless of how things turned out *without*.

My mother knew that more than she wanted us to love the world, she wanted us to love *her*. This began a sibling rivalry with my sister that distanced all three of us from one another. I wanted to please my mother, and she wanted to be pleased. But my sister wanted to displease her; something my sister has never succeeded in doing because our mother loves her so very much. True “sharing,” “cooperation” and “pleasing” were not family fortes in her house. We were all far from ideal.

The collapse of the American family has put everyone a little on edge. We all need to go a little deeper than the traditional, nuclear family to find a reason to love those in our life. If we begin by loving the stranger in *ourselves* before we try to love the stranger in our *midst*, we’ll create family from within. Since there’s little chance we’ll all achieve love from our sibling relationships, we need to try to feel at one with our *spiritual* brothers and sisters. And to do that, we have to begin by becoming a family unto our self.

It’s important that love trickles down from parents to children, but the trickle-down theory of emotionality doesn’t work any better than the trickle-down theory of economics. When parents share their love with their children without explaining their intentions to each child separately, a competition for emotional resources develops in the children that can last a lifetime.

The rabbis claim that gOD can sometimes be quite shy. **He** doesn’t like to explode on the scene with illumination that’s like the light at high noon. **He** sometimes prefers to hide in the darkness after twilight or before dawn where we have to look especially hard for **Him**. Depression, disease, dilemmas and distraught feelings are dark places where **He** waits to be found.

Crediting yourself is a sign of your love for you. Discrediting yourself is a sign of your guilt. You’ve got to be able to recognize both. You’ve got to be able to credit (love) yourself for your results on some tests you take in the school of life and not give yourself credit (guilt) for others.

Self-love is the ocean from which all other love is derived. Your oceans of emotions are the source and supply of all the love that saturates your world. You carry your guilt like clouds and then dump it, like rain. And then you receive your nourishment like heart-shaped drops that replenish the ground of your being.

My mother treated people as though she’d some day meet *their* mother. She’s assumed all mothers would be protective of their

children and would need to be assured that their offspring had been well treated by my mother. She envisioned peace beginning in heaven between mothers and working its way down to earth through other women like herself.

Although my mother had a proactive and elaborate philosophy of respect for everyone by envisioning a relationship with his mother, she also pretended to respect others out of fear. Of course, respect for people and fear of people don't mix, but what else could I have expected to learn from a Holocaust survivor?

Pretending to respect people out of fear is the result of "intimidation." My mother had been unconsciously taught by almost a hundred generations of Jews living amongst European Christians to be intimidated by them. And, unconsciously, she wasn't going to teach me differently. But I went out into the world thinking I knew how to respect people. But I did not. I knew how to fear them.

My mother had no interest whatsoever in worshipping our Teacher in any of the traditional houses of worship. She simply taught every woman she met what she knew about life, and my gay friends and me were some of her greatest students. She taught us to worship women. And that doesn't mean you have to pray *to* them or sleep *with* them...

Although my mother didn't even have a junior high, public school education, she instinctively knew that gOD needs nothing from us. She simply figured that if she treated **His** students with courtesy, she could avoid another go around in the school of hard knocks. And she was right. She was blessed with a long and healthy life, a happy marriage for 35 years to her second husband and enough money to live comfortably for the rest of her life.

My mother was also blessed with a daughter who cared about her bodily needs, something I have no interest in doing for our mother. I made a very bad nurse to my former boyfriend with AIDS, and I'm just as useless with my mother's physical needs today. I'm a doctor of the head, heart and soul, not a nurse of the body. Know who you are and what you have to give. And then do your best to have enough money to pay other people to do the rest.

"Cleaning" was the metaphor my mother introduced into our home in place of worship. Cleanliness of the body was the way she taught me to repair my thoughts. Cleaning my closet was the metaphor she unconsciously employed instead of cleansing of the heart. And insisting I spend some time each day cleaning up my act by doing an internal inventory was her way of teaching me to keep my soul clean before my Maker.

It was because of her German philosophy of the spiritual rewards of cleaning that I was able to go into the darkness of my mind to perceive the file cabinets, chests of drawers, cupboards and closets behind the dark curtain in there where I'd been flinging all my junk. It was in lifting the curtain of denial that I saw what a godless mess I'd made inside myself.

There was no religious duty I had to perform for my mother's sake. There was no Jewish holiday I needed to literally observe for her if, instead, I could observe it metaphorically. There was no regard for the Jewish people, our history and our wonderful relationship with gOD I wasn't introduced to by my mother in some figurative sense. I was taught everything I needed to know through household duties she insisted I perform with religious fervor.

The idea that the Bible should be taken literally made no sense to my mother. She was in her own way a *zealot*. I could even call her a religious *fanatic*. She was a *martyr* in every sense of the word. But she simply performed all her religious duties by modeling them metaphorically rather than talking about them.

My sister and I had to learn how to clean the house, cook, sew, do the laundry and ironing while she did the worldly work of a husband by bringing home the bacon. Girls! If you're looking for a husband, look for one whose mother taught him to iron. If his mother didn't do her job by making a good *woman* out of him, don't pick up where she left off. You'll only work your fingers to the bone trying to turn him into a good *man*.

I was taught to worship my mother's coffee table with furniture polish and a rag until you could see your face reflected in it. I was instructed on how to iron a shirt until every wrinkle had left the garment and was, instead, planted on my brow. I didn't need a Friday night service at synagogue to worship our "Father." I needed that night off from worry about dust and household dishevelment of her home to give thought to what I was doing the other six days of the week to clean up my act.

I derived credit for "work" and "worship" in the school of self-love metaphorically. I didn't have to take that class for a grade. I got to use good thoughts (head), deep feelings (heart), and moral rectitude (conscience) to show respect for my body and the actions I took with others. With my mother's preparation for my final exam in life, I had no need to worry unduly about what the Teacher thought of me. I did occasionally get a reassuring smile from a baby or a mischievous wink from a setting sun to remind me of gOD's glorious presence. But I've always considered those "perks."

The concept of “faith” is as important to my spiritual education as “avoda.” “Faith” refers to an evolving awareness of life as a spiritual school guided by our Teacher’s presence in every aspect of our curriculum. The more my faith evolved, the greater the attention I could place on **His** next lesson as it became manifested in my day-to-day routine.

What I learned from the *spiritual* education I received from my mother was that religion doesn’t only happen in a synagogue, church or mosque. It also happens at home. If you need to go to services to share what you know with gOD in a public setting, you do so to learn about your relationship to **Him** in the company of others. But that hour or two is only reinforcement of how you should act every day while you’re at home alone.

The whole world is my synagogue and my home. I’m in this world to pray and to learn to live in peace with all gOD’s pupils. All communication, especially communication with myself, is prayer. And all action, especially the actions I take to care for myself, teaches me to take life seriously. When people say, “Get a life,” what they’re really saying is, “Become more aware of your self.”

Thanks to faith in myself, I found I was able to look and listen for deeper meaning in the everydayness of being. Faith focused my attention on my own, unique way of interfacing with my self. That then affected my relation to the Teacher and **His** relationship with **His** other students. I have faith that the grade I get on today’s tests with others will give our Teacher the information **He** needs to prepare **His** lessons for my tomorrows.

There’s no teacher on earth who doesn’t love the student who loves the subject being taught. The more enthusiastic the student, the happier the teacher is with both the student and the subject matter - and the more fun the class becomes for everyone who loves to learn. If you want to enjoy learning, make a teacher’s job more interesting for him or her. That’ll improve the learning experience for everyone. If you want our Teacher to love you, try to be more enthusiastic about the learning experience you’re going through in all **His** classes, great and small.

But to do that you’re going to have to learn about “patience.” If the word alone brings up feelings of impatience, consider that just another example of how little you know about yourself and the endless possibilities for embracing your destiny and relinquishing your fate.

Most of the kids in your class on patience will be taking it for a grade. You’re going to hear all sorts of excuses, reasons and blame for the grades they’re getting. You’re going to conclude that getting high

marks in patience is the most important goal in their spiritual education. And you're going to be so grateful to gOD that you only enrolled in that class "credit/no credit." The pressure is off you.

The delight in having no specific agenda in learning patience lies in then imagining all the temptations you might like to think about indulging in without actually doing so. Spending time writing down your desires on the board in your imagination is a lot easier than living them out in reality. And you're going to find you can erase them just as easily. You don't have to engage others with your seedy, disreputable or mischievous urges. You can mull them over and decide over time which ones you really *need* to live out. Such patience with your self will be its own reward.

Patience isn't a science. It's an art. I recommend you go through your undergraduate requirements in the university of self-love slow and easy. You can always enroll in the upper division coursework in your spiritual, higher education when its time. There's no rush when it comes to becoming a "masterpiece."

If you find yourself with a teacher who sows hatred of gays or Jews, seek a transfer out of his or her class. The longer you remain in the company of Jew-haters and gay-haters, the more they'll affect your work habits unfavorably. They'll only make you impatient.

Judaism prepared me for survival by teaching me all the things I *shouldn't* do out of duty. But I finally graduated to appreciate the philosophy of the Christian culture I live in that accentuates all the things I *should* do out of love. And the Islamic culture intensifies gOD's generosity of spirit by magnifying the Judeo-Christian dos and don'ts with greater intensity for an even higher, spiritual education than humanity has imagined up until now. There's nothing on earth that's superfluous. Our Teacher gave us the Abrahamic religions as steps to approach **Him** with questions while **He's** seated at **His** desk, not to make us so miserable that we have to squirm in our seat.

Most people simply aren't ready to make *themselves* their major in life, and the consequence of that is they're left viewing themselves from the outside in. They're on the periphery of their own life, not at the center of it. They're always thinking about what "they" will think and what "they" will say.

And there's nothing wrong with that. You need to be able to judge yourself as others may see you. But you've got to have an inner eye that's focused on "you," as well. If "they" is all you're worried about, then "their" tail will be wagging "your" dog.

Our Teacher presents **His** lessons with hindsight, foresight and, lastly, insight. **He** knows what **He's** doing and the results **He'll**

achieve. **He** created the whole universe with humanity in mind. But everything around us should always be a clue to **His** presence within.

The filth of this planet is a mirror of man's soul as it manifests the sorry state of his conscience today. Hatred in politics and the running of our nation is a reflection of the weakening of his heart. And the scheming plans some men make with other thieves like themselves is a sign of a head, like the moon, that has a dark side to it. You can't face one way only and think you can see it all.

Answers are given at the university level of self-love from within. The lower level students only learn from the outside appearances of things. You have to complete the outer level of work before you're privileged to graduate to the work within.

Denying the importance of the angry gOD of the *Old* Testament makes it difficult to see the importance of tough love as a precursor to the tender love described in the *New* Testament. Wisdom has to precede love, and love has to precede generosity of spirit, or you'll squander all that you work so hard to attain. By using the wisdom of the Jews to recognize the reasons for the order in which gOD manifests **His** presence in your world, you become more capable of changing your mind. By recognizing the love of the Christians you become more capable of transforming your feeling, thereby transcending your relationship with your self.

By honoring yourself with self-discipline, you can accomplish a good deal with only hunches, guesses and clues. But questions of faith will only be answered if you continue moving in that direction. With each answer, you'll be able to look back and honor a little bit of your own authority as well as the generous contributions to society that could be coming from government, employers and family if people thought like you.

Taking gOD seriously began for me when I could take **Him** personally. Personalizing all three of the Abrahamic traditions makes it possible to glean *mystery* from *history*. The problem isn't that I don't worship gOD *correctly*. The problem is that I don't yet worship **Him** *thoroughly*. **His** influence in my life is far greater today than it was yesterday. Only once I saw that everyone has a seat at **His** table; once I realized everyone has answers that may be useful if their answers are wise, loving or generous; once I saw gOD working in everyone's life – that I began to see that life really is a school, and everyone is always learning, albeit at different rates and at different times.

At one time, Jews weren't permitted to sit at a Christian table. Today it's practicing gays at the Judeo-Christian table who are still

frowned upon in many religious institutions. But the table only needs to be extended with another leaf. Nobody needs to be asked to leave or asked to give up his seat. There's enough room for everyone to sit at this table even for those who might be sickened at the thought of having to sit next to a gay or a Jew.

If you read the Christian Testament (keeping in mind that Jesus most probably was a gay-Jew), you'll see the Hebrew Testament in a whole new light. If you use your imagination to conceive of Mohammed as a prophet who was expressing an internal process that Muslims have externalized to their own detriment, you'll be better able to help them interpret the Quran for a new age. The reason there should be no depictions of the Prophet Mohammed is so that everyone's imagination can improve upon the Islamic message for this new day.

Perhaps your *work habits* in the school of self-love need a little upgrading, or perhaps you believe your grades in *cooperation* are just fine. Perhaps you see yourself as a good student of life who could simply afford to be a little more disciplined in tackling the curriculum our Teacher has given you.

I'm very uncooperative when I'm frustrated and impatient with others. I'm very resistant when I get answers that leave me feeling sickened by life. I'm not in a hurry to embrace a change of mind when I don't find any room for a transformation of my heart. I can't entertain the idea of transcending myself unless I have a really good reason for doing so.

Patience becomes my best friend when I express my anger and frustration *with* my self *to* myself rather than just expressing my anger and frustration with others to myself. Internalizing the problems around me helps me take them personally, and that help me make them more meaningful. It also helps me see my challenges universally. That doesn't mean that my problems are only about me. It means that my challenges with regard to advancement in the school of self-love have universal applications that everyone should be able relate to.

My mind is like barren rock in a vacuum (moon) being bombarded by death rays from my heart (sun) and meteoric impacts from all the crazy desires (asteroids) also revolving around my heart. My mind is hardly a place I'd choose to live in if I hadn't felt banished to it from my soul (earth) in childhood.

Looking back at the earth from the moon is like looking at my soul from my mind. I know my mind plays an important role in lighting my way at night as well as tugging on my oceans of emotion. But people are obsessed with "thinking," to the detriment of their other

inner options. The crescent moon and single star of Islam says a lot about the nature of humanity. But without Jewish and Christian interpretation, it doesn't say enough.

Faith in gOD is evidence of things not seen or heard. Faith in the one gOD who made us all in **His** image is more aptly compared to the metaphor of smell than to seeing, hearing or touching. Jasmine blooms on warm, summer nights. Its fragrance can keep you on the path when sight and sound fail you. The ability to follow the trail our Teacher leaves for you is like a spiritual fragrance. You should use your *nose* to find your way spiritually through life. The way to say that in simple English is to listen to your intuition.

Each of the three Abrahamic religions tends to become hateful of the other two unless you can personalize their messages. There's no point in assuming gOD only made a plan with one of these faiths to the exclusion of the other two. That's simply ridiculous. **His** plan is greater than that. **He** plans to deliver truth, justice and love universally.

It's easy to get your nose bent out of shape. Your nose is like a paperclip. If it's bent too many times in too many ways, it figuratively falls off. There are millions of maniacs walking this earth who figuratively have no nose on their face. Imagine them looking like those ancient, Greek statues that were unearthly with their noses broken off. *Time* works on us like *rock* works on *rock*.

You can't always believe what your eyes see or your ears hear. Sometimes you need to use your intuition like a nose that can search out the truth. The truth is far more fragrant than those canned, artificial smells people spray on themselves. Their artificial scents will figuratively choke you with philosophies they bathe themselves in that distract you from the natural, spiritual fragrance their soul brings into the room. He who knows, nose.

I don't feel guilty about the drugs and sex I indulged in, in my youth. Modesty of the body wasn't easy for me to come by without suffering STD's and myriad forms of rejection. I don't unduly worry about the superficial pleasures of youth that I now see as forms of idol worship I danced around. Extremes of pain and pleasure were the results of very low levels of self-love and self-regard. My introduction to spirituality was perfect for a spiritual beginner in the latter half of the 20th Century.

"Self-indulgence" is just self-love for amateurs. "Patience" is self-love for experts. I'm not angry about once having been an amateur now that I'm an expert. Humility is nothing more than your own truth stated without arrogance or spite.

“Addiction” is nothing more than a golden calf experience I learned to give up while taking my first, few, spiritual steps on my journey through the desert of my soul. After what seemed like 400 years of bondage to obsessions, I was ready to make my way home. Just as the Israelites moved on after they danced around the Golden Calf three months into their journey, you can, too. You have a long way yet to go, but you made it out the door.

My dance with cigarettes was a form of idolatry I enjoyed in my youth, a golden calf I danced around that finally grew old and died. And through other addictions like alcohol, drugs, coffee, food and shopping, I found the spiritual strength to walk away from a *whole* herd of golden calves without having to wait for them to expire one by one.

You can kill golden calves from the inside in. You can learn to fight your addiction of your self, which always leads to self-indulgence, not self-love. There are reasons why you’re *hooked* on you and not in *love* with you. If you want to get further along on your journey to your promised land, you’re going to have to melt down your golden calves and eat the gold, just as Moses told the Israelites to do with the Golden Calf they constructed. But you’re going to have to ask gOD what that means in your case. I don’t have your answers. I only have my own.

Overeating was the last sacred cow I had to melt down in my life. Food brought on that delirious sense of self-adoration until I was spiritually ready to turn that power over to myself in a righteous way. I couldn’t get my fill of me until I gave up trying to satisfy my appetite for me with food.

I danced around food with childish glee for many years, hardly finishing one meal before I was busy planning the next. The idea of eating less at each meal without in between meal snacks wasn’t a sacrifice once I could eat what was on my plate with a sense of pure enjoyment in the moment without thought to what I was going to fill myself with later. I could eat what was on my plate and walk away in peace once consuming myself like forbidden fruit became more important to me than food.

At the university level of my spiritual education, serving others’ needs became a joy because I could see that in serving them I was learning how to become “*self-serving*” in the best sense of the word. If you teach the Teacher’s students with wisdom and love, **He**’ll reward you with the beneficence of **His** ways.

The problems in the Middle East aren’t political or religious. They’re spiritual. The Muslims now live in the information age when

the *values* of Jews and *virtues* of Christians are challenging them in ways they don't yet see as coming from our universal gOD. Like the Christians before them who learned to call gOD by three names, the Muslims think that calling **Him** "Allah" changes **His** plans.

Changing the spelling of gOD; changing **His** name; or changing **His** gender – won't change **His** plans. Elementary school children love to give their teacher pet names or call her names behind her back. But that doesn't change their teacher's *plans* or their *grades*. "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." ["Romeo and Juliette" by William Shakespeare] Think with your nose. Don't rely on your eyes or ears.

As a young man, I dreamt about a house on a hill and a loving partner. As a middle-aged man, I realized I was becoming the man I'd come here to love. Then my body became my dream house, and keeping it neat and clean, inside and out, became a joy and a privilege.

The emotional home my parents had constructed to protect me against the inclement weather of childhood hadn't been sturdy enough for the world I had to inhabit. First I needed to strive to buy a house in the literal sense; then I needed to build an emotional abode all my own.

My parents' emotional refuge didn't serve as a sanctuary for my spiritual needs. I wanted a modern, sensible home in my soul that would protect me in all inclement weather.

Today, I'm a tabernacle of love. I'm a movable tent on the outside that houses gOD within. I'm on a journey to my inner israel, but I'm also on an inner ascension that, with faith, will defy death with a reward even greater than eternal life.

Jacob dreamed of a ladder to heaven on which angels ascended and descended. *Jesus* constructed a spiritual, spiral staircase that everyone was invited to climb. And *Mohammed* gave the world a magic carpet ride to heaven, a sort of escalator for those who can't climb stairs.

It's hard to give humanity credit for what mankind has done until you can give yourself credit for all that *you've* done. It's hard to see gOD's gifts to others if you're in competition with those people for *their* rewards. It's hard to earn a degree in the school of self-love if you don't plan your curriculum with any particular major in mind, or if you're always scheming to find ways to get your classmates to fail.

There must be many subjects I'll some day need to pass, but there are many more I won't need to enroll in if I look back carefully at what I already know. I'm smarter than I think because I'm willing to learn about myself with others. There are so many people who've

shown me what's behind their darkened curtain. I can see so much that they've revealed that I can copy and use thankfully in my own spiritual home.

I've learned more than I realize. My grades are better than they look. My transcript is more impressive than I previously thought possible. I don't need to *think* about what I *know* as much as I need to think about what I don't *feel*. Now that I'm living in my soul, not my head or heart, I find it much easier to believe in hope. Belief is what my soul does best. But it took faith in my self to believe in me before I could believe that gOD stands behind the darkened curtain of the universe, smiling at us through the stars.

56. Upper Division Coursework

At the university level of the spiritual mystery of being me, there was a shift that took place once I completed the undergraduate coursework in "faith in myself." In my upper division studies, I found myself facing the challenge of tackling the coursework in "*Patience With My Self*."

When I looked back at my youth, I knew no one who tried my patience more than me. Twice trying to kill myself turned out to be unnerving. I had to find a way to apply the lessons of patience to myself before I'd be able to find patience with others. But learning to become patient with myself in a wise and loving manner was a challenge I hadn't considered until I'd completed all the undergraduate requirements in spiritual college.

Reality unfolds a lot like a college catalogue. It presents a host of prerequisite courses the student is required to take before going on to the fun classes in one's major. I was frustrated when I literally applied to college in my youth because I suddenly realized then that I wasn't going to be allowed to learn only what I wanted to study. And I was equally frustrated and impatient with life later for the same reason. For some inexplicable reason the Teacher seems to enroll us in classes we're not the least bit interested in taking before we get to take the classes we want...

After struggling with patience for a lifetime, I realized there were two prerequisite courses to that class that I'd also have to pass before I could tackle my spiritual coursework on the subject that really interests me: me. But just the idea of being required to approach patience in small steps was enough to drive me nuts. I got so impatient with the whole, educational system that I thought about figuratively dropping out if I didn't have the guts to do so literally.

Fortunately, these two prerequisite classes before enrolling in “Patience With My Self” made sense in a weird sort of way once I got into them. One was a class in “spiritual space” and the other, “spiritual time.” And I was surprised to discover I enjoyed both courses more than I expected.

Before achieving patience with myself, I had to perceive the difference between the *objective* space and *objective* time around me, and the equivalent *subjective* forces within me. Once I had a sense of the spiritual distinction between the outer world and the world within, I was in a moral position to understand my impatience from a subjective point of view.

“Spiritual space” or “subjective space” is “inner space.” “Outer place” is the classroom I was born into: the world. Achievements in “outer place” are the good grades commonly referred to as health, a job, a relationship, money, property and harmony in the community.

“Inner space” is my other classroom. The “fence” between “outer place” and “inner space” is called your “skin.” Even before students touch your “fence,” they may come so close to it that you may begin to experience negative or positive feelings about their proximity to your other school. We all want a school zone around us that other people respect so our inner child feels safe throughout the day and all through the night. We’re all thin skinned.

“Time” can be perceived as subjectively as “space.” “Time” should be seen as a resource like water or electricity – something brought into your inner house for a price. “Time” is metered internally just like the utilities in your house. The more you use your time subjectively, the more soulful you become.

Looking in a full-length mirror in middle age brought with it anxiety over running out of time altogether. I became particularly envious of all the unused time I could see on the faces of young men. I thought I was becoming more attracted to them for their youth and beauty rather than for their inner attributes, but I was really attracted to the time they personified that I was running out of.

The lines on my face gave away the sad truth about my time left on earth. I found myself wanting to cling to the blossom of *other people’s* bloom. Time saddened, irritated and frightened me. The mirror on the wall was telling me I was the oldest of them all. But last year’s apples will cling more tenaciously to the branches by their gnarly stems...

When I was a child, I used time thoughtlessly, not realizing it shouldn’t be wasted. As a young adult, I tried to get as much done in as little time as possible as though time were a precious commodity I

couldn't afford to enjoy at all. Learning to spend time as wisely as money was a spiritual axiom I hadn't thought to contemplate.

To take the time I had left to heart, I looked at the anxiety of an orange of a sunset and saw my fear (yellow) combined with my anger (red) at getting old. I watched the sky go from sky blue (self-pity); to royal blue; (regret) to azure (disappointment); indigo (disenchantment); and then to pitch-black (guilt).

The more I experienced time from my head, the more I became *thankful* to others. The more I experienced time from my heart, the more *appreciative* I became of myself. And the more I could see that it would take some time to make my conscience my guide, the more *soulful* I became and grateful to gOD. I don't waste time anymore now that I appreciate it as an internal resource.

The turning of the leaves; the movement of the stars; the grinding down of rock into sand - these are clues to the passage of subjective time as it rushes like a waterfall first into the pool I share with others, and then downstream alone with me to the sea. There are two clocks by which to tell time, one objective and one subjective, and both wait for no man...

Having graduated the prerequisite courses in "Inner Time" and "Inner Space" I was ready to enroll in "Patience with My Self." I gave myself permission to go beyond the curtain of black guilt at the horizon of my inner world when I closed my eyes. There, where I can't see, lie the memories I keep in a file cabinet; sensations in a chest of drawers; feelings in a closet; and myriad impressions of this world that sit like crockery in a cupboard. To access these symbols and use them to construct metaphors, I needed only time and patience with myself.

Many people hide in fear from time. They have a short memory because a longer memory would bring up guilt, and that they don't want to have to feel. The subjectivity of time brings up feelings about being in a timed experience you can't control.

Many people dread getting old. They dread death. And the reason for this is because they're afraid to face the guilt they've been throwing willy-nilly behind that black curtain into the file cabinet, drawers, closet and cupboard. They don't want to arrange their inner world in an orderly fashion because they can't literally see what they're doing. And so they don't bother to try, and then they run out of time. They find themselves on their deathbed with no time left to clean up the mess inside before they're asked to vacate the premises.

There's a word Israelis use that you'd hear at least a dozen times a day if you lived in Israel and spoke Hebrew. The word is

“dafka.” It’s a concept we rarely refer to in our society, but it’s an idea that’s ready for the world stage. The meaning of “dafka” is “defiant.”

When you take your own defiance to heart, you’re left feeling impatient with yourself. You probably wish you’d behave better toward *you*, regardless of whether you’re satisfied with the way you’re behaving toward *others*. Your “defiance” grew out of your insistence on treating yourself in a brusque way in order to get done what you need to do in a timely manner. You’re constantly pressured by society to act quickly and efficiently, which then forces you to deny the affect of that pressure on yourself to keep up with your ever-growing responsibilities.

The figurative tracks, bridges and tunnels you constructed long ago and now use on your train trips through your inner world, crisscross the inner landscape of your imagination in an organized way. They’re a conveyance system that will reveal your intentions to you over time.

You’re the sole consumer of the products and sole individual who benefits from the passengers on your trains of thought. And, you’re probably not nearly as lenient as you need to be on yourself when your goods don’t make it to market or the passengers on your trains of thought are upset with the system.

You probably don’t fully appreciate the effort that went into creating your spiritual system. You probably just insist on it working to your benefit without question or interruption. Therefore, any little thing that slows you down in any way becomes a clue from gOD to what **He** wants you to know about the way **He** made you...

Your attitude of ingratitude has made you inwardly defiant over time. You may strive to be polite and patient with others, (even gOD), but you may not be nearly as patient with yourself as you’d like to be. But the less you know about your self, the less you’re going to care about yourself; and the more accustomed you become to you giving yourself exactly what you want in a timely manner, the more *self*-defiant you’re going to become when you don’t tow the line...

Give thought to how you act when you misplace your wallet or keys. How do you react when you oversleep on a workday? How do you feel when your hair is out of place; when you don’t fit into your jeans; or you have to eat alone in a restaurant? “Patience with Your Self” is a college level course in the school of self-love that everyone has to take, but few pass with flying colors.

Your inner escapades in avoiding your self are the result of millennia of inner engineering feats achieved by the ancient world that have made you soft. Humanity constructed this spiritual transportation

system of “faith in our selves” over millennia. It gives each of us the possibility of getting out of our head and heart to enjoy a unique view of our self from our soul. But you’ve got to learn patience to appreciate your own panorama.

Man was citified and civilized on the inside without even realizing it. Each of us today is like a secret suburb of self-regard that he thinks nobody else could possibly envision. But we’re all taking trains of thought from one modern metropolis in our self to another. We’re onboard every subway, train, tram and trolley that transports our thoughts through the landscape of our imagination. We’re all living life *internally* involved and comparing the experience of being alive in the 21st Century to the world around us. Our inner space may be personal, but it’s easy to describe through metaphors that use today’s, contemporary cityscape because every human being in the civilized world operates in the same *metaphoric* ways. The mystery of our spiritual being is *individually* unique, but *collectively* almost commonplace.

Not only is gOD greater than I previously thought; *I’m* greater than I previously thought... For me to know me is for me to love me because the whole world, past and present, helped construct the pathways that make me the gay-Jew I feel free to describe to you. I’m a masterpiece of spiritual engineering. And so are you...

I don’t have to *defy* my self any longer. I no longer have to *tolerate* who I am. I don’t even have to *accept* myself as I am. I can *admire* myself today. And the reason I can do so is because I know and love the way I operate. And I’m this infatuated with myself because I’m not willing to allow *myself* to defy *me* anymore. I stop myself every time I try.

When I was finally able to get out of my head, I could see the influence my penis had on my thinking. I could share my desire to connect lovingly with other men who felt the same way I did. My first orgasm with a man was the first clue to my potential for greater self-honesty, sincerity and authenticity. Sex was a sign of a mystery I was going to uncover about life just by being genuinely me.

Becoming patient with myself through this process required a deeper look at the vocabulary I used when speaking to myself that I’d been taking for granted. There are words for feelings I hadn’t fully explored. I’d never be able to talk to myself with a sense of sincerity if I didn’t perceive the depth of the words I was using.

Our Teacher has many ways of rewarding and punishing us. When you receive a reward in life, it may or may not come with

positive sensations or feelings. But if it does, the positive response will always outweigh any negativity. That's what it means to be rewarded.

Poor performance in life comes with pain and/or suffering. But because time is also subjective and internally, it may be some time before you experience the rewards of punishments of your efforts in the school of self-love.

Man has a tendency to reward or punish people objectively in real time. The spiritual system is far too complex to be managed subjectively except on your self.

It's very possible to turn your low grades into high grades and your high grades into low grades over time from the inside in. But you must understand matters of the heart to do so. Subjectivity is emotional.

With that said, here are some vocabulary words that will make the subjectivity of your inner world more meaningful, which will, in turn, make you more patient with yourself:

1. Sympathy:

A heartfelt response of sorrow for what another person is going through. Sympathy is a feeling triggered by the imagination.

2. Empathy:

A heartfelt response of sorrow for what another person is going through based on self-pity. If you haven't been through what the other person is going through, you feel "sympathy" for them. If you *have* been through what they're going through you already know how they feel. You don't have to imagine it because you've felt that way yourself. That's "empathy."

3. Passion:

A heartfelt response that includes a desire to *change* another person. "Passion" can include many emotions but it emanates out of the genital region. Passion includes a desire to affect others. When you see someone who's behaving passionately, it's more earthy and visceral than someone who's just showing sympathy or empathy.

4. Compassion:

A heartfelt response that includes the desire to *help* another person. Compassion is a mix of heart and crotch, feelings and desires. When you've used your "passions" to change yourself, you open yourself to the possibility of feeling "compassion" for others. This helps them help themselves. You have feelings and desires you want to *share* with others.

Much of the defiance we see out in the world is based on religious passions that aren't compassionate. The belief system of the passionate individual might also have political implications, but they're based upon a religious tradition. Such people project their passions out onto others. And because they haven't first applied their feelings and desires to themselves, they may come across as uncompassionate.

A train of thought is a terrible thing to waste. Don't be like a European commuter who gets on and off a train each day without looking around to appreciate the charm and functionality of the incredibly artistic and historically rich place where he lives. Don't forget your past or wish to minimize it with disregard. Millions of people came before you to make your daily commute so interesting, safe and easy. Don't fall back to sleep after so many have done so much to wake you up.

Learning your way around inner space makes it possible to use outer place in new and exciting ways. Nowhere was that exemplified better than at Tiananmen Square where that young, Chinese dissident chose to change his position in outer place to counter the movements of the tank deployed by the government to stop him. We all intuitively knew he felt liberated enough to want to express his *passionate* regard for his country. His inner orientation skills gave him the ability to reposition himself valiantly in opposition to the outer Communist threat to nullify his intentions. His expression of patriotism was misunderstood.

I'd describe his act as an expression of *adolescent* outrage at his government's unwillingness to discuss the issues he felt strongly about. His defiance was interpreted by the authorities as impatience with the system. But young people are always going to seek justice as expediently as possible.

Parental outrage was recently exemplified 25 years later in Baltimore where a mother entered a crowd of dissidents and started to hit her teenage son because she saw him associated with students throwing stones at the police. Many saw her *passionate* response as instructive and helpful.

The dissident at Tiananmen Square responded passionately to his government. The mother in Baltimore responded passionately to her son. But by comparing them, you can take their lessons even more to heart. You can become compassionate by applying your passions to your own inner authority.

We must all graduate the outrage of the passionate *adolescent* to come to personify the outrage of the passionate *parent*. And this is a

luxury some of us have been blessed to be able to do in America internally because we've been inspired by the courage of those around us.

The bully in blue who intimates blacks is like one of the many bullies in you. But the bully with the hoody who throws stones at the police is also like one of the bullies in you. Intimidation always starts out as a train of thought on an angry track going to a place in inner space where *self-improvements* need to be made.

Looking at the world subjectively rather than objectively will help you personalize everything that's happening in life. The irony in doing so is that you'll actually become more *objective* when you become more *subjective*.

"Fear" occurs from the outside in. "Paranoia" occurs from the inside, in. But "intimidation" can occur from either outer place or inner space. If *others* intimidate you, you must overcome your *fear* of them. But if *you* intimidate yourself, you must overcome your *paranoia* of the many defiant adolescent and parental voices in you.

"Defiance" begins as an inner response to intimidation, whether you've been intimidated the outside or the inside. To become a more patient person, you must question the feelings that make you want to react defiantly to anything you perceive as unjust.

To become a hero, you must conquer a relationship *within* yourself that you'll then be able to demonstrate *around* your self. That can take decades to unfold or happen in an instant. Throughout history, good people have brought down invading, barbaric tribes; corrupt governments; and hateful individuals – using their faith in the moral significance of their spiritual being.

"Life" is the only school we don't graduate when we're old enough to have sex or hold down a fulltime job. The lessons of life constantly change, and with age and experience that becomes evident to all. The magic of youth becomes internalized by middle age, changing us slowly in ways we may not always be aware of as it's happening. But your imagination can reactivate the magic of the spiritual process any time you make an effort to believe in yourself.

Most of my life, I was patient with others because I didn't yet know my way around inner space. But I intuitively knew I was in a spiritual Catch-22 because my mind required one kind of information, and my heart, another. Therefore, my youth wasn't magical or dreamy. My growing up years were pretty uneventful, but devoid of hope. I had no reason to live except externally. I had no one to share my imagination with except my self.

It wasn't possible for me to declare my undying loyalty to myself any sooner than by middle age. I couldn't surrender all the aggravation and irritation I'd amassed from others. That would have made me feel guilt ridden, which would have then forced me to question my bad moods...

Instead, I became compliant in the outer world, while secretly defiant within. I became patient with others while my impatience with myself grew. I appeared loving on the outside, but I felt increasingly emptier within.

I would have loved to be able to say that we're all in this ship of fools together, but I didn't believe it. I felt both guilty and in denial of my guilt. I didn't really believe anybody wanted me onboard with everyone else. I might have easily agree then that life is a school, and I certainly could have concluded I was a college level student far ahead of the rest of my class, but I still couldn't believe my classmates liked me. I didn't think anybody would want a know-it-all like me around.

In recognizing outer place as a continuum that goes beyond the skin down to a man's flesh and bone, I found the curiosity and courage to ask myself what I could learn from everyday situations that would wake me up to my moral responsibility to treated myself better. (And screw anyone who didn't like the spiritual nerd I'd become...)

You only have to deal with my personality in this book. If you try to imagine knowing me personally and then ran into me from time to time on the streets of San Francisco, you, too, might decide I'm easier to get along with in writing than in conversation. But I can't let that change my opinion of me...

I had to pick myself like forbidden fruit, overeat, become addicted, swear off me and feel banished before I could come back to my tree in this spiritual garden each of us was planted in.

The road going out *to* hell is paved with self-ignorance. It's the road coming back *from* hell that's paved with good intentions. The closer you get to the garden metaphor, the more optimistic you'll become.

I may be alone on this planet, but I wasn't abandoned here. I'm here with gOD, discovering my spiritual curriculum day-by-day. There's no one between uS... My relationship to everyone rests on *my* shoulders. **He** might have brought them to me, but I have to discover why. There's something good about me to be learned from everything.

I now feel heroic for passing my class in "spiritual space" and "spiritual time." That gave me the knowledge I needed to become patient with myself. I now know I can't shrug my shoulders and claim the "Devil" made me do anything. I'm responsible for everything I do,

and gOD has a reason for challenging me to learn from everything. There's no supernatural force in me trying to defy gOD. I just become defiant when I can't do as I please. "Defiance," not the "Devil" is my only adversary. "Defiance," not the "Devil" is my best friend.

Most people aren't afraid of the Diaspora the Jews were forced into for 2,000 years. But everyone intuitively knows that he has to go through his own diaspora subjectively, and many are paranoid about having to do so. They don't want to have to wander around inside themselves not knowing where they're going. They don't want to use the guilt given to the world by the Jews to make moral sense of their own journey within. They embrace the love of Jesus or the generosity of Allah without being willing to admit their guilt and atone for their mistakes in how they've mistreated themselves.

Middle age becomes a precious time of life if you're ready to spend that time learning about yourself in new way. The light streaming in your bedroom window in the morning could become a mirror reflecting the inner light in your heart that's illuminating your soul. From your soul, that light might radiate out to form the shadows in your mind that you see projected around the room. You could take your outer environment subjectively to make life more of a magical experience...

When you succeed in observing the time and space around you as figuratively also existing within, time and space become spiritual commodities to be employed wisely. When self-learning is occurring, it's no longer possible to waste time or space. They become gOD-given resources you come to love and cherish. But that's only possible if you conserve time and space joyously. When learning is occurring you achieve an increasingly bountiful regard for your love of your life. Life becomes magnified, and you *see* more life around you and *perceive* more life within.

There's no place out in the world that isn't your classroom when you're sitting consciously in your soul ready for the Teacher's next outing to your head, heart or crotch. There's no moment in the day that isn't your time to shine when you're illuminated to the miracle of being made in one of gOD's images.

Your heart is like a flame **He** moves across your inner sky to shine down on one inner place after another to illuminate you to your self. Every beat of your heart moves your conscious awareness of your heart another degree across your inner sky. The sun in the heavens above is but a mirror of your inner process of self-illumination.

When you see every individual as a world turning, they become another good earth in the process of gOD's creation. Some are still

having volcanic eruptions that mirror the dawn of the planet. Their inner atmosphere may even be virtually non-existent. Life in them may just be beginning to form, while others are enjoying a 21st century bliss. There's life on other planets, subjectively speaking. Every person is an earth like you.

The perception of "space" as something around me, a physical container I'm stuck in, made me conclude that all occurrences were random, brought on without intelligence or order. But I was really in two containers, one within the other. I was a spirit contained in inner *space*, with my spirit and inner world contained by outer *place*. Both inner space and outer place are infinite in size. Both the vast, night sky with the Milky Way - and the immeasurable darkness of inner space with all the illuminating points of inner light - are there to remind me that gOD is awesome and in both my "lives."

When my perception of "time" had been like a river I'd been thrown into that was carrying me helplessly downstream toward a vast and nebulous sea, I felt powerless over the current and the destination. But when I could experience time as a resource brought into my spiritual house for my personal use, I became a tenant in my body, and time became a utility, a service provided by the Landlord while I was leasing **His** place.

The idea of running out of time is as real as California running out of water or having your electricity turned off if you don't pay your bill. People may worry about the water and electricity being shut off in their house, but they try not to think about the time and space they're going to have "shut off" when they die. They don't like to talk about "eviction." They prefer to change the metaphor to "graduation."

While I'd viewed myself from the outside out, I took up physical space for the purpose of manipulating physical space, and I perceived myself as an *object* influencing other objects. I prided myself on my objectivity, my rational and critical view of life.

But my *objectivity* was in constant conflict with my *subjectivity*. To appreciate myself subjectively, I had to be able to say, "I feel, therefore *you* must feel too; I feel therefore my Teacher must be teaching me why it's important to feel; *I feel, therefore I am.*"

By looking at myself as a subject going through emotional transformations for the purpose of spiritual transcendence, I gave myself the dignity and respect of being a student of life, not a helpless child in the hands of an angry God. As I grew, my view of gOD grew, too. The images of **Him** in religious paintings came to life. **His** finger reached out to mine as portrayed by Michelangelo in his Creation Story fresco of Adam and gOD. And I yearned to feel the sensation of

touching gOD with at least one finger, too. And as a proud, 21st Century citizen of the world, I now know I've had the sensation of high-fiving Him.

When I was a young man, I was intent on solving for "y" in the equation $(x + y) = 1$. Now that I have so much more of a sense of what it means to be a man, I give myself the liberty to solve for "x." And in doing so, my image of gOD is strong enough to perceive the masculine *and* feminine sides of myself; justice *and* mercy; tough *and* tender love, evil *and* goodness turning "x" *and* "y" inexorably to "1".

Once I could forgive myself for having needed to suck my thumb as a child, I was able to forgive others for having needed to suck their thumb, too. I was able to understand why my father had been so upset seeing me sucking my thumb in my sleep that night so long ago, and why he slapped me so hard across the face.

Becoming a man doesn't end when you get through boyhood. Becoming a man doesn't end when your portfolio is impervious to losses. Becoming a *man* continues until you can acknowledge the *woman* in your self...

Seeing the other side of your self is like seeing the dark side of the moon. That one side of your mind that's always facing your soul can't easily account for why your heart burns the way it does. The face of the man-in-the-moon won't reveal to your soul your subjective truth. Becoming a man internalizes your inner world until space and time become personal and meaningful from within.

Externally, most men have some reason to claim to be a *winner* (usually determined by the size of their penis and testicles or the wallet in their back pocket). But internally, most have to admit they feel like a *loser* from time to time.

If you've got a good head on your shoulders, you're likely to do moderately well in the outside world. But if you've got a bigger heart than head, you'll likely feel somewhat unsuccessful until you see yourself as a solar system your mother (Venus) and your father (Mars) are revolving around, too.

You aren't going to understand how your head (moon) revolves around your soul (earth) every month with one side of your mind always facing your soul, while the other side conspires in the dark of inner space. The two of them revolve around your heart (sun) every year as you plunge through your milky way experience of seeding the universe with your song.

This is the upper division coursework in the school of self-love that will make you more patient with your self. This is the spiritual

astronomy you're going to have to understand subjectively if you're going to achieve a bachelor's degree in "me."

57. Coming Out to My Teacher

Don't judge *your* book by *your* cover. Then you'll be able to peruse people as you would a magazine. You'll delve into them as you would a good book. Not everyone wants to express himself like Shakespeare. Some people would prefer to tell their story through non-fiction than take a chance at causing friction.

You can't be authentic with others if you're not striving to become more fully yourself with our Teacher. You can't be a naked Adam on a sistine chapel ceiling pointing your index finger at gOD until you can see **His** loving finger pointed back at you in the hope that you'll reach out to shake **His** whole hand.

But there's a two-way mirror reflecting a separation between **His** finger and yours. **He** can see you, but you can only see yourself. And that reflection is impossible to penetrate without soulful self-regard. You're a reflection of so much more than you may now be able to see in yourself. Offer gOD a helping hand in making this world right, not just a finger. Reflect the best in **Him** by expressing the best in you.

There is no Michelangelo here to update his picture of reality from centuries ago. Don't even ask anyone to take a selfie of himself interacting with gOD. You have to look for the picture of the two of "yOU" in "you." Use your imagination to increase your appreciation of yourself. That's what you're inner eye is for...

Coming out as a gay man was the result of having gone in to discover how gOD made me in hIS image. But that doesn't mean that if *you* go in you're going to see the same reflection of gOD that I see. Nobody looks in the mirror and sees the same face. You can't legislate a reflection with dogmatic insistence on what this world has to look like.

Even if it were possible to reduce the Bible to one meaning, there'd always be someone who'd come along to tamper with the spelling of the WORD of gOD in some new, creative way. You can't take our Jewish gOD and turn our understanding of **Him** into the teachings of Jesus or Allah. You can't accuse the Jews of not believing in the "name" of gOD you're using. Your words will fail you because gOD created all the words you're using. $1 + x^x < 1$

On a trip I once took with my ex-partner to Europe, we stayed in an apartment in London that had a V-shaped mirror in a corner of

the bathroom about a tiny sink. The mirror on the right wall reflected its image onto the mirror on the left wall, and visa versa. So what I saw when I looked straight at the line at the corner of the room was a *real* reflection of myself, not a reverse image. For the first time, I *literally* saw myself as others see me.

But it was confounding to try to comb my hair while looking in this mirror because I wasn't looking at the reverse image I was accustomed to when I look in a flat mirror. And so my arms wouldn't obey my eyes. My arms would only obey the dictates of habit. They seemed to have a mind of their own, and all my entreaties wouldn't make my arms change their "evil" ways. They'd been caught in a lie for so long that the truth was impossible for them to adhere to.

Coming out to the world as gay was the beginning of a greater, spiritual commitment to being authentically me. Coming out was the result of looking in the V-shaped mirror within and seeing myself as I really was, not the reverse image I was so used to seeing, which was the result of looking out at the straight world and not in at my queer, inner world.

Then I finally saw myself as gOD sees me. I could perceive myself without the distortions religion and straight society have heretofore claimed as gOD's only mirror of moral authority.

Because I learned to comb my hair by looking at myself in the mirror, I found it difficult to discern *right from left* when looking in a V-shaped mirror. And discerning *right from wrong* in life is no different. I was used to looking at the world through my mind's eye. Looking at myself through my "heart's" eye was disorienting at first even though I finally saw myself as others see me. And the exercise of looking at myself from my soul to see both was way beyond my imagination in those days.

The V-shaped mirror in that apartment in London made it obvious to me that I had a lot to learn before I'd be able to love myself as I truly am. My frustration and impatience with the world is still a sign that I view myself through the conventional mirror others gave me with which to reflect on reality. That's an image that's not *wrong*. It's simply not all *right*.

We've all learned through a monkey-see/monkey-do strategy of survival. But at what a cost! The rage and contempt I feel emanates out from my frustration with a belief system that's been failing me in some ways all my life. I can no longer walk through life as though I'm looking in a mirror. I had to find the V-shaped mirror within to see myself truthfully.

Self-love is so difficult because gOD made you only translucent, not transparent, to yourself. You see yourself with a depth you can't appreciate in anyone else on earth. But you see *the* world from the outside, in, while you see *your* world from the inside, out. This makes your view of reality somewhat opaque.

Your impression of *outer* place and *inner* space hinges upon your thoughts and feelings. But sometimes, conscious understanding of your thoughts and feelings hinge upon your deeds, and sometimes your deeds hinge upon conscious understanding of your thoughts and feelings. In other words, sometimes you have to take action to know what's going on inside you, and other times you have to know what's going on inside you before you can take action. Sometimes you learn from the outside in and sometimes from the inside out.

The more you endeavor to perceive others' love as a mirror of your own; the more you may question others' intentions with loving intention. The more you see gOD's power to give sight and take it away – the more you'll understand **His** influence in all your insights, perceptions and opinions. If you don't strive to look for wise, loving and generous answers to the mystery of you, you may find yourself with very unpleasant questions you'll be forced to face on the final exam, or even tomorrow when there may be a spot quiz...

Those who quote the Bible chapter and verse by telling gay men that we're damned and going to hell are hypocrites at heart. They'd never want anyone judging them that way. Yet they seem to think they have a gOD-given right to interpret the Bible for everyone. They're in the dark and insist on not moving any further forward toward the light. They insist that gOD's plan was given only to them.

Moses may have received the Ten Commandments readymade from God the first time he climbed Mt. Sinai. But he broke them on the way down and had to go up a second time to get another set. But the second time, gOD dictated them to Moses and made him carve them into the stones himself. If you think gOD has given you the "LAST WORD" readymade, I suggest you do the hard work not even Moses could get out of doing. I suggest you chisel away at your own marble.

Such people see themselves as monitors of the Teacher's coatroom, crosswalk and halls. But they're just deluded pupils of self-love who only want to control the class, not themselves. They fail to realize that they're walking around in a spiritual university setting with students around them who know much more than they do.

Don't treat the Teacher's university-level scholars like elementary schoolchildren. It's disrespectful. Only a child who didn't realize he's in an adult setting would behave in such a shameful way.

A Jew makes a fool of himself if he doesn't work at becoming wise. A Christian becomes hateful if he doesn't work at becoming loving. And a Muslim becomes mean-spirited if he doesn't work at becoming generous of spirit. It's no surprise there are so many foolish, hateful and mean-spirited people in this world. Defiance knows no bounds.

Your religion and your sexual identity don't determine your proximity to gOD. You get closer to **Him** when you discipline your wild inner child, when you raise him or her to be respectful, loving and kind.

gOD created the animals of the earth without a double container. They simply are the way they are. They don't have the spiritual ability to perceive the way they are. If you don't do everything you can to protect the animals of the earth, your inner child is going to grow up to become like a wild animal. He won't have the spiritual containment the rest of us have put so much time and effort into. He won't have an inner parent training him to being an angel in disguise.

The V-shaped mirror is a *literal* example of a *spiritual* concept. You have to look at your self with the detachment you look at others. You're the real deal. What you see in you is what you get - for now. To get the opportunity to see yourself any more clearly, you first have to improve your behavior toward others. *Self-love* has to be earned through *other* love. You don't deserve the revelation of self-love without first putting in the effort by treating the rest of us with the same respect you might only reserve for your parents, a celebrity or someone with an awful lot of money.

No one can do it alone. We all need each other's help because gOD planned it that way. You can *tutor* yourself in every aspect of life, but you can't *teach* yourself a thing. Teaching is gOD's job. Learning from gOD through people is what makes learning such a humbling experience.

The child in you has to learn to trust the humanity of your own authority despite all the horrible examples in your past of authority that was imposed on you without adequate love or sufficient wisdom. Only by respecting your own *humanity* can you come to respect your own *authority*.

But you aren't the world's ultimate authority on becoming human. You need greater help than you'll ever be able to give

yourself. You need everyone. And every person gOD brings into your life is there for a reason. *Ask Him* why. Don't guess.

Acting *habitually* is less effective than striving to act more *authentically*. When you make mistakes from a place of authenticity, you'll feel worse about it in the short term, but you'll thank yourself in long run.

When you act habitually you perceive your inner world like the earth as viewed from a satellite or the moon. When you see yourself authentically, it's as if you see yourself from the sun. The distance is vast, but the other planets orbiting your heart become other people and other valid ways of doing things.

You may be smaller than you once perceived yourself to be, but you're the heavenly body revolving around your heart that's capable of supporting your life. Your feelings may shine out for many other planets, moons, comets and asteroids, but you're the star.

You mother may be like Venus, closer to your heart than even you. She may be your morning star and your evening star. And your father may be like Mars, further from your heart than even you. There may have been someone who loved you, and that relationship may have exploded into little bits like the planet between Mars and Jupiter that's left our solar system with the asteroid belt. But there's a chance of you meeting someone like the planet Mercury, someone who'll faithfully face your heart and fly around it even closer than your mother revolved around it when you were a child.

Coming out of the closet was like looking at myself in a V-shaped mirror. I could finally see myself more authentically. I could see my truth, even if I couldn't relate to it as easily as before. Growing accustomed to seeing myself realistically made me realize that I'm just one star in a galaxy of billions of stars. I'm not unique. I'm just special.

Bringing the metaphor back down to earth, I see myself like a flying squirrel. I see how similar I am to Rocky. Like a flying squirrel, I can soar from one tree of knowledge to the next. I can make my way easily up the trunk to the highest branches. I can pick any fruit or nut I wish to gnaw. When I was a child I was a little mouse. But over time, I grew up to become a flying squirrel. No regrets...

Like a squirrel, I twitch, tremble and shudder instinctively. I'm easily and often intimidated. I'm almost always on red alert. And because I once didn't see myself as I truly was when I looked in a regular mirror, I didn't figuratively see how similar I was to Rocky and how my previous boyfriends mirrored the relationship of Bullwinkle in my life.

Coming out of the closet began as a mysterious process with sex, but coming out had much deeper implications later on in my life. When religious straights demand I conform sexually to their way of behaving because the Hebrew Bible says so, they have no idea of the depth of contempt that generates in me. That Bible is mine, too! As a gay-Jew and poet who's studied my Bible thoroughly, I don't appreciate other people telling me how I should interpret the WORD of gOD. Those people are insisting on how I should *be*, not just how I should *act*. I see them as the next generation of nazis who came after the Nazis who persecuted my mother and father.

The portion of the Book of Leviticus in which it's written that "IT'S AN ABOMINATION FOR A MAN TO SLEEP WITH A MAN" [Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13] are intended as edicts for *married* men. It's an abomination for any man who's past the age of puberty to sleep with his mother, his sister, aunt or cousin. It's an abomination for him to sleep with his neighbor's wife, because she, too, is in a committed relationship. And it's an abomination for him to sleep with another man as well because he's already made a vow of fidelity to one person. This law is about adultery, not sexuality. If religious fanatics bothered to ask gays for help in interpreting this law, they'd understand gOD's intentions more wisely, lovingly and with more generosity of spirit than they've lived it until now.

Such hypocritical, religious straights don't just expect me to mirror their *behavior*; they expect me to mirror their *thoughts*, *feelings*, *desires* and *beliefs*, as well. They want me to ignore the V-shaped mirror image in which I've seen my truth. They insist I behave like the backward reflection they see in themselves.

Such straight, religious fanatics are like 19th Century teachers who insisted their left-handed students write with their right hand. They're like 16th Century Catholics like telling the sun that it turns around the earth or insisting that the earth ends at the horizon. It looks like life on earth *ought* to work their way, but that's just the appearance of truth, not the truth. gOD works in much more mysterious ways.

The lessons in being authentic are presented in the school of self-love solely between Teacher and student. I don't need a religious tutor telling me who to love, how to love, where, when and why to love. I can figure all that out for myself without anyone's help. And if I make mistakes, at least they'll be honest mistakes, and not simply an effort to fit it.

I don't suffer fools who monitor what I do with my penis and anus. gOD knows what I do. **He** knows how I *feel*. **He** knows *why* I

love whom I love. And **He** knows **He** brings fools into my life to help me develop spiritual callouses so I don't have to suffer such a bad fit to my soul in the future.

I'm a writer, therefore I am. I don't need anyone to try to help me with my righting. If fundamental Jews, Christians and Muslims had been given the right to legislate how gay-Jews should have thought, felt and believed, we never would have graduated to Jesus and Mohammed. We'd still be wandering the Sinai looking for a good deli to recommend to our friends...

If I choose to change the way I spell the name of my Creator, that's my business. I don't have to account to anyone for the way I address **Him**. (I took "worship" for credit/no credit, not a grade. That's what I learned in that class, and that's all I need to know.)

Although my family easily accepted me as gay, coming out was just the tip of a spiritual iceberg they'll never be able to fully understand. I got the sympathy I needed, and I know I can't expect any empathy from them.

Being gay is an experience as unique as being Jewish. You have to be gay to know what it means to be gay. You have to be Jewish to know what it means to be Jewish. And anyone who tells you they know who you are and how that makes you feel has no respect for the deep and profound differences in the way gOD made everyone.

Approach gay-Jews with the same respect you'd approach a black man or a Muslim. We're profoundly different from others because of the way gOD fashioned us through our experiences in this society. A gay-Jew is a unicorn, not your typical stallion. Once you can see the magical properties we hold, you'll do much better appreciating those differences in yourself, and you'll get off your high horse.

Most people don't yet have the depth of *self*-understanding to realize that the suffering of others can never be fully understood. I share some empathy with family; some with gay friends; some with Jews; and some of my empathy is reserved for the disabled community, since only they know from the inside out what it means to be mentally/emotionally challenged.

But that doesn't stop me from expressing myself passionately. And it certainly makes it possible for me to behave compassionately toward people who've suffered as much I have.

The way in which blacks have been treated in this country and Muslims are treating themselves around the world mirrors the ways I treated myself in the past. To perceive their suffering, I have only to look at my own.

Once you empathize with yourself, self-marriage still won't be the logical and spiritual conclusion of holding a lifelong spiritual relationship with your self until you become a passionate person. Once you've committed to loving yourself *physically* while engaged in sex, *emotionally* while engaged in love, and *spiritually* while engaged in prayer, you'll be able to marry yourself without ever contemplating *divorcing* yourself ever again. Only then will you declare that your marriage to your self was made in heaven.

Being gay requires no apology, whether others sympathize with me; empathize with me; or revile me for it. Being gay is one of the Teacher's mysterious transformational processes of *my* heart that affects *my* soul. It has less to do with sexual behavior, and much more to do with spiritual intention. Homosexuality is another way of *becoming*, one of many ways to bud, blossom and flower spiritually. Gays seed the world with unique spiritual fruit. We, too, are fruitful and multiply, albeit with a form of brotherhood and sisterhood many others will never be able to understand or achieve. Like the Jews, we are a peaceful people who always hope with our hand stretched out ready to shake on it. Those who speak ill of us should look in a V-shaped mirror.

I happen to think the whole world would be better off if everyone were gay and Jewish, but I have no intention of recruiting anyone to either lifestyle. I wouldn't want to disrespect myself, or gOD, by making such an assertion. And frankly, I don't think other gays and Jews would appreciate it if I tried.

People have been spiritual delivery systems of insight throughout my life. They've taught me directly or indirectly how to honor myself. No one enters my world incidentally or accidentally. Nothing that happens to me is coincidental. But bringing self-awareness to the level of incidents and co-incidence that have personal importance requires strength of character. And that I have...

But doing something about the way your life has turned out requires willpower. "Willpower" is the combined force of your penis (desires) and heart (feelings). It's willpower that makes you a passionate person. The terrible consequence of using your willpower without self-knowledge is described in the Creation Story when Eve conspires with the serpent. Your head always gets in on the conspiracy when you're self-ignorant. Therefore you might as well admit you have the power to make good choices as well as bad.

The shock of being born; the disappointment of being loved badly; and the fear of not seeing your self clearly because of habitual patterns instilled in you by previous generations that knew much less

about themselves - mustn't be denied with self-ignorance or cynicism. You're your only hope.

Come out to the Teacher. Come out of the closet where you've dumped some of your feelings instead of putting them away. Tell **Him** what you've done wrong, and tell **Him** what you believe you need to do to straighten up the mess you made from the inside out. If you leave without thoroughly cleaning up the mess you made, I guarantee you're going to regret it...

58. Learning to Learn

Learning *how to learn* wasn't a question that occurred to me until quite late in my spiritual education. My study habits as a student on earth weren't consciously formed until I'd passed many of life's subjects with grades I could only unconsciously contemplate. My parents instilled in me habits and attitudes about learning, many of which were horrendously inappropriate for the late 20th and early 21st Centuries. Many of my parents' opinions were formed by unenlightened opinions about mankind and personal experience that prejudiced them with severe cynicism and scorn about what they were doing down here. Amassing money, achieving status and appearing righteous - pretty much sums up the graduation requirements for their generation.

You can't blame Israel anymore for how the ancient Christians tried to deform the Jews morally, emotionally and spiritually any way they could. You can't blame the Muslims and Christians anymore for fighting over who gOD wanted to take possession of the Holy Land.

We're all who we are because of our ancestors and the historical record that describes the creation and construction of the school of self-love. Today's wars with Israel and battles with the Jews of the Diaspora aren't going to solve the world's problems anymore than converting gays to straight would make this world a better place.

Self-hatred is very real, and therefore it's important you take the topic so seriously that it becomes personal. You probably didn't get the container you really wanted. And you certainly didn't get an instruction book on how to operate it. I'm sure you've done your best to tolerate what you don't like about yourself, inside and out. You may even be secretly quite pleased with yourself for accepting yourself as you are now. But if you want to move into the realm of self-admiration, you're going to have to learn how to learn from yourself. And self-hatred is the only thing standing in your way.

You can't expect to do really well in the school of self-love until you've attained good work habits and a cooperative spirit. Another way of saying that is that you've got to train your inner child to obey you, and do so with a good attitude. But that's harder than it sounds. Learning how to learn to obey yourself is a mandatory class we're all enrolled in whether we like it or not. Whether we pass it or not is another story...

It turned out that it's no coincidence I was extremely critical of my face and indulgent of my bodily desires. My mother had held the same attitudes about hers. In my exuberance as a child to please her, I'd scrambled to learn all I could from her without scrutinizing what I was doing. Such is the naiveté of many a child. Such is the tragic tale of "family dynamics."

As I aged and my inner life became more complex, the New Age also aged. And I began to see that not all the good answers my generation came up with were going to last forever. All answers are confined by time and space. Every generation of human beings, like computer chips, can only operate devices as speedily and efficiently as is possible at that time. People, like machines, become redundant, outdated and obsolete.

Words, like shadows, change shape as the source of light moves through space over time. What you know about yourself today is light-years ahead of what you knew ten years ago. And if your inner child doesn't keep up with *you*, how can you expect *you* to keep up with everybody else?

There was a time when European Christians actually believed that Jews had horns because Michelangelo sculpted his rendition of Moses with horns. (The Hebrew word "keren" had been translated as "horns" when it also means "aura of light." In Exodus 34:29-30 it states, "AND WHEN MOSES CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNT SINAI, HE HELD THE TWO TABLES OF THE TESTIMONY, AND HE KNEW NOT THAT HIS FACE WAS (**HORNED**) *AGLOW* FROM THE CONVERSATION OF THE LORD. AND AARON AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL SEEING THE FACE OF MOSES (**HORNED**) *AGLOW*, WERE AFRAID TO COME NEAR.")

Today, people don't even remember that Jews were once vilified by European Christians for being animal-like and therefore thought to be less than human. The problems today between gays and straights, and Jews and Muslims, won't last forever. Future generations will have to explain to Muslims why their grandparents tried to describe Jews as monkeys and pigs just as I've had to do here for Christians concerning why Jews were once thought to have "horns."

The concept of the “Devil,” a supernatural force in opposition to gOD was a Christian construct with horns to convince the poorly educated European peasantry that the Jews were their enemies. Islam adopted this concept, and the rest is history...

Wisdom requires that we regularly update our knowledge of what’s good and bad collectively as well as individually. *Social* justice is just the tip of the iceberg of *self*-justice. If you can’t empathize with the Jew in you, you can’t achieve compassion. There’s definitely a devil in you, but today we call that our “inner child.” And there’s an angel in disguise in you, too. But we now call that our “inner parent.”

If you’re passionate about learning about yourself, you can become compassion with yourself. If you begin with your inner “mother and child,” you’ll be able to more deeply appreciate the virtuous teachings of Christianity.

Self-love compels us to learn to love our self more the longer we’re in our own company. And *generosity* of spirit obliges us to share our revelations about our self with one another to insure future generations are wiser and more loving than we were. (My book on Islam will teach you how to share your revelations about your *self* with *yourself*.)

We can only hold so much information in our head. Facts about the world may give us a momentary pleasure, but facts bring a confidence that only mitigates our fears. Fears keep returning despite the facts. There’s more to life than facts.

Learning to like my face required that I learn how to like the thoughts behind them and the words that came out of my mouth. Learning to like my body required that I learn how to like the feelings and sensations that emanated out from me as I moved through the world.

Learning to learn from myself required that I open myself up to learning from my “x” variable as well as my “y”. I had to return to that unpleasant thought of me having been sexually created by my parents. I had to return to that unpleasant thought of being intimate with being a male, something straight men think they can’t do because they’re not gay.

The fact that gay people are attracted to the gender of the same container doesn’t make us attractive to our own contents. Our contents don’t make us spiritually attractive to our self. The idea that “opposites attract” is as true for gay couples as for straight. We all have to develop sensitivity to the emotional and spiritual forces that create attraction, whether or not we think we’re cute.

Learning how to learn recognizes that the landscape of your unique soul creates the contours upon which your tracks of feelings will be hammered into consciousness. Where your trains of thought will go depends on the terrain of your inner landscape, which metaphorically mirrors the outside world. Since it can only be upon *your* tracks that your trains of thoughts will run, much depends on the contours of your inner terrain.

Driving my car off a cliff makes a lot more sense when I realized I couldn't build bridges internally. That frustrated me so deeply that I wanted to die. If not for the fact that the good Lord understood my dilemma better than me, I wouldn't be here today to talk about it.

You may meet people who don't have the inner locomotion necessary to climb the kinds of steep grades you're used to. Therefore helping people *circumnavigate* their inner mountains rather than *climb* them may be much wiser than trying to reduce their number of boxcars with ridicule or increasing their power with money.

Ridicule will force people to limit the length of their trains of thought. Many people come away from their public school education feeling dumb, but that's because they haven't learned to respond to ridicule. Poverty will force people to limit the power of the locomotive that drives their trains of thought. Many people will come away from their work world experiences feeling weak, but that's because they haven't learned to respond to financial inequality.

Being a child was an enchanting experience in which you lived your life as a series of metaphors without realizing it. When you outgrew that stage of self-discovery, nobody told you how important it would be to hold on to the enchantment of the metaphors you had to externalize. Consequently, most people grow embittered and soured over time. They think they've lost their magic. And even if they remember how they once believed or what they were once looking for, they don't realize now that faith in the metaphors they had once been using will bring back their enchantment with life.

Moving the focus of your attention from your head down through your heart and into your soul was the humbling experience that taught you how to learn about yourself in the first place. You couldn't stop your thoughts from finding a way to crisscross your inner world while gliding along your feelings. You didn't realize those feelings of guilt and love, like the two rails of one track, had been hammered into the contour of the countryside that was your soul.

You had to *outlive* your unconscious love of metaphor to *relive* it. You had to give up the magic of childhood to return to it with

greater appreciation of the big picture once you had more experience. You had to develop faith in the way gOD made you to discover the mystery, magic and miracle of life itself.

You can now say you've *changed* your mind many times, but it's not so easy to *transform* your feelings. You can now see that feelings of dislike and hatred have to go through a spiritual process that's hard to put into words because it happens in such a mysteriously unique way for each one of us.

And yet thoughts and feelings that are able to work together internally are able to achieve the kind of moral efficacy we can hope will last a thousand years. The moral consequence of thinking clearly and feeling deeply create new beliefs that weren't there before. To the extent that you work to change the way you think and transform the way you feel to include people different from yourself, you transcend who you were before. This is the mark of the true "human be-coming." This is the mark of the individual who's learning to be grateful for the privilege of being alive.

Hating Jews became passé for Christians. It soon will become passé for Muslims, too. It's unsustainable to hate us. We're gOD's chosen to lead you to wisdom. Our wisdom will lead you to the love of Jesus and the generosity of the spirit of Mohammed. If you hate us, you'll never get where you want to go.

Thoughts are changed with facts. Feelings are transformed with self-love; which begins with tolerance, moves through acceptance and should arrive several times each day at self-admiration if you're going to make any progress in enjoying life. Facts and feelings will influence the way you believe. And the more you're able to admire yourself for the effort you're putting into transcending yourself, the more you'll be able to believe in yourself, the more low self-esteem will dissipate and confidence will replace it.

If you don't see miraculous differences from the way you were yesterday in the way you're turning out today, you're not looking closely enough at yourself or you're not talking to yourself nearly enough in the course of each day. Progress takes effort. And when you listen to people who sound like they're centuries behind you, it's because they are.

You'll never learn to believe that miracles begin within if you don't get to know yourself better. When you don't bridge the strangeness of your being with self-intimacy, gOD's presence in your life remains a theory. You hold ideas about **Him** that are antiquated and passé.

You don't want to live your life using guesses, hunches or dogma. But it can be unnerving to see people, especially in African-American churches, who are so confident and secure in their belief in gOD. It's easy to conclude that they've lost their mind. But as someone who literally went insane, I can tell you they're not crazy. They've found their soul, not lost their mind. And if the descendants of slaves from Africa who were dragged to this country against their will can find faith in the way things are turning out for them in America, you can, too...

Remember that the word "ghetto" was originally the part of European cities in the 16th and 17th Centuries where the Jews lived that were literally locked up each night. These walled quarters that separated the "good" Christian world from the Jews aren't so different in their philosophical intention from the ghettos of the American cities today.

To work your way out of a ghetto spiritually entails recognizing that you've been a slumlord by allowing this medieval, spiritual system continue to today. Your opinion of poor people, blacks and the educationally disenfranchised has its origins in anti-Semitism. But it holds an even deeper root in your prejudice against your self.

The word "you" is a word you have to learn how to use on yourself. If you don't use this pronoun while talking to yourself, you're not going to discover what makes "you" different from "You" and "**You.**" You're going to confuse yourself with Jesus and your Creator. You're going to act in ways that are arrogant, egotistical and selfish. You're going to play god.

When you apply the word "you" to yourself, it's your inner parent (head) speaking to your inner child (heart). This is the relationship that improves you.

When you use the word "we" on yourself, it's your inner parent and child speaking from your conscience speaking from a place of moral authority over your self. This is the relationship that approves of you.

But when you use the word "I" when speaking to yourself, you're coming from your soul. You're coming from a conscience that's been informed through righteous deeds that there is a gOD who refers to **Himself** as "**I**". When you speak from the first person singular pronoun, you're insinuating that you believe in gOD. You're stating that you're no longer an "i" seeking yourself. You've grown up. You're aware of the power of your being from that place in inner space out of which that power emanates.

In short, the word “you” comes from your head. The word “we” comes from your heart. And the word “I” comes from your soul.

You could even say that the word “you” is originally Jewish as informed by gOD. The word “we” is originally Christian as also informed by gOD. And the word “I” is originally Muslim, also informed by **Him**. But until you combine these spiritual inferences, you’re not going to be able to call yourself a “citizen of the world.”

Remember the lyrics to the song, “A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes.” (Kimberley Locke) “No matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing, that wish will come true.” However, the lyrics also state, “Whatever you wish for, you keep.” Therefore it’s very important you wish wisely. It’s important that when you wish you pay close attention to the “I” doing the speaking because you’re speaking from your soul to gOD.

The only good reason I’d found to spend time with people in the past had been in the hopes of getting laid. Sex comforted me in a way that nothing else could. But sex, like drugs and alcohol, because I abused it, not only made me feel worse over time; it interfered with my ability to put learning about myself first and foremost.

Sex with many men was comfort for my container. It even improved my contents in that it made me feel more affectionate toward others. But hook-ups made me feel worse about myself in the long run. It felt selfish rather than *self-serving*. It didn’t enhance my ability to believe in me. It was a distraction from the love I hadn’t dared name: self-love.

Sex was so enticing because it skipped the criticism inherent in words in favor of compliments and encouragement from others through touch. Sex, like drugs, told me I was more than O.K. In subtle ways, sex told me I was pleasing. But I wasn’t pleasing enough. I wasn’t pleasing to me.

I can only tolerate people one moment at a time. They’re addictions, like any other. They’re powerful and inebriating. They can take you on some pretty bad trips. You have to learn to live with people as you do with food. You can’t live without them, but overindulging in people isn’t good for you either, especially if they’re spoiled or rotten.

When I was young, the words I spoke to myself in the privacy of my mind always seemed to fall flat. I couldn’t believe me when I said anything kind about myself because my words were too superficial to be taken to heart. To surpass *knowing* myself to *feeling* good about myself, I had to perceive of me as a spirit undergoing a human experience. I had to talk to myself about what it was I truly

believed about the meaning of life. That made my experience of me come alive. That's what made me feel 3-D.

Talking to myself led to internal conversations I'll never discuss with anyone. They're much too private, too complex and personal to ever be put into words. I can't always say out loud what I tell myself because many of my conversations only occur in abstract impressions. These symbolic utterances are what I call, "office hours with the Teacher." They're intimate exchanges like art classes that occur in a medium that's different from words. They're colorful and well designed with meaningful forms. But they don't include verbal language. They're right brain, not left brain creations.

You have to rise to every occasion. You have to learn to walk (think) and then swim (feel) before you can learn to fly (believe). But once you're spiritually airborne (and not an atheist anymore), you can then use the perspective of height to learn to believe in your unique relationship with gOD.

This relationship is what the concentration camp survivors talked about that the Nazis couldn't take away from them. This relationship is what gays hold with one another that straights will never be able to take away from us. This is the black experience in America that whites like me can only speculate about. These relationships are awesome and real. They're powerful, and the more those who are hateful and prejudiced are, the more good people can challenge these relationships in more powerful ways.

The N.R.A. still has control over our politicians because many conservatives correlate guns with their freedom to believe in gOD. They don't realize that a gun is a life-size symbol for a penis. They don't realize that it's their penis, the organ that symbolizes the delivery system of their personal desires, and their testicles, the organ that symbolizes their ability to create ammunition to make their wishes come true, that they're gripping with such fervor. It's not the right to own a gun that they really want to express, but their freedom to stick their penis, and consequently infuse their "desires," anywhere they like.

It's deeply ironic that conservatives are so threatened by gay rights when the idea that gay men have been fighting for is metaphorically so similar to what the gun owner wants. We need a country where every man in America has certain rights over his own penis. But that requires commonsense regulation. The gun/gay issues are two sides of the same coin. Do what you want with your penis as long as you don't literally hurt anybody.

Juvenile minds don't want to learn about themselves. They can't believe in gOD or **His** plan until they can believe in themselves and the plan gOD is laying out for them. They can't really believe in gOD working in their life every moment of every day until they learn to concentrate on what's happening within them.

It *takes* miracles to *make* miracles. You may be able to look back on your life to see many miracles after the fact. But you have to learn to see yourself making miracles moment by moment to believe in gOD's spiritual system. You can't really claim to believe in angels if you don't have evidence that you're one of **His** angels in disguise...

It takes changing your mind from a one-dimensional series of pinpoint locations (thought) to a two-dimensional surface with length and width (feeling) into a three-dimensional cube with depth (belief). You have to learn to become spiritually real, 3-D.

Jesus told the Jews of His day to get out of their head. He told them, in essence, that the only way to our Father was through His heart. He set a new standard. He moved the discussion from the table in their head to another in their heart. He personified love. But so do you...

If you want to use His life as the model for your own, do so. But if you think you're going to exclude gay-Jews from your table, you need to know that you're making a very serious mistake.

Many say that "grace" is a gift from gOD that everybody is *given*. I don't believe that to be true. I believe grace is a gift from gOD everyone is *earning*. Jesus can't gift you with grace. He can only gift you with awareness of your potential in earning **His** grace. You can't believe without love. It's simply not possible.

If you don't get off your behind and get to work earning grace, you'll likely slip right out of your recliner at some point on your journey through life. Becoming "grace full" is harder than it looks. And the less graceful you are, the more humble you're going to need to strive to become to make up for it. Clumsy (lack of grace) and bigheaded (arrogant) is what took Humpty Dumpty down. And as you know, all the King's horse and all the King's men couldn't put *him* together again.

Unless you can visualize the pictures I'm painting in your imagination, you're not thinking in 3-D. Your mind is still flat. Your imagination is linear, and your feelings, shallow. You may have to work to achieve a greater belief system than the one you now hold. But learning to "believe" isn't easy, and yet the rewards of doing so through soulful self-regard will increase your ability to imagine. It's

your belief system that'll make you smarter and more loving. And it'll also make you more generous of spirit in all your worldly affairs.

I had to learn that there was nothing to fear but fear of *me*, and I had to break through that paranoia with self-love. Only in mastering my emotions was I ready to see that believing in me would be the miracle that would make all the other miracles around me apparent.

Think about yourself constantly. Commend yourself lovingly for the truth your heart reveals to you about the way you are, regardless of how uncomfortable *self*-consciousness may make you feel. When you don't enjoy being around your *self*, you'll also find it very unpleasant being around others...

Hold yourself kindly and charitably at all times, as a parent would hold a small child. And then you'll be able to do the same for others. Take actions based on your unique combination of wisdom and self-love, and you'll come to believe in gOD's participation in your process. To thine own soul be true.

If you learn to treat yourself better, you'll be in a position to treat others with better intentions, too. And if you learn to do both, *then* you'll see those little miracles begin to appear in your life that you thought gOD had forgotten.

Don't expect a tree to blossom with fruit overnight. There's a season for all things. If you expect to see *big* results in a day, you're being unrealistic. But if you don't see tiny, little results day-by-day, you're not working hard enough. You're still being distracted by the outside world.

Our Creator gave us weather, not so we'd talk about it ad nauseum, but so we'd come to realize that today's weather around us reveals the global warming of our emotional world within. Therefore, you should expect tornadoes, hurricanes, floods or droughts within you at certain times of your year. You should expect to see your polar icecaps melt with sympathy and your oceans of emotions rise with empathy. You should expect to see your passion and compassion affect the landscape of your soul. We're in a new age of self-discovery, and we've all got to adapt to it with wiser ways.

Whether your inner temperature normally runs hot, warm, cool or cold you can learn to live better without self-blame. You wouldn't blame gOD for the weather around you, so don't blame yourself for the weather within.

The three Abrahamic religions are gOD-given ways of living in all seasons. There's something dormant, seeded, about to germinate or growing in you at all times. Your nature is unique. Your emotional weather patterns are unique. Your whole inner world is unique. But

you can only talk about your relationship with your self sanely in terms of the world we all share. Therefore you must learn how to acknowledge the mystery of metaphor and learn to use metaphors to create symbols and similes to express yourself.

59. The Bachelor's Degree in Spiritual Science

Everyone can be a spiritual scientist exploring his own unique terrain. Everyone can use the scientific method of gathering evidence, hypothesizing, analyzing and theorizing to determine the meaning of his or her inner world.

But at the bachelor's degree level in the science of spirituality, I was challenged to put aside the popularity contest with others to become popular just for exploring myself. I got to work at investigating me as a scientific experiment. I had no great interest anymore in applying everything I knew to achieving fame or fortune. I became engaged in learning for the sake of pure self-knowledge.

In the B.S. degree in self-love, I got through the bullshit to learn to "like" myself *conditionally*. I was so sick of "love." I'd been bitterly disappointed in familial love, romantic love and even the word "love" because it's so misused to describe relationships people have with peanut butter, their local baseball team and other people's body parts.

I wanted to learn to "like" myself. There's enough about me I'm never going to love, so I decided to learn to like some things about myself, even if that meant that there'd be other things about me I'd have to "dislike."

But how can I like someone like me if I'm so dissatisfied being me? When I bitch about how unhappy I am when I'm alone in my own company, I'm insulting myself. (And I don't like that.) When I seek others to distract me from me, not to enhance my being me, I'm really avoiding and rejecting myself. (And I don't like that either.) When I witness the ways I treat myself badly and have no choice but to conclude I'm not the kind of person I want to be around, I owe myself a deep, heartfelt apology. (But I don't like apologizing to myself.)

I had to become indifferent to myself because I didn't want to do the hard work of learning to like myself by myself as I was. And now I'm at the point where I truly don't care. I became so habituated to being indifferent about myself that I had no idea how to get out of it.

I believe the habitual disinterest and indifference I see in me now can only be overcome with greater communication with my self, and so I'm prepared to try. I have little choice. I have to force myself

to admire the good in me and dislike the bad. I have to continue with my spiritual education in learning to love myself because I believe that's the only reason I have to live. If I stop caring, I'll die.

When I bore me, I don't just have to right to be irritated. I have a *duty* to be irritated. When I'm sick and tired of me, I have no choice but to *plummet* my attitude to discover why. When I don't feel good about myself, I have to *force* my self to explore my feelings to discover my moral reasoning for making me feel the way I do. I have to take the way I feel about me personally, whatever I do.

Every day I remain the same I slowly turn into petrified wood. Over time I won't be able to grow anymore at all if I don't force myself to grow today. I'll become rock, imitating wood. I won't be able to distinguish between pretending to be real and being real. And that's the nightmare I can't go back to. I'll take any feeling over no feelings at all...

In the past, I hated ugly people, so I concluded I was ugly. (And then I felt terrible about how I looked.) I hated losers, so I made sure to lose. (And I felt terrible about how little I accomplished.) I hated fat, naïve, stupid, prejudiced people, and I hated unkind, snobby people who thought they were better than everyone else. (And I felt guilty from time to time because I identified as someone like that.) I wanted to be in the company of people who weren't like people. But that would never be possible. (And I didn't like myself for trying to someone like that.)

Now I *have* to ask myself what I'm trying to teach myself. Now I *want* to know why I care so much about not caring about anything at all. Now I put my *faith* in things being the way they are to accomplish a moral goal that will better me in my own eyes. Now my goal in life is to care about what I feel (even though I feel guilty for feeling that way).

Although as a child growing up, I wanted to *look good* to others, now I want to *see* clearly. In youth, I wasn't ready to admire myself from the inside out. Now I am. Self-admiration requires identifying with the feeling of "sorrow" more than "anger." I'm no longer banished from the magic of self-enchancement because today I can feel "sorry" for my self without indulging myself to punish me for what I think or feel.

Adam and Eve were *angry* about how things turned out, while the serpent didn't say a word when it was reprimanded by gOD. *They* were angry, and the *serpent* was indifferent. It was only the forbidden fruit that surely felt sorry for what had happened to it.

It pays to look at life in ways that provide new perspectives. The real victim in life is always the one who's sorry, not angry or indifferent. Strive to be like forbidden fruit, not like original man and woman, and the snake that got them into trouble with its indifference.

I once had the power to dance ballet, the most strenuously physical achievement on earth, but I didn't have the strength to put my fork down when I was full. I had the determination to fight for gay rights, but I couldn't make peace with my own guilty conscience. When my penis went up, more often than not, my brains slipped into my behind and I was screwed, regardless of what happened in bed, or with whom.

There was a hole in my head that went right down to my ass. I was a donut of flesh looking for something to fill the hole inside me. And there was no one, no food nor drink nor drug that could adequately do so. I'm made in a way that won't work...

Today, I know that Rome wasn't built in a day; Rome was built day-by-day. Today, I remember that the skills I've developed in one area of my outer life can be applied within. If I can take everything *more* personally, not *less*, I'll succeed in overcoming my indifference of me.

But this requires emotional poise. Taking everything personally requires a view of life that's panoramic. I have to see the big picture and my place in it. I have to be able to climb my mountain with my eyes peeled to the ground to see the next step I'm taking. And I have to stop frequently to look back at the vista behind me.

To take everything more personally *and* universally, I have to commit to reacting *less* outwardly and feeling *more* inwardly. I have to use willpower to observe the way others behave toward me and observe the ways I can admire myself for not behaving like them. It's better to secretly succumb to being a snob than to let others know how indifferent I see they are to themselves.

I never wanted to be average or mediocre; I always felt special. But now I have to prove to my *self* that I'm exceptional, gifted and outstanding in my own way. And the only way for me to do that is by witnessing myself giving *willingly* to me.

The Teacher creates every student with a capacity to be superb at something. The only reason I haven't yet done anything that others have acknowledged to be superb is because the Teacher wants me to continue doing what I'm doing at this time until I can do it better.

I don't know what **He** has planned for me. I don't even really know what this dented, battered can has inside of it. I'm still a work in progress. I'm a mystery, and it takes patience to solve a mystery.

My specialty in life has turned out to be talking about the fact that I talk to myself. I don't think anybody on earth can do that better than me. And yet, for the longest time, I was the one I spent the least amount of time talking to. I made my bed every morning without noticing how pulling the wrinkles out of the sheets provoked my anxiety. I folded my laundry like I was in a card game and had been dealt a bad hand. I did the dishes as though it was the sole activity gOD was grading me on.

Dark, but colorful, little feelings were everywhere inside me. Like little shadows they passed over me, making me shiver without realizing why. But now I'm more alert to the impressions I receive from my inner world. I've become *self*-conscious. I've learned to get to know myself all over again without all the B.S. Achieving the Bachelor's Degree in the science of my soul means I'm not indifferent to me anymore.

People overlooked me for the same reasons I overlooked myself. They were indifferent to me, and I was indifferent to me. Now I don't have the right anymore to blame them because *they're* unfeeling.

If I really want to like myself by myself, I have to start by not forgiving me for my lack of inner vision. I now know I can't see right through me. I'm translucent inside, not transparent. But just because I can't see what a curious and interesting person I am on the inside doesn't mean I can't learn to do so.

Below the thoughts and feelings you're experiencing now, there's another set waiting to surface. Like shark's teeth or snakeskin, there are layers of you that'll surface when you've used up the layer you're consciously using now. Try to take a peek at what's beneath the "you" you now perceive inside. There's a mystery there already in the making. There's a skin beneath your skin, even if there's literally no longer another tooth beneath each tooth. Life is sad. Get used to it. That'll make your happy moments more precious.

I was so sure I had x-ray vision when it came to looking inside others. I was so confident I knew what they thought and felt that I thought I could tell you how they should behave. The truth is that using my superpower of x-raying others had only been for practice.

Even though I lost the popularity contest at school in my youth, I can now see that I'd lost it by just one vote: my own. But I don't have to continue making the mistakes the class clowns are still making at the back of the room in the high school of self-love. I don't even need to get myself elected "most likely to succeed." I'm beyond all that.

Making friends with the “village idiots” gets easier once you find your own craziness endearing. Once you’re really out of your mind, you don’t have to look for someone else’s head to occupy. Once they decided I was out of my mind, I wisely decided to stay out.

If you decide to go anywhere from there, I recommend you go to your heart. Don’t try to become an expert on what others are thinking, feeling, desiring, believing or doing. It’s a waste of your time, and for some mysterious reason, it annoys people. Be yourself with your self and let them work out their issues their way.

Look for those you think are weird, eccentric, odd or whom you think may be creative in ways that will inspire you. Start conversations with people you may think have nothing in common with you, perhaps someone normal or conventional... Look at how their feelings dance on their face when they begin to talk about something that interests them. Listen to their tone of voice and the rhythm of their speech. Go beyond their matter-of-fact outer appearance to discover the person with feelings inside. Conventional people are so fascinating!

Divine lessons in being yourself are brought to you through people. You need Jews; gays; blacks; Muslims; the disabled; women with small breasts and big hips; and men with tiny penises and beer bellies. You need Republicans, Red Sox, and Mexicans. You need the upper class and illegal aliens. You need everyone to vote for or against you in his own mind just to teach you how to focus more clearly on your own inner elections. Nobody’s vote really counts except your own. And when you get to the post-graduate level at the university of self-love you’re going to work very hard to earn it...

But for now you need *personal* power. In the bachelor’s degree in science in the school of self-love, my Teacher became my Advisor, and for the first time in my life I felt, somewhere deep within, that there might be a way I could actually become a winner in my own eyes by *liking* myself for some things and *disliking* myself for others. Advise yourself. Your advice will become more important to you if you receive it appreciatively.

The cards I was dealt in life were no coincidence. My *hand* is now in my *hand*. I’m more poised. I’m ready. I can talk to my Advisor at anytime about anything; I can even advise myself. **He** isn’t ever going to blame me for getting the wrong answer. I’m here to learn, not to express **His** perfection.

60. The Master's Degree in Spiritual Art

“Art” is any expression of *the wisdom and generosity of your love*. Art doesn’t have to be beautiful or ugly. Art is an attempt to excite your feelings so you can express yourself more sincerely. A work of art is successful if it makes you think, feel, desire and then more deeply believe. Art is our attempt to recreate gOD’s image in ourselves.

Technique comes from a sound mind and craftsmanship comes from a good heart. But all inspiration to create “art” comes from the deepest part of your soul. Everyone is an artist in the making. Everyone is made in gOD’s image, and therefore everyone is an “i” in the process of recreating **His** image by capitalizing on his own work.

Art is work. Work is worship. Every job I was ever hired to do should have been an expression of the wisdom of *my* self-love. Every dollar I earned should have been in remuneration for my services as an artist of life. If I’d only known that at the time I held those jobs, perhaps I wouldn’t have needed to change “canvases” so many times, or reframe my resume in so many ways.

I’ve had 28 jobs in my life, and each was a blank canvas on which I learned to paint a portrait of my soul with ever greater wisdom and self-love. Self-respect and inspiration from gOD often come through gainful employment. Self-love especially pays dividends if you’re in a position to hire people. That makes you more than an intermediary of gOD’s efforts on earth. It makes you an ambassador of **His** good will.

My first lessons in “the *art* of working with myself” occurred in spiritual, elementary school at about the age of 36 when I became aware of my intra-dependence on myself. I’d just left L.A. and I was driving up the coast going to my new home in northern California. I’ll never forget that drive up the coast, alone behind the wheel, listening to music. It was such an intimate, hopeful trip, and it changed the entire course of my life.

For the previous four years, I’d been teaching junior high school English in East L.A. I felt I’ was “advancing” in gOD’s plan when I got the job of drama teacher in Santa Rosa (north of San Francisco) in 1989. But I had to unexpectedly quit that job in the middle of my first school year because my students were calling me “faggot,” disrespecting me because I appeared gay, and I couldn’t stand the abuse. I told the vice-principal I was going to come out to my classes as a learning opportunity for them, but I got no support from the school administration. Once out, the administrators, teachers, parents and students all sided with the kids. I was the first out teacher

in Sonoma County, and it was hell. I tried to demonstrate what self-respect looks like as they tormented me mercilessly because of my sexual orientation, but it wasn't easy. I couldn't stand my job.

The union agreed with the board of education to pay me my salary through to the end of the year if I agreed to give up my teaching position. And I, in turn, agreed not to talk publically about the incident.

But now that gay marriage is the law of the land, I'm not willing to keep silent any longer about what happened to me on the Ides of March, 1990 at the Board of Education in Santa Rosa when I agreed to leave my job to end *their* discomfort with my sexual identity. Twenty-five years of silence is enough...

All through my life, it's only been after I proved to myself that I could be there for others that I witnessed I had the self-esteem to esteem myself. My path got less circuitous after that teaching job. I met my former partner at a "Gay Men's Spiritual Retreat;" moved to San Francisco; and resumed my career at the high school level, teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) to newcomers to America who were eager to learn to communicate with me without calling me names or disrespecting me.

Because I'd been afraid to talk to myself in the privacy of my own mind, especially as a parent would, a child; because I'd been afraid others would be able to listen in and would call me crazy; because I'd been locked up against my will in mental two institutions and seen with my own eyes just how crazy I could behave - I'd allowed others to decide my standards of sanity for me. And, boy, was that a big mistake! It turned out I'd only been *mentally* ill. The whole nation was *socially* insane in those days.

What other people call "crazy" I now call "stupid." I'd been in a *stupor*. The adult in my conscience had done nothing to control the inner parent in my head, and therefore the inner child in my heart lived much of the time as though in a trance. I'd been in a dysfunctional family relationship of father, mother and child. And I'd been distracted at work into believing people liked me, when they didn't really know me. That simply doesn't work, especially if you're trying to build team spirit.

If you don't bring your conscience to work with you, you'll never turn it into a soul. If you don't challenge others to do the same, they may turn on you and treat you badly. If the U.S. military can do it, our business and educational communities can learn to do so, too.

We all have a responsibility to bring all of our self everywhere we go. If you're not ready for public life, stay home and watch TV. I

can't tell you how much I learned about myself from daytime television when I was too sick to hold down a job.

Nobody has to know I talk to myself. These conversations between inner parent and child, overheard and commented on by the adult in me are only something my Teacher would want to listen to. But an encouraging word from the adult in my conscience when I feel down is so helpful to my inner parent. And a compliment whispered within from my inner parent to our inner child is just what the kid in my heart sometimes needs to hear.

Even administering a harsh word occasionally from my inner adult (conscience) to my inner parent (head) makes my inner child (heart) feel so beloved in the long run. Who says the American family is falling apart? Mine is just coming together.

People forgive one another easily. They forgive far more often and easily than we're aware of. Their need to release themselves from anger is admirable, especially when they have good cause.

But when do we forgive our selves? I don't mean, "excuse" ourselves for how we treat *others*. I mean, "forgive" our *self* for what we do to aspects of our self that don't deserve to be treated so badly. Forgiveness doesn't happen until we graduate anger of others to discover self-sorrow.

This world is full of angry people slowly learning sad. This world requires sorrow to break the will of man. His ridicule, scorn and derision of life make him arrogant and unteachable. Without sorrow, man would never learn. He'd never discover the humility that turns his shame into the tool that helps him achieve godliness.

My heart still aches because my head once decided I didn't have a reason to live. I still see the turmoil I caused within me and wonder if I'll ever fully be able to come to peace with myself. But at least my head knows how to apologize to my heart, and my heart in cooperation with my conscience (soul) can now lead me in the direction of self-forgiveness. It's all about progress, not perfection.

The third dimension requires learning about god/God/ gOD in three ways internally, even though we appear to be made symmetrical externally. Outside, we've been divided in two: right and left. Inside, we're triangular. Inside there's a triangle of wisdom, love and generosity of spirit we have to learn to recognize to determine right from wrong.

This is the Pythagorean Theory personalized. The square of the hypotenuse (soul) is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides (head and heart). $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ In other words, you have to

multiply your efforts at thinking and feeling to multiply your spiritual rewards in life.

In religious terms, you could say that for every two Jews there are three opinions: (1) Jewish (wise thinking) (2) Christian (loving feelings) and (3) Muslim (generous spirit). Until we stop looking for what's different about the Jews and start looking for what's similar and different about all human beings, we aren't going to learn how to open tin "cans" without the "can openers" produced by arms industries and controlled by the N.R.A.

The art of becoming authentic requires a rigorous discipline of honesty combined with the courage to be utterly sincere. When you can look at your inner process in this creative way, you'll become respectful of *yourself*, and you'll learn much more about your *self* each day.

When I was in the second grade in Ventura, California, I made an ashtray at school that I sent to my father who was living in New York. When I chanced across it again in my forties in my father's house in Queens, I recalled how hastily my little fingers had formed it. It was as though the love and joy of creating had so overwhelmed me as a child that I couldn't create slowly.

I've always thought I lacked what is referred to as "skill," when in fact the only thing missing in my life has always been "patience." "Genius" is the term we use to differentiate the most patient members of society from the rest of us who are so impatient that we have to do everything in a stupor. I still do some things very fast, and then have to go back and look at what I did as slowly and thoroughly as I possibly can.

Speed is the gift of youth. Work as fast and efficiently as you can while you're young. Do as much as you possibly can because the key to success in loving yourself in later years will be the patience you'll then have to tolerate, accept and admire yourself as you watch yourself slowing down.

It takes enormous patience to admire your *self*. But you can succeed in doing so if you try. gOD knows, **He** gives us enough lessons to learn about patience. You'd think we'd all be experts in it by now...

When you're young, you seek the *love* of others instead of loving your *self*. In middle age, you seek someone to *like* you instead of liking your *self*. But by the time you're really mature, you should really be seeking someone to *adore* you in addition to adoring yourself. Hopefully you'll be able to look back on your path through life with self-adoration because there are so few children and

grandchildren nowadays who really have learned to “adore” their elders. Maybe that can change...

Those who work well with others are preparing for an even more challenging relationship with themselves in years to come. All that cooperation and patience you practiced on others will come back ten fold to help you in the post-graduate classrooms of self-love.

In the master’s degree in art in the spiritual school of self-love, I learned *self*-creation. I discovered the metaphors, symbols, and similes that had shaped my life. I found ways to describe what was happening inside me, so I wouldn’t get locked up in an insane asylum again. I’ve found that honesty, sincerity and authenticity have been the best ways to avoid that nightmare a third time...

My parents had *formed* me like clay, but they also *deformed* me in their rush to see me grow up. I was a misshapen mass in their hands, hastily shaped on their potter’s wheel of child rearing, often feeling poorly centered in later years because of it. The hasty glaze of courtesy and good manners they dipped me in didn’t conceal from *me* the flaws in my clay beneath the smooth surface. There came a point when I cracked, and then my lack of self-love revealed the rock-hard clay beneath my surface; out of which I leaked many an unpleasant word and gesture.

My parents had guided me in childhood like a vehicle on a road. But when my mother divorced my father it was as though she was the curb on one side of my road, but the road had no curb on the other. The shoulder just kept going and going, and then my vehicle often ended up in a ditch or a gully. It took me a lifetime to get myself out of that ditch and back on the road. Now I can proudly say I drive sanely and carefully on life’s roads. I’m not a menace behind the wheel anymore.

Today is Gay Pride Day in San Francisco, Sunday, June 28th, 2015. It’s two days after the Supreme Court ruled that proclaims I’m an American citizen in every sense of the word. I can marry a man in any state in the union. The city is simply electric!

Those who are so self-satisfied that they think their parents did a better job of raising them because they’re straight and I’m gay aren’t so happy today. Those so complacent as to think I suffered from mental illness because my parents got a divorce will continue to oppose divorce. The self-righteous will conclude that if only my parents hadn’t survived the War, there’d be one less gay Jew in America.

Scratch the glaze of a Republican and you’ll find a homophobic, xenophobic, misogynistic racist in his clay. The smug

don't have curbs on *either* side of their street. They drive their thoughts as though traveling a dirt road, wherever their heart desires. They crash into anything and everything along the way, and call that their idea of moral progress. They're reckless and irresponsible bumpkins traveling the city streets of life. And they proudly credit the Bible as their license to do so.

I was born by caesarian. I came out of the dark and into the light another way. But today I was reborn. Today I think I know what it feels like to have come into this world through a vagina. Today I'm a human being, finally feeling born in a way most people take for granted. I'm so happy. I'm in tears.

Yesterday I may have had a "TIA" a "Transient Ischemic Attack," a mini-stroke. I lost my balance and my ability to stand on my feet at a bus stop. I figuratively blew a gasket. Two good Samaritans got me into a taxi, and on the way to the emergency room, I had another attack in which my words slurred. My doctor now thinks it might only have been caused by dehydration, but it was scary spending six hours in a hospital.

The health scare I had yesterday was like entering a "pre-med" classroom in the school of self-love, a classroom I'd never been in before. I suddenly felt human. I felt vulnerable. I felt mortal. And thanks to my faith, it wasn't terribly frightening.

We're all vehicles that we can't always control, whether because we literally run off the road or because our vehicle figuratively breaks down over time. You wouldn't blame a car with more than 100,000 miles for needing to rotate or replace the tires. But the religious fanatics in all three of the Abrahamic religions are just looking for any dent in my bumper to lay blame at how I drive.

You are your own chauffeur in life. But as you age, you can't always be your own mechanic. You're going to need to have your vehicle towed in when you have emergencies on the road. It's just a part of driving in a world with a lot of traffic. It's what it means to be human in the biological, intellectual, emotional and spiritual sense of the word.

I was very lucky yesterday in that I got to enter the classroom of "med-school" and take a seat quietly at the back of the room to watch as they looked under my hood. It was a humbling experience just to be there with all those impatient patients with conditions much more serious and frightening than mine.

Today is Pride Sunday, It's very humbling to be home in bed while all my friends are out celebrating national, gay marriage rights in our country. I'm so proud to think that the cost of my tuition in the

school of self-love as a teacher in Sonoma County helped to change the heart of America around gay people. Today I'm all in. Every part of me feels "human" and empathetic.

I have to give my parents credit for how they helped make me who I am. Even though I hastily made that ashtray for my father as a child and later resented the two of them for how crude a job they did in shaping me, I think back now to the fingerprints embossed by a child in that ashtray, and see in my mind's eye the little hands that had eagerly worked to thank my father for his participation in my life. gOD gave me exactly what I needed from a father. The rest **He** decided to leave up to me in shaping my *self*.

Criticizing my parents angrily was unproductive and unworthy of the artist in residence in me. The bittersweet feeling of "joy" is the only emotional solution to self-creation that makes any spiritual sense at all. Joy in life is all that matters. You can't die fighting the world. Life without joy isn't worth dying for.

Nobody suggested to me that loving myself could be achieved through the language arts or the fine arts. Nobody said I could choose to become an actor, director and producer working to make a movie of my love of life. My life didn't have to be a medieval painting without perspective or an odd-shaped ceramic that's been chipped.

The art of self-love is unique to each of us. In many ways it's not a science once you've given up your indifference to your self. There's no one formula for any individual. The art of self-love is an inside job that leads to brotherhood and sisterhood with your self.

Loving yourself like a brother won't turn you into a homosexual, and loving yourself like a sister won't make you want to become a transsexual. Self-love makes your love unique, pliable, dynamic and special. Self-love leads to tolerance of people similar and different to you.

You don't have to change the way you think. You only have to change the way you *perceive* the way you think. You can love yourself the way you are if you can come to yourself with a view to your attitude. This direction comes from your heart. If you do this, you'll see yourself as gOD sees you. You'll see yourself *becoming* joyful, and you'll be grateful to **Him** for teaching you to love yourself the way **He** wishes you could love.

Become your own academy in your own hollywood. Give yourself an oscar for your performance yesterday if you think you deserved it. Be the star, not the gaffer or best boy in your story. Don't wait to die to enjoy your "Life: The Movie." You're a cliffhanger that you're going to watch an episode at a time, day-by-day. It's a story

that could be, in retrospect, the greatest teaching tool in your life. But you've got to look at your attitude to find this perspective.

Of course you should also be a crewmember on other people's sets helping them produce their figurative film, too. Be sure to give an award-winning performance in every scene you're in whether or not you're in the limelight. Be real! Be memorable!

Here is a metaphor of life in story form. It's a little, known tale told by some orthodox rabbis. It's also unfinished. Perhaps you'll be able to guess why...

The Ring of Devotion

Once upon a time there was a king who asked a subject of his to travel to a far away kingdom to look for a ring the king had left there. "Certainly," said the subject. "Where did you leave the ring, your majesty? I'll be happy to get it for you."

"Just go there and look around. You'll find it," retorted the king brusquely.

"But your majesty. The job sounds impossible. It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack?"

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do for you," said the king with a strange smile. "I'll give you two gifts to help you through the task. I'll give you a horse to help you get around while you're there and a servant to help you look for the ring."

The subject was about to argue with the king when the poor man realized it would look bad if he didn't just accept the assignment and do the king's bidding. So he bowed and left the court with an outward look of appreciation. But inwardly, he resented having to go on the journey and the seemingly impossible task he'd been commanded to undertake.

The good man traveled for nine months to get to the kingdom where his search would begin. And when he got to the castle where the royalty resided in the far away kingdom, he found soldiers on the ramparts with bows and arrows pointed menacingly at him. And so the fellow became frightened. He decided to get off the horse and leave it behind in the bushes.

And then he and his servant approached the moat of the castle on foot, and they found they were allowed to cross the bridge with impunity along with all the local residents. In fact, the soldiers ignored the subject and his servant completely.

Once inside, while the servant spent his time looking for the ring, the subject began to learn about court life by becoming friendly

with the inhabitants of the castle. And the king's subject really enjoyed himself, except at those inopportune moments when the servant would interrupt him, tugging at his sleeve, reminding him of the job they were there to do, which took the good man away from his interactions with the lords and ladies of the court.

He began to give thought to the horse he'd left in the bushes, and how well that decision had turned out. And so he decided to fire the servant in the hopes that, that would simplify his life even further.

In retrospect, it felt like it was a good decision, because without his servant, the guy's life really did become a lot easier. Without that irritating retainer interrupting and nagging him to look for the ring, the people of the court actually liked him even more, concluding he was really one of the boys. He found he had even more time to really enjoy life, which made him even more popular. And he was greatly respected by all.

But one night, after an evening of heavy drinking and consorting, he fell asleep and had a dream. And in his dream, the king appeared before him saying, "I gifted you with a horse; where's your horse? I gifted you with a servant; where's your servant? I commanded you to do my bidding, but what have you accomplished? I find you sleeping!"

And then he woke up...

And that's the end of the story. Perhaps you can finish the story with your own interpretation. But here are the rabbis' thoughts on the matter. It is, of course, a story about waking up.

The "king" in the story is gOD, and you are **His** "subject." Our King created this court on earth called "reality" and has sent you here with the task of looking for **His** ring despite the distraction of all the people who behave as though they're lords and ladies of the land. The ring is a symbol of **His** eternal devotion to you in this distant realm, so far from **His** court and so far from where you came from.

After nine months of traveling from conception through physical formation, you arrived in this strange place called "reality" at birth feeling like a stranger from a distant land. And those around you looked like terrifying soldiers on ramparts at first, defending a place you decided right from the start you'd have to find a way to enter to make yourself at home.

The tools the King gave you to accomplish **His** task were a body (horse) and a conscience (servant). And **He** assured you these gifts would suffice in finding **His** devotion to you.

The “castle” is outer reality. But it’s the place where people, places and things also bring you meaningful lessons in learning the organizing principles of gOD’s devotion (wisdom, love and generosity).

The “soldiers” that guard the castle stand for the social pressures of parents and other authority figures who either let you in to the secret or keep you out of their protective stronghold, depending on your willingness to comply with their expectations.

The bows and arrows they display are the social conventions they use to threaten to pierce you with ridicule and scorn to maintain appropriate and courteous behavior under their roof. They appeared scary to you when you first arrived, and with good reason. But with time, you found ways to overcome your fear of them.

You abandoned your horse (body) right from the start out of paranoia. Your physical vehicle for this journey was weak; from the day you were born, you gave in to the temptations of food, warmth and dry diapers for the sake of comfort. Your thoughts were a maelstrom of forces until you crossed over the moat and were able to put them into words. So long as all your appetites were met, you didn’t give thought to the “horse” you rode in on and left behind in the bushes so that you’d fit in with the crowd.

As you grew up and made friends with the “locals,” you probably experimented with drugs and alcohol; participated in casual sex; perhaps smoked cigarettes, overate or indulged in foods you knew were bad for you – all to satisfy your urges and interests, all to share the feeling of being “one of the boys.” In these ways, you learned to avoid most of the slings of ridicule and arrows of scorn you could see being shot at others. You fit in to society by using your bad habits to seek conformity and acceptance.

By all rights, you should not have been allowed over the moat and ramparts into the castle, let alone given a place at the table of polite society. Having left your precious “horse” behind, thinking it was an encumbrance, you used your body as a vehicle for pleasure, sensation and titillation.

But pleasing yourself didn’t help you find the devotion (ring) you came here to look for. And even though you abandoned yourself on one level, you were still granted access to self-awareness the longer you were here.

Despite all the pain and punishment you put your body through just to be accepted by others (and all the embarrassment you subjected yourself to with physical disregard for your health), you were still

allowed to enjoy the good life in the court, still given a chance to learn what lies beneath the flesh and blood of the everyday view of reality.

You found yourself in the company of other “courtiers” (peers) who respected you. And many of them even liked you just as you are. But you didn’t see their acceptance as a sign that you were getting closer to gOD’s ring of devotion. That level of **His** loyalty to you, you took for granted.

But along the way, you made the decision to give up your servant (conscience) so you’d be loved and all the more popular with those around you. In your effort to lower your standards to fit in with others, you gave up the goal you’d been given in coming here. In an effort to devote your heart to pleasing people, you didn’t uphold ethical regard for all of your self. Without a conscience that could consciously put the development of your own love for you before all other love, you fell asleep to the task of looking for the loyalty and devotion from gOD that can be found in everyday external experiences.

You’ve always been well within the castle walls of reality where the warmth and safety of others has protected you from the harshness of existence. But you may have been uncertain where you were in spiritual space.

When you fired your servant (conscience) it’s as though you blew out the candle that illuminated you to yourself. You gave up the goal you were sent here to achieve. And then you found yourself in the dark without ethical regard for the spiritual purpose of love. That’s when you fell asleep and dreamt about your reason for being here.

Because you thought you did pretty well without a horse and a servant, you were willing to bet you could get others to close an eye to all you were doing wrong in your relationship with your self. You told yourself that others were doing no better than you. You thought you could go through life sleepwalking, and nobody would know about it or single you out for it.

You became a *doer*, without a personal, spiritual reason for *being*. You abandoned your horse, servant and the assignment of searching for the King’s ring (which would have proved **He** had been here long before you arrived), but you still thrived outwardly. You thought **He’d** either forgotten **His** reason for sending you here or had forgiven you for having forgotten it yourself.

The ring in this story is whatever you find here on earth that proves to you that our King was here once and, through your devotion to the search for devotion, can still be perceived as being here

symbolically now. The ring is your sign of **His** bond of matrimony to you.

When you return to where you came from, there'll be nothing here you'll be able to take with you. Therefore, you have to prove to yourself that you've done **His** bidding while you're here.

This isn't about anyone else. It isn't about gays, women, blacks or Jews. It's only about you. You have to prove to yourself that you've used your time wisely, lovingly and generously. You have to prove to gOD that your intentions have been loving and kind...

The ring is whatever proof you need that you learned to love your life with (or without) **His** help. It's not about declaring gOD's existence or intentions. It's about declaring the importance of your own. If love conquers all, then your love must conquer much more than your death. Your love for your life must conquer *you*. Without the love you've already earned for *yourself*, there's no way you'll be able to produce more of it to share.

In the master's degree in the art of spirituality, I saw that I was a cherub, not a fully-grown angel. I was a cupid that had shot himself in the foot. I'd wounded myself in my foolish attempt to get others to love my love. I'd aimed poorly. But it's fools like me who win out in the end...

I was blessed with mental illness. Many are not. They're blessed with physical illness or, more commonly, financial weakness instead. But it doesn't matter whether you're blessed with material losses, physical losses or mental losses. All loss is bestowed upon us to teach us to intensify our relationship with our self.

Worry is the "blossom" on the branch that blooms with joy. The more overjoyed you are with someone or something, the more you'll worry about losing it. Bless your worries. They're the only sign you have of your true wealth. Thank gOD for all that you have that **He** might choose to take away from you. Out of these blossoms will emerge the fruits of your labors of love.

Abandoning the goal of admiring myself for the admiration of others wasn't ignorant, arrogant or futile. It had simply been a fool's errand. My love was simply far too precious not to attempt in every way to bestow it upon myself. Once I discovered I couldn't get my neighbors to love me, I realized I had to do so myself. I discovered what it meant to "LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF." [Leviticus 19:18, Mark 12:31, Matthew 22:39]

It wasn't *what* I went through in life, but *how* I went through it that most mattered. After I failed at making others joyful with just a smile – as a baby can do - I decided to change my tactics. I decided to

offer myself my own joy and sorrow, instead. I decided to improve my attitude in being with me. Then, all the overflow from my cup after I gave my love to me, people were welcome to drink, out of my saucer. Such is *my* rendition of a tea party.

Leave “love” to the young. Let them pursue other love to discover that it’s terribly bittersweet. Leave “like” for the middle aged. Let them pursue their desire to have others like them and themselves. Look instead for “adoration.” Adore yourself passionately. Adore your life with the best attitude you can possibly muster. If you do, you’ll have plenty of adoration left over to give to gOD, I promise.

The metaphor of life as a kingdom with gOD as our King and us as **His** subjects is medieval and, in some ways, outdated. But in terms of my own spiritual development, I’d come about as far as my own late middle age. I was dying every day from a religious war somewhere within myself. I battled one crusade after another trying to seize the holy land within me that I never seemed to be able to hold on to. I’d been on a crusade against an inner infidel, using self-scorn, self-derision and self-contempt in an unconscious effort to strengthen my belief in me. And I was losing, regardless of which side won.

I didn’t have to wonder why my prayers weren’t answered. I didn’t have to question why evil was everywhere and justice so rarely seen. I didn’t have to ask myself why it was so hard to help anyone. I could see that my problem was universal. We’re all in the same boat together, alone. You’ve got to create a life preserver on the inside in case the boat sinks.

(Prepare now for a change in metaphors.) The master’s degree in art in the spiritual school of self-love is like a jeweler’s workshop. In this inner workspace, you’re molding a ring of self-devotion you’re going to give to yourself and then offer to your King when you get back to **His** Kingdom.

You’re becoming a more skilled artisan each day. You’re working in a golden, three-dimensional medium called “reality” – a mettle that’s brilliant, but not soft or flexible. And your soul is the diamond that shines with a love of your self that’s brilliant and colorful because it’s so well centered in this setting.

You can’t exactly “find” this ring, and if you could, I doubt it would be your ring size. This is the ring you’re better off fashioning yourself. This is the devotion from gOD that you can only see with decades of self-scrutiny and self-regard. This is the tough and tender love that will make you into a ring of devotion that others will want to grab ahold of when it looks like they’re about to sink into the sea.

61. The Ph.D. in Self-Love

The world says you can't buy love, but, of course, that's not really true. Worldly "pleasures" *can* be purchased; it's the levels of loving experiences *beyond* "pleasure" that must be achieved through the *intangible* means at your disposal. Pleasure *is* a form of self-love, but those who believe they've earned wisdom from mistakes corrected that they've learned from can afford to love themselves beyond the level of only pleasuring themselves.

To overcome your fear of your love for you (paranoia), you need only engage your imagination by figuratively submerging yourself in your love, as you would your body in the sea. In so doing, you'll perceive yourself emotionally breathing underwater. You can do this in your imagination in the waking state or in your dreams.

Jesus never literally walked on water in any accounts of His miracles. But He must have been a compelling and mysterious phenomenon for the ancient Jews because He figuratively came down from the spiritual realm inhaling and exhaling love on earth, as a fish does water. He was surely coming from His heart, not His head. He breathed under emotional water while simultaneously moving as would any man through spiritual air, something people have known about for 2,000 years and still have trouble doing.

People have to be figuratively fished out of the ocean of their emotions just to realize how deeply and unconsciously they're submerged in the concept of love. It's only when they're introduced to the world of spirit above the one they're normally used to that they realize how deeply "in" love they've been all along.

Giving and receiving my own love had become a complex issue by the time I reached puberty. Prior to puberty, I perceived giving as something adults were supposed to do *for* me, since I was just a kid. During puberty, I realized I had to give to others to get what I wanted from *them*. Later, I learned to give to others to get what I wanted from my *self*. The process of learning to give deepened for me over time until I could give to others for the pure joy of seeing myself give.

This deepening process is like diving into the sea and swimming down below ten feet of water; there you begin to feel the pressure and cold. The underwater world of feelings begins to look different from when you were frolicked in the waves. It gets quiet. It gets serene.

Once I'd learned how to give in a deep way, it still took a lot of giving and *taking* in adulthood before I learned how to *receive*. Receiving was extremely difficult for me because it brought up so much guilt about not being deserving.

Once I saw I could *give* to others but couldn't *receive* from them without feeling bad about doing so, I realized I had to first give my love to *me*, if, for no other reason, so I could practice receiving from my *self*.

I can now say with great sincerity that I learned to receive from the inside *in*. In learning to receive from *me*, I got to appreciate myself as a giver at a profound depth of emotional regard because I got to witness myself giving, and from doing so, I received something even greater than my own love, gOD's love and appreciation of me. Only then could I receive from others guilt free.

The Ph.D. in *the wisdom of self-love* in the spiritual school on earth becomes a striving for conscious awareness of all manner of love and wisdom ((giving and receiving)). In the Pd.D. program, I got to learn about *innocence*, not *guilt*. And that was actually a *lot* harder to experience. Anybody can accomplish the skills of giving and taking. The rewards of giving and receiving are immeasurable.

In my doctorate schedule of classes, life became a growing up experience in which I became more childlike and innocent than I ever imagined possible. I learned about the innocence of selfishness. I can now state unequivocally that selfishness can be a virtue if you perform it for your self.

It was my love of wisdom that led me to "the wisdom of self-love." It was the wisdom inherent in Judaism that taught me to appreciate the love inherent in Christianity; and it was the love in Christianity that led me to love the generosity of spirit inherent in Islam. There was method to the order in which gOD created the Abrahamic faiths, and there was Abrahamic order in the way I learned about me.

When I was about eight years old, my father came from New York to California to try to reconcile with my mother. One night in my mother's one-room apartment, my sister (who was six years old at the time), our father and me (who was eight) sat in the dinette while my mother lay on the bed mulling over in her mind what to do about her marriage. My father suddenly burst into uncontrollable sobs, saying he only wanted to bring the family together again. So, naturally, in that moment, I thought the job of reconciling my parents had fallen to me...

Four years ago, when my mother was 90 years old, she burst into sobs, herself, and sat on my lap like a little girl, begging me to make up with my sister in order to return our little family of three to the way it had been before. But I was only reminded of how I felt when I was eight...

I couldn't have mended my mother's broken marriage to my father when I was eight. And I certainly couldn't go back to her youth in Bavaria to save her brother from falling over the baluster and dying. I can't pretend to love my sister today after she stole my inheritance out from under me. (I'd have gladly given my half to her in appreciation of how she's cared for our mother.) But life goes on. You have to make the best of the way things turn out from the heart.

It wasn't *my* fault my mother suffered for a lifetime for having wished her brother dead. It wasn't *my* fault she didn't teach my sister and me about sibling rivalry because of her shame over something she said when she was a child. It wasn't *my* fault my sister punched a hole in my bedroom door when she was fourteen. It wasn't *my* fault she stole all our mother's money. Actions speak louder than words. Other people's mistakes aren't my business. *My* mistakes are my business. And I'm not comparing myself to anyone.

Prior to my studies in Ph.D. program in self-love, I didn't believe in spiritual evolution because I hadn't witnessed myself evolving. I could look back to see that I'd literally crawled before I could stand, and had stood before I could walk. But I'd never really considered where I was headed. Giving to myself and receiving from myself helped me see the evolutionary spiritual process of human nature.

Life is actually an evolution of the *finest*, not the *fittest* anymore. Money, property and prestige aren't a factor when it comes to spiritual evolution because the only thing that separates one person from another is moral progress. We may all be in the same boat, but we're not all in the same class. There are those who are in spiritual nursery school in terms of their moral development, and there are those who are in their post-graduate studies. There are even people who are monetarily very wealthy and yet spiritually bankrupt. It behooves me not to compare out class schedules and grades.

We should all look at what *we've* done and look at what *we've* avoided doing. Sometimes we should feel guilty about what we did. Sometimes we should feel guilty about what we didn't do.

If you devote your life to the "betterment" of the masses, you may discover you only *think* gOD hired you to police the world after you left the police academy in your parents' home. Planning to shape the soul of every human being on earth is a bit far fetched. Try, instead, patrolling and monitoring yourself. Nobody wants your nose up his butt or her vagina. That's simply "perverse."

I spoke to my mother about her past and helped her see that ignorance is no excuse for the way things turn out for anyone. The

spirit of the law is as much a part of gOD's plan as the letter of the law. We all do the best we can at the time and then take our chances.

Sadly, many, in this world are afraid we're devolving as a species. You can see it in their health, wealth and wellbeing. You can see it in their philosophy of life. You can see it in their cynicism and scorn. In truth, individually, each of us is learning to correct his mistakes of judgment without having to appear to be an utter fool.

Putting people down *collectively* for their *individual* choices isn't a realistic or optimistic way to view life. It's not even *realistic* not to be *optimistic*. Those who are old or sick often perceive the world as nearing its end. But that's only a projection of what's happening to them, personally. Young, bright and healthy people who look at the world pessimistically are equally unrealistic. The world is a school, and you are its star pupil. If you look at the world metaphorically, symbolically and comparatively, you'll become an optimistic realist. You'll become an individualist who sees himself evolving. Those who are working at moral progress are achieving results day-by-day. And those who are not are not...

I went through most of the tests of my life in the past with the attitude of a spoiled adolescent, cursing and complaining, rather than as a student devoted to learning about myself. I took my punishments like a martyr and a masochist. I never "questioned" the spiritual reason for my pain and suffering. Hence, my moral progress was very slow.

Christianity produced the greatest victim the world has ever known in Jesus. And people today still like to get up on the cross to proclaim their innocence, thinking He'll love them more if they're more like Him by proclaiming themselves a victim of circumstances. They'll tell you in great detail how some "roman barbarian" crucified them in one of many ways, but they won't try to come down from their cross. They'll stay up there looking down on you and everyone else with supercilious, self-serving selflessness. Self-love won't end Christianity. It'll only end martyrdom.

Playing the victim is a game that uses guilt as its reward. Most people don't want to learn how to feel good about themselves. They only want to learn how, when and where they can lay blame to appear the victim. Their attitude is adversarial to life out of spite. To improve *your* attitude, you only have to deal with *your* guilt, not everyone else's.

The tears my parents shed saddened me deeply, but their spiritual evolutions were only indicators that proved my own. I could only *learn* from their mistakes. What had happened to them in life wasn't my fault. What my sister decided to do to get our mother's

inheritance also wasn't my fault. And because I have no reason to feel guilty, it felt morally fine for me to figuratively walk away from my family guilt free.

Granted, people are always looking for reasons to besmirch your reputation. There's nothing some like more than to splash *black* guilt anywhere they see *white* love. They're spiteful, and they get a lot of "pleasure" from being that way. But improving your attitude will require giving up your spite. It'll require that you commit to higher levels of love.

We all have to live with a certain amount of bitterness (disappointment) and sourness (anger) in life. That's the universal aftertaste for all of us who are searching for the sweetness of self-love. It's harder to love yourself than it looks because love brings us many other feelings that are never going to go away. You can only commit to dealing with those feelings responsibly rather than spitefully.

I spent a lifetime bending over backwards to appease others to make up for familial problems I didn't learn to separate myself from until middle age. The problems I inherited from my family's core dynamics are now behind me. In the Ph.D. program in the school of self-love I learned to say, "It's not my fault." And that's not selfish. That's just true.

"Freedom" is something you learn about in childhood. "Liberty" is something you learn about in adolescence. But "emancipation" is something that comes over the emotional age of eighteen. Emotionally, *most* people are still children at heart; *many* are adolescent in nature; and a *few* have been emancipated into adulthood in the deepest, emotional sense of the word. The *freedom* I now have without familial guilt gives me the *liberty* to help others *emancipate* themselves.

I had to glean wisdom from my parents' pain and suffering to separate from *it* without separating from *them*. There was no point in blaming *them* for the way their lives turned out, and the certainly was no point in blaming *myself* for the way it turned out, either. *Their* grades didn't go on *my* report card. They may never have been emancipated in the emotional sense, but that's between them and our Teacher. It's none of my business how they did on their report card. My schedule of classes keeps me well enough occupied. I don't have to worry about other people's work habits and grades anymore.

My seemingly cantankerous nature is really the result of a boundary I now keep between myself and others. Some people leave me celebrating their successes. Others leave me wishing they were dead. If I don't see you working morally hard in class, I'll lose

patience with you very quickly. There are too many great students of life for me to tolerate those who don't come to class having done their homework.

The great reward for making mistakes in life comes in the emotional realm. Mistakes bring up massive amount of anger, a good deal of sorrow, a bit of guilt and a smidgen of self-love. If you don't learn from your self-love, you'll be left with only one of those other feelings pointed with an index finger at others, which you'll then have to turn around and feel for yourself.

My blood, like Abel's, called out many times to gOD from the ground of my being in my past, but I'd always shrug my shoulders, like Cain, rhetorically questioning whether I was really my *own* keeper... I welcomed pain and suffering in my youth, unconsciously thinking I'd be able to use it after life to blackmail gOD into rewarding me for having been mistreated so badly while down here trying to learn something useful...

I never guessed self-love would lead me to make more sense of Cain's rhetorical question of gOD (Am I my brother's keeper?) by posing it of myself. I finally asked myself if *I'm* my own keeper, or not. But what I got out of that question wasn't what I expected.

By identifying with both Cain and Abel in this, the second story of Genesis, which all three of the Abrahamic faiths are commanded to take to heart, I was able to perceive why gOD, in **His** infinite wisdom, wants me to take *every* point of view presented in the Bible.

When my blood cries out from the ground for justice from myself, I am, *indeed*, my keeper. I have a duty then to *care* about what happens to me. In this sense, the voice of both Cain and Abel *are* speaking to me.

Just because there are suicidal people in this world who deny climate change, want to disassemble the government and take away healthcare from the poor, doesn't mean I have to go along with their irrational urges. Just because they shrug their shoulder at gOD, like Cain, doesn't mean I have to.

I want to live. I want justice. But I'm only willing to take responsibility for *my* participation in the destruction of the environment and our political system. I fight suicidal thinking to the best of my ability in *myself*. But I'll do everything I can to avoid massive amounts of guilt when I have little reason to feel guilty.

I'm proud I don't feel anymore guilty than I do. It's because I *don't* feel guilty that I'm motivated to do more and more for others. Those who feel the guiltiest do the least. And they increasingly do it with the worst attitude.

The Golden Rule begins within:

Do unto you² as you¹ would have you³ do unto you².

In other words, use your head¹ to manage your heart². Then use your head¹ to manage your conscience³. Lastly use your conscience³ to manage your heart². Then, when you compare what your head and conscience think about how you feel, you'll discover a more righteous way of behaving. Only in this way will you earn the right to truly love yourself as Jesus did. Only in this way will you make moral progress at the doctorate level in the university of self-love.

Don't just read the Bible and relate to one or another of the characters in it. The Bible isn't a cafeteria. You don't get to pick and choose what you want to take away from the Bible, bring to the table and consume. If you *believe* in all of it, *use* all of it.

Come from a place where you can relate to everyone and all points of view. Only then will you be able to decide what righteous, moral conduct means for you. I *think* like a gay man who couldn't be politically more left. I *believe* like a Jew who couldn't be politically more right. But I also decide for myself how I'm going to *feel* about the next gay-Jew I meet – or anyone else who comes into my life.

I'm not interested in converting to Christianity or Islam, but I'm also not willing to switch my sexual orientation for them either. I *am* the way I am. Get used to it.

There's always method to gOD's madness. gOD allowed everything to turn out the way it looks today for the best of all possible reasons: to help us work toward a better future. If you waiver in your belief of that, you need to reread this book from the beginning for clues to what it means to be a person of faith. Then you should read or reread the Bible. Only then will you be prepared to rethink your attitude about tomorrow.

Loving that one person who had the potential to become totally transparent to me had been of little interest to me at first. I thought self-love was a little creepy. Giving and receiving from myself was the last thing I imagined I'd like doing. It even seemed immoral.

It had always been physical intimacy with *others* I thought about when I thought about "love." And I'm not sorry I still do. The fact that I can keep my penis in my pants and remain faithful to my partner is one of the great achievements of my life. Being married to myself while having a boyfriend on the side was the last outcome I ever thought would serve my needs. But it works well for me! I get to

explore myself *internally* and my boyfriend *externally*. And the two of us keep me well occupied...

For the past few hundred years, the religious institutions have been harping on “desire.” They’ve had their head between everybody else’s legs, preaching what not to do with urges, impulses, needs, wants and desires. I got the message! And now I decide for myself what makes me feel guilty and what does not.

I’ve moved to matters above the waist. I’m ready to talk about my *locomotive* but not anymore about my *caboose*.

Learn what you can about yourself despite the appalling universal disregard and exorbitant cost of a good, spiritual education. Devote yourself to learning and your awe of life, and you’ll contribute far more to paying your tuition in this spiritual institution. You’ll see that veneration has come *to* you and then gone *through* you. You couldn’t honor, respect or revere gOD if you hadn’t first been introduced to those topics in your classes in venerating your *self*.

You weren’t brought to this one-room schoolhouse called “earth” to quiver and quake like a child before a raging Father. But you’re also not here only to serve the needs of the lords and ladies of **His** court. Take it from a queen. Blue blood only runs through your veins when you feel sorry (blue) for yourself. Don’t compete with those whose heart is black because their blood and intentions will figuratively be, too.

The religious fanatics in the Jewish religion think they’re superior to the rest of the Jews. The religious fanatics in the Christian faith think they’re superior the rest of the Christians. And the Muslims are obviously doing the same thing by blaming the gays *and* the Jews. This won’t last much longer.

People on the *left* discuss their principles. People on the *right* kill for their principles. The right will never prove they’re right until they stop killing and start negotiating. They may think they sit on the right hand side of gOD. They may claim **He** only has a right side politically and not a left side. But it’s simply preposterous for the world to live with such a tiny view of gOD. Until the religious right in all three of the Abrahamic religions gives up their willingness to kill for their beliefs, they’re going to continue to drive people away from gOD. And that’s simply not *right*.

The Golden Rule only gets closer, shines brighter and measures you ever more accurately. Sooner or later, everyone has to take the Golden Rule personally. “Do unto your *self*” and stop telling everyone to “do unto *others*.”

In the Ph.D. of Self-love, I learned not to let others make me feel guilty. You never know what class those who lay blame are in. You may actually be a lot more mature than you realize. The gay community proved to America that our argument for equal rights was more mature than the argument presented by the religious right. You may even feel like a pushover like me when it comes to self-blame. But the cleaner your heart is with yourself, the more righteously you'll negotiate with others.

The word "peace" in Hebrew is "shalom." It doesn't mean "peace" in the western sense of the word. "Shalom" comes from the verb "lishalem" which means, "to fill." "Shalom" is the imperative verb, "Fill!" Fill *yourself*! You need to feel fuller. You're spiritually too thin. You may even be spiritually anorexic. Force yourself to fill your self with you. You're better than you think.

In the doctorate program in the school of self-love I felt something I'd felt a million times before. It wasn't fear. It wasn't paranoia. But it was so unpleasant that I didn't know what to call it. It was "excitement." I was excited about my spiritual education.

62. Dissertation on the Meaning of My Life

All the tragedies of my life - poor health, unsuccessful careers and disillusionment with romance - brought with them more awareness and understanding of the meaning of my life than all my winnings put together. I didn't need many rewards. I'm a simple man who likes a good challenge.

Correcting my mistakes brought me wisdom. And wisdom led me to higher and higher plateaus of awareness of the importance of self-love. I love loving myself because self-love is what made me wiser than when I started.

If you look at yourself as a skyscraper, each "story" you construct one upon the other will impart a more panoramic view. Teach young people to aim for the sky. Show them the view you've achieved from the spiritual height you've achieved, but remember there are more stories still under construction for you. Be kind.

Awe them with your wisdom and profess your love of yourself. They already know that life is a mystery. They already know there's so much they don't know. Teach them to embrace the gift of childhood and never let it go. Teach them to believe in the *magic* of life, not just in the *miracle* of life.

In the graduate department at the university of self-love, I learned how to relearn the elementary school lessons of life, but with

my *self* in mind. I learned to add up one plus one plus one to achieve **One**. I saw things I couldn't see before.

Guilt and failure no longer held as tight a grip on me because I was able to see the purpose of guilt and failure in personal and private terms. New, creative answers to old, standard questions came to light at this late-stage in my education.

The drought in California speaks volumes about the spiritual desertification in the West. The unprecedented, freezing winters, raging storms, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes in the East speak to the emotional wrath many there don't wish to address in themselves.

Spirituality is a process that slowly turns pessimism into promise. It's a warming process that can be very dangerous if not taken to heart. With answers to the questions of *my* purpose, my achievements became eternal. I felt that office hours with my Professor were available to me at all times. Now, when I give of myself to someone in need, I send the Teacher a bill at the end of the day for my services. And although I have tendency to overcharge **Him** even on these small school jobs **He** has me do, **He** always adjusts my invoices on a daily basis and pays me fairly for my efforts.

There's a limit to freewill although people don't know it. You may think you have the freewill to do anything you please, but there's one important exception. And when I tell you what that exception is, you're going to have to agree with me whether you like hearing the truth or not. You were actually created in a way that gives you "limited" freewill. You can't do *everything* you please.

You can do anything you want in the waking state until you fall asleep. During your sleeping hours, you no longer have the freewill to do as you please. This can be easily seen by your dreams (and nightmares) where you might find yourself coerced or cursed with behaviors you can't control.

Dreams are a reprogramming of your spiritual hard drive based on the thoughts, feelings, desires and beliefs you held all day. As you use your freewill to guide yourself through your day, you create new dynamics inside that are later assimilated into your operating system while you sleep. You have no control over this process. Whatever you do during the day is recorded on your hard drive. If you choose to behave like trash, you'll see garbage going in, and garbage coming out.

Your input into this process obviously doesn't have to be entirely unconscious. You can use your conscious mind to help your self. You can contribute to the reprogramming process through the metaphors, symbols and signs you use to consolidate the data you

accumulate to create the beliefs on which you'll later decide what action you're going to take. But you have no choice about what you're going to dream at night because your dreams affect your attitude.

It's so much easier to do what you love if you love who's doing the doing. It's so easy to discover what you love if you love who's doing the discovering. Everything is easier if the person accomplishing the task is easier to access and more intimately connected to you. But to internalize this theory requires a third person relationship with your self. You have to be in a relationship of "I" to "he" with "you" between the two. This will give you the distance on your self that will take the sting out of the negative thoughts and feelings you put yourself through.

The more familiar ["I" to "you"] relationship most people have within themselves can be too close for comfort in some instances. The "I/you" relationship can create emotional highs and lows that may be too violent to be manageable. The "I/he" relationship with yourself is often much easier to live with. (Jesus often spoke about Himself in the third person.)

When I tell myself that I¹ am treating him¹ worse than he² is treating him¹, I'm creating a comparison about the world around me that I can hold with thoughtful consideration within. This Western form of contemplation is very different from Eastern meditation. This'll intensify and clarify your relationship with your self as well as your relationship with others. It won't empty your cluttered mind. It'll fill it with something worth keeping.

But you'll also need to be able to say to your self, "I¹ am treating you¹ better than anyone² else is treating you¹." This will increase your self-worth. It'll make you realize that your relationship to your self is far more important than your relationship to any other person on earth. Putting your wife and children before you is a noble gesture when it comes to physical safety. But when it comes to emotional health and spiritual progress, it's absolutely the wrong thing to do. Today's younger generation have been terribly spoiled because my generation didn't teach them to be fruitful and multiply in this way that I'm describing.

"Exponents" are shorthand for repeated multiplication of the same thing by itself. When you spiritually multiply the efforts of your head (1) heart (1) and soul (1) you get a simple answer: $(1)(1)(1) = 1^3$. You're still one person on the outside, but you become so much more powerful within. Be fruitful and multiply *exponentially*.

Everything I went through in the past was lightweight compared to what I'm facing today. Everything I did in the past was

one story that built upon the other that constructed my “self” like a skyscraper. And every little emotional weight I lift today, like a crane lifting an I-beam, will change my tomorrow in a great way. Don’t underestimate the power created in the now through matters of the heart. It’ll bring you spiritual rewards and a greater outlook on life in the future.

Tolerance for people who seem to be particularly strange combo packages made by gOD will develop when you appreciate what a strange conglomeration of traits *you* are. Tolerance on the *outside* will be the result of tolerance *within*.

When you see yourself as a skyscraper in the making, your whole outer world begins to look like a manhattan in the making. You become the new yorker in your life who can relate to every other person on earth as another new yorker. Your outlook becomes universal, not local. You become spiritually “urbane.”

Learning got easier as I got spiritually stronger. Faith in gOD came more naturally as I developed greater faith in myself. I didn’t have to be able to answer every question life asked of me *perfectly*. I only had to answer every question that came to mind *honestly* and *thoroughly*.

If I’m angry and intolerant of someone, he automatically becomes a mirror of a vice I don’t like in myself. (That doesn’t mean I have to tolerate that vice in either one of us. It only means I have to do my best to surmount that vice in myself.) Faith tells me that gOD is bringing me moral questions about myself. Faith tells me I’m providing gOD with answers when I answer every question that comes to mind rather than distract myself by focusing on something else to ignore that question entirely. If you hold your faith in this way, there’ll even come a point when you’ll have nowhere left to hide in your head...

When I was a child, I was afraid of my parents punishing me. Of course, they were old-fashioned disciplinarians, so I didn’t want to fear them overtly for fear they’d punish me for that, too. But in my heart, I was afraid of them. And there was a price to pay for that in later years when I saw how deeply I dismissed others with a reactive and arrogant attitude internally even before they opened their mouth. I had my attitude planned before I started a conversation.

I disliked the book just by perusing the cover. I didn’t learn to read people until late in life, and so I was emotionally illiterate. I looked at the picture on the cover, and I immediately knew what I thought of the book. And when I did bother to scan a few pages, I

always came away convinced I was right about that person from the start.

The Bible is a book that can teach you how to overcome your emotional illiteracy. But you have to be willing to take it figuratively and personally. Only those who are spiritually illiterate or poorly trained claim the Bible must be taken literally. The rest of us are reading it for insight, not “out-sight.”

Indifference begins within when you pose questions of yourself you can’t answer or then don’t want to study to find the answer. You can’t respect someone who doesn’t want to learn.

And you can’t treat others better than you treat yourself. You can’t teach others something you haven’t taught yourself. If you don’t, at least, file a question you don’t have to answer to away to look at it when you’re alone, you’re doing yourself a disservice. You’re coming to *school*, but not going to *class*.

It’s actually very easy to learn from yourself if you concentrate on the questions you’re asking. You may find that your mind moves off the question to rephrase it in story form, but if you look at the story you tell yourself, you’ll see that it’s a metaphor that’s trying to answer your question. You have a teacher inside you. There’s a teacher in the Teacher.

Fear of my parents and anyone who spoke from a position of authority had become internalized in my subconscious. There was mother in me that mirrored our Mother. There was a father in me that mirrored our Father.

It had only been my fear of authority that left me afraid to question my own opinions. Instead, I reacted with cynicism, sarcasm or scorn of myself. Without *questioning* my authority, it wasn’t possible for me to get a handle on my beliefs. I was intellectually opinionated, but not emotionally and morally informed. I held beliefs about myself that were based on very strong feelings, but without questioning those feelings, I couldn’t question what I believed.

It’s very possible to *feel* a certain way about a person or a situation and *believe* it’s not right to question that feeling. Your heart is often, in fact, acting independently of your conscience. If you look at what you’re thinking more carefully, you’ll see that you sometimes act on how you *feel* rather than what you *believe* to be right. This is self-indulgent.

You may *believe* you have very high moral regard for humanity in general, and yet *feel* very scornful of individuals. You may do everything in your power to avoid homelessness, for instance, but

instead of feeling sorry for the homeless, feel angry, frustrated and upset with them. This, too, is self-indulgent.

You know in your heart, you should feel sorry for them. You know that their problems are problems you'd never want to face yourself. But you don't want to feel sorry for them, for fear that sorrow will lead to guilt, and guilt will lead to you feeling obliged to do something for them.

This pressure isn't fair to you. It's a sign that you don't understand how you operate. Feeling *sorry* for others doesn't oblige you to help them. Feeling *guilty* makes you feel obliged to help them. If you believe that their predicament isn't your fault, you aren't obliged to do anything about it.

If you choose to act out of pity, that's fine. If you don't, that's fine, too. But if you judge others for not acting out of pity, that's *not* fine. Everyone takes action when motivated by the feeling that leads him to act. For some, that's fear. For others it may be anger or sorrow. Some need to wait until they feel guilt or love before they're ready to take action.

Your self-esteem may not be as high as you wish it were because you don't know what feelings trigger you act. If you want to change your mind, you're going to have to question your feelings and then use your willpower to do what's right, regardless of what you may think and feel.

I had to become the parent to my inner toddler, child, adolescent and young adult to bring my fears to consciousness because I tend to be easily frightened, but I also tend to act on fear.

I don't tend to act on anger. Something inside (my conscience) tells me that anger isn't a good feeling to motivate me to act. There are exceptions to that, but when I feel angry, I tend to weigh my options very carefully before I decide what to do, for fear of making a serious mistake. When I act impulsively out of anger and don't succeed in achieving the results I want, I tend to feel very guilty (ashamed).

But I can feel very sympathetic and even empathetic of others without feeling the need to do anything about it. Their problems aren't my fault. I didn't get them into their situation, therefore I don't believe I have to get them out. It's far more likely that I'll act compassionately and wisely if I don't act out of fear, anger or sorrow.

When I act compassionately, it's the result of guilt, love or both. I can credit myself for making mistakes if I apologize for them and then atone by acting compassionately. I also credit myself for loving others and being motivated by my love to act compassionately toward them.

Often, it wasn't even my heart that was making me act in a particular way. It was my penis... It's not the "Devil" that's in the details. It's your own urges. It's not the "Devil" that can quote the scriptures. It's your own penis that's telling you what to think. If you include use your penis as contributing to what motivates you, your head, heart and conscience aren't going to bring to consciousness the affect your urges, impulses, needs, wants and desire are having on your actions. You're going to act *passionately*, but without a fully informed conscience. You're never going to learn *compassion*.

Your eyes are also windows on your desires. What your eyes see, your penis often wants. If you close your eyes, you may even discover it's easier to avoid some temptations, provided your imagination isn't so strong that it overwhelms you with an inner vision of what your heart "thinks" it wants.

It had been my tendency in childhood to look at my mother as my "parent" and my father as my "friend." My mother had been my day-to-day disciplinarian, but, perhaps because my parents divorced and I saw my father so seldom, I thought of him more like Santa Claus, the tooth fairy or a "sugar daddy," all rolled into one.

So my inner parent (head) was like my mother and my inner adult (conscience) was like my father. My inner mother criticized me and my inner father indulged me. My head told me I was wrong, and my conscience told me I was right. I grew up with an inner adult (conscience) that spoiled me. It didn't train me.

The depressions and inner turmoil I suffered in early adulthood were a "hate" triangle of inner parent, adult and child who couldn't get along. This "hate triangle" was my family of origin internalized. None of the segments of this triangle recognized or acknowledged one another. They didn't really even like one another. It's no surprise to me now that I ended up in mental institutions.

It had been so easy for me to lose friends and so hard for me to make them. But that was because I didn't work at making a friend of myself. It's better to befriend yourself and then be disappointed in your behavior than it is never to have befriended yourself at all.

It's familiarity with yourself that will lead to the friendship you need to overcome contempt. You can't make sound decisions if your head, heart and soul aren't on speaking terms with one another. If you can ask yourself what you're feeling, you can ask yourself if that feeling is moving you in the direction of guilt (down) or love (up). If you don't know whether you're going up *or* down, it shouldn't be a surprise that your life is going up *and* down. You're not going to make much headway unless you first figure out up from down.

I'm my greatest hero in life just for having struggled so valiantly to understand me. It took hard work and dedication to separate the forces in me into head (parent), heart (child) and soul (adult). Then I had to distance myself from each of these forces, so I could talk about them rationally in the third person.

Today, I can usually tell which part of me is doing the talking and whether or not the other two parts of me are even listening. Today, it's easy for me to recognize the voice of my penis even if it doesn't literally raise its head to make its desires known. When I hear it whispering about someone nowadays, the first thing I say to myself is, "I'm gonna get screwed..."

The worst feeling I went through much of my life was despondency. Utter lack of hope is a devastating emotion that overwhelmed me easily and often. I protected myself against despondency with cynicism, but that only distanced me from my humanity. I had to allow myself to feel despondent while holding hope that the feeling of despondency would pass, and I'd be stronger for having gotten through it.

I wanted to give up my friendship with me every time I saw that my behavior toward others wasn't admirable. But I didn't see depression, nervousness, anxiety, angst and paranoia as simultaneously compromising my relationship with myself. These feelings turned me into an unfit father who couldn't get anywhere in life, just like my father. They turned me into a hysterical mother, just like my mother who went up and down all the time.

Compromising my relationships within myself also turned the kid in me into the kind of child I hadn't liked being around at school. But I was stuck with the challenge of being me. I was made in gOD's image, and I had to deal with that challenge just the way it came to me.

Life actually isn't too *hard*. Life is too *easy*. Life is easy to understand if you look at it metaphorically. It's when you take your life *seriously* instead of *metaphorically* that it appears dramatic, melodramatic and even tragic.

Feelings are an important part of life, and feelings have to be explored for their importance. If you only act intellectually or religiously, you're going to make bigger mistakes than have to. But if you understand yourself emotionally, you'll become much richer inside.

The word "Israel" means, "to struggle with gOD." I lived in Israel for only two years, but nobody there told me at the time there was an israel within me, whether or not I remained a resident of the

Holy Land. The reward for my efforts in coming to know my inner isreal became the ticket to entry into my soul. And with that came knowledge of gOD I hadn't known before.

My thoughts struggling with my feelings opened me to awareness of the efforts of my conscience to make sense of my inner turmoil. This deepened me. This made me soulful. And it gave me the hope I needed to get through despondency.

I'll never be able to end the tug-of-war between the rational and irrational sides of me. But I've been able to diminish it through appreciation of the moral improvements I've made within. I'm less of a hypocrite than I've ever been before because my inner father (soul), inner mother (head) and inner child (heart) have become the essential "love" triangle of my spiritual family.

My adoration of my self makes it possible for me to build moral strength just where and when I need it. Each day, I'm given a class schedule different from next. Each day, I'm given assignments and homework different from every other day in my life. But from these spiritual forms of work that I integrate with worship, I'm becoming whole. I'm connecting the disparate parts of my life into one life well lived.

After working on a career in dance for a few years, I concluded in my early twenties that dance wouldn't give me the life lessons I most needed and wanted anymore. I didn't have the body or the social skills to excel any further than I had in the social arts. But by continuing to dance for the love of it, I came to see that my body wasn't just a physical *vehicle*. It was an *instrument* of *self*-communication. I could use my body to come to know myself, love myself and appreciate being me for a lifetime. I may be a spirit having a human experience, but I've developed a more spirited spirit as the result of enjoying my life like choreography. Each day I take another step with the help of my ballet Master. Every glance I make; every smile I break – is an expression of my love for me. I'm watching me!

Body language became an most important manner of self-expression. First I learned to *read* me. And people's covers were "good books" to practice on. (Everyone is a bible he authors with gOD's help. In learning to read other people's cover, front and back, using body language, I \ learned to write my own body language.) Once I could read people's cover and write my about my own, I developed a greater appreciation of gOD's library, where I check people out like good books to help me with my studies.

We all need to learn *self*-love gradually, class-by-class, tutor-by-tutor. We all need to develop patience with the process because the

product can appear to be so uneven as it slowly emerges from consciousness into feeling and then becomes meaningful in the outer world as metaphoric fact.

If you think of this world as an orchard; each of us as a tree of knowledge; and the fruits of self-knowledge coming to us through good (love) and evil (wisdom) – then each of us is here for one year. We hope throughout our four seasons [spring (childhood); summer (youth); fall (middle age); and winter (old age)] to discover our self, but many a tree is felled before it gets to complete its symbolic revolution around the star we call the “sun.”

Most people in the Western world don’t even realize they’re enjoying this orchard of experiences until there are no more blossoms fruiting on their branches. They wonder what it was all about because they weren’t willing to study Torah before they advanced to the Gospel and Quran. They don’t even know where the orchard metaphorically ends and the story of Cain and Abel begins. They don’t know that they’re a tree of knowledge planted in an orchard, or that there are people who behave like brambles, thorn bushes and briar patches on the edge of the orchard to let you know when you’ve gone too far. They dogmatically claim to be here for the Principal, but they don’t observe the spirit of the principles. They’re here for selfless reasons, not selfish reasons. Their self-hatred only reminds you not to leave the land of self-love.

The Bible is a foreign language you’ve been learning to speak all your life. Discovering you’re in spiritual, language lab in the school of self-love is a miracle that sometimes doesn’t become apparent until you’re in your dissertation in the Ph.D. program. Many in our school die illiterate to themselves. Many die without learning one foreign language, when there are many: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and paganism, just to name a few.

It now seems to me that “sentimentality” was the level of love my mother concentrated on in her spiritual education. I’m sure the time in which she lived had a lot to do with choosing that major. But I’m not as sentimental a person as she is. Family and pets don’t do move me. My sentimentality comes out when people unexpectedly show me their hidden goodness. That’s when I melt within into unspeakable tears of joy.

Not achieving greatness out in the world through *fame* hasn’t been easy for me to accept. But coming to love myself through self-loyalty and friendship has brought tenderness to my heart.

Not achieving greatness out in the world through *fortune* has been a lot easier for me to accept, since I'm as financially comfortable as I need to be. My inner riches satisfy me as much as my money and possessions do. These are both areas of my life that seem balanced inside and out.

Aim to graduate the school of self-love with a doctorate in you. That's the only degree you'll ever be truly proud to take away from here. It'll give you a sense of comfort that money can't buy. Aim to shake the Teacher's hand when you leave with a grateful smile on your face by learning to be a scholar of the self.

In the story of the three blind men of India who explored an elephant by touch, each came away with different conclusions about what an elephant looks like. One touched the body, another an ear and the third the trunk. And so they came away with the impressions that an elephant looks like a wall, a fan and a hose. All three impressions were right, but without discussing their conclusions with one another, all three got the wrong idea of the big picture. If you combine the images of a wall with a fan and a hose in your imagination, you get a pretty good silhouette of what an elephant looks like.

In my dissertation on self-love, I could claim to be like all three blind men *and* the elephant. I'd always been the elephant in every room I ever entered without having been able to see myself as I truly was. I sometimes felt people were indirectly talking about me. (I was paranoid.) And because I couldn't affirm my own emotional presence when I was with them, I projected my discomfort with myself out and had difficulty acknowledging my difficulty communicating.

I was blind in three ways. (1) I thought people were judging me. (2) I wasn't judging myself to conclude how terrified I was of me. And (3) I concluded self-love wasn't an option.

In truth, my head, heart and soul had all been blind to the bigger picture. I didn't fully perceive my self. I was Swiss cheese projecting my view of the world out onto others, proclaiming there were big holes in everybody.

I had to learn to figuratively touch every part of my body (especially my anus) to discover where I felt embarrassed. I had to touch every part of my mind (particularly my fantasies) to discern in what ways my behavior toward myself was shameful. And I had to touch my soul (particularly my opinion about gOD) to perceive in what ways gOD was thankful, appreciative and grateful to *me*.

To understand the importance of the gOD-given feeling called "guilt" I had to see the difference between my modesty and my foolishness. I had to see the difference between my humility and my

self-hate. And I had to see the difference between loyalty to my self and loyalty to gOD. The pieces of the big puzzle make complete sense if you can put them together naturally without forcing any of them to fit together with dogma, despair or dislike.

The elephant in your imagination that you weren't willing to acknowledge looks like you. You're much bigger than you ever gave yourself credit for. Your odd shape is perfect for what you were made to do. Don't be like the mouse that terrifies the elephant. If you can see that you frighten you, turn your nose up at you.

I once asked a friend who was blind from birth what she thought the color yellow looks like. She told me yellow is warm and embracing. "Yellow is like the sun: giving and inviting" she said. "But what yellow has to do with bananas," she mumbled with a bit of embarrassment, "I have no idea."

Although I knew the names of the *physical* colors of the rainbow, I was *emotionally* blinded by the harshness of life into creating strange theories about who I really was and what I'd look like if I could see myself from the outside in. I had to grope through my life using my deeds alone to draw conclusions about the emotional colors I could only see mixed and muddled on my palette. The truth I now see is that I'd been figuratively born colorblind...

I thought I saw all of myself when I first looked in a mirror as a toddler. I thought I could feel all my feelings from the moment I was born. I didn't think there was any more to learn about "seeing" and "feeling" by the age of three.

In fact, I was literally born with severe myopia, and it wasn't until I went to school at the age of five that I was fitted for glasses. I'll never forget how the world suddenly changed when I put glasses on for the first time. Emotionally, I was just as surprised, when I've discovered how to feel colors subjectively. It's as though I'd been colorblind all my life and suddenly could see.

Although I've been able to literally "see" thanks to glasses, contacts and Lasik surgery, and don't literally suffer from colorblindness, I had much to learn in order to "perceive" the emotional side of myself. The truth about my heart's vision felt like a placement test that determined my curriculum for decades.

The honorary spiritual degree of "doctor," conferred on me for all my efforts to know and love myself, has come with insight, hindsight and foresight. But it was all thanks to curiosity about the mystery of being me that led me to see myself as clearly as I now do.

In the Ph.D. dissertation in the School of Self-Love I learned something about spiritual math that I hadn't known before. If $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ then in my spiritual undergraduate studies, I learned:

$$1 + 1 + 1 = 1$$

This is what I perceived in my post-graduate studies. gOD is bigger than I previously imagined. **His** plan goes deeper and affects me more pervasively than I ever thought possible.

I'm sure what delights my Professor about me the most is my willingness to go further than others to discover the mystery of my life. Nothing must give **Him** more pleasure than having students like me who are eager to learn about themselves. Why bother to make man in **Your** image if you don't get to see **Yourself** in a more flattering light when **You're** through?

Yellow has a great deal to do with bananas, but there isn't a person in the world who can explain that to you if you can't perceive it yourself. Whether you're male or female and blind to your fear of "bananas," you're just going to have to live with that inner darkness about what's *between* two legs until you find a way to peek through the mystery down there to see why gOD made it you the way **He** did.

My mother came away from the War terrified that if she showed any indignation or rebuke of others, it would get her killed. She arranged her feelings like playing cards in her hand, and she rarely gave away what she'd been dealt, emotionally speaking, unless it left her sentimental or with reason to complain. It took decades for me to see through her poker face to figure out what card she'd play next. I never realized how cautiously and secretly she held her cards close to the vest.

She was well suited to hang from a cross thanks to the victim card she loved to play. She may have been a woman, but she knew how to pretend to be as righteous as Jesus. She was deeply incensed by the way others behaved unfairly toward her, but she had no ability to figure out what cards were in their hand. Whether their intentions were good or evil, if she was inconvenienced and it wasn't good for her, she considered it evil. Consequently, it took me a lifetime to even look for the strategy every individual is using to win the game.

By comparison, it wasn't until middle age that I realized I didn't even know what card *I* was playing emotionally until it was on the table for all to see. It's only been recently that I've been able to plan my feelings before I express them. That doesn't make me insincere. It makes me cautious, caring of others and self-caring.

I'm still shocked to see how many jokers there are out there who don't realize they're playing the game "spitefully," without even realizing that that won't get them. My mother was a *straight* flush; there were no wild cards in her hand. But, with a queen in the family, she was obviously betting on dying with a royal flush. I can't promise that will happen. Her cards aren't going into my hand. They go back into the deck.

Defiance doesn't lie at the core of the human spirit, but much like the strawberry, it does lie in the seeds. I had to help people move past appearances to see themselves as they could be. I was a teacher and a father type, even though I didn't have much in the way of a father or a lifetime of professional experience as a teacher. gOD still gave me many clues to perceive the hand I was playing. It was always when I didn't look carefully at my reaction to the reactions around the table that I didn't bet wisely or deal with the next card I was about to draw. I had to learn to show a poker face.

Most people in my parents' generation didn't have time to worry very much about their feelings. They were too busy putting food on the table and saving the world from totalitarianism. The tool used by their generation to control other people's behavior was "social censure": embarrassment, shame and humiliation. Their generation cared more about what other people thought of them than how they felt about themselves. They used guilt easily on others, but not on themselves. Feeling bad about themselves seemed to have been a luxury for them, not the necessity it is today. It cost them dearly. Today we have to put our heart into everything we say and do, or we feel we're betraying ourselves.

It often takes 40 years of flying around in circles like a bird in a flock before you can feel you know the terrain of the world well enough to migrate in your inner world to your comfort zone. "Forty years" is the Biblical number that describes the lifetime of man. In forty years, a man used to be able to procreate and bounce grandchildren on his knee before he met his Maker.

Today, people need 40 years just to move unconsciously through their inner child and adolescent to become an adult who can deal with their inner children like a good parent. Today emancipation comes when you're emotionally over the age of 18, or literally over the age of 40. Only then are most people ready to take off intuitively prepared for the direction they were always intended to go in. Only then are they ready to stop separating in the Jewish sense of "holy" (guilt) and start uniting in the Christian sense of the word (self-love).

But you don't hear people talking about preparing for this great, inner migration. The anxiety most people feel as they get to the age of 39 is the common indicator of feeling the pressure to start out on this next leg of their journey. Many people think they got off to a bad start and want to start over at 40. Many feel they're running out of time, when, in truth, their "survival" instinct is coming to an end and they're beginning to yearn to "live."

The border between 39 and 40 figuratively describes the border between guilt and love. The last level of guilt comes with the class in "Your problem isn't my fault." And the first level of self-love begins with "self-pity." It only once you can separate your guilt from other peoples that you can perceive how much you ignored or abused your inner child. It's only then that you can give yourself permission to feel sorry for your self. And it's only then that you can refill your cup yourself, until it runneth over.

I was sure mental illness had changed the rules of the game for me. Having to go through two decades of severe mental illness had left me with a hand that made it very difficult to imagine ever winning, with the cards I'd been dealt. I thought for sure I was a loser and would always be one. But mental illness really set me up to play in a new way. It had been a gift in disguise. I can deal better than most with the next card I draw because I've learning not to bet against myself.

It hadn't been self-sabotage that had been my ace in the "hole." It had been spite. The way I'd treated my parents had been motivated by spite. Their grades weren't going on my report card, but mine were. I had to get spite out of my hand and onto the table. I had to admit how horribly I'd treated myself. No other reason made sense in coming to terms with what I'd done to others.

Mental illness taught me that the pronoun "it" can infer "death." You never know when "it" is going to knock at your door. You never know when "it" will take someone you love. And yet, "it" is an indefinite pronoun that can also be filled with glee and playful innuendo when "it" refers to your penis. But when "it" turns to "death," *it's* not so funny. "*It*" makes you see things differently.

There are so many lessons in life, so much to learn about the objective pronoun "me;" the reflexive pronoun "myself;" and the nominative pronoun "I." And that can't be done without the gay community. The linguistic creativity of the gay persona is a model for new ways of thinking, feeling and believing. You've got to warm up to the man that you are, even if intimacy with a man makes you uncomfortable.

Learning about “it” turned the gay community into the world’s youngest philosopher kings. Thanks to the unification of our penis with death (HIV) through the third-person, singular, neuter, nominative case pronoun “it” the world will never be able to demean gay people again without incurring a sense of guilt. Now’s the time for everyone to look at the lessons “it” has brought into the world. Tag. You’re “it.” Now *you* decide what yellow has to do with your banana.

I have a reason for being here that I couldn’t imagine when I was a younger man. I’ve been schooled in becoming a grease monkey of the soul. I couldn’t always look under my own hood and diagnose what was wrong with me in the past, but I’ve always been fascinated by the inner locomotion of my trains of thought. I’ve always been fascinated by the idea that my vehicle will die, my journey will end, and that the story of humanity will continue without me.

I couldn’t fix my *self* in the past until I understood what all the internal parts were made for. I’m far too complex to *fully* understand how I run, even today. But I do move through life more safely knowing I can tell the difference between my thoughts, feelings, desires and judgments by using metaphor to express myself. And when I “break down” like a vehicle or a machine these days, I don’t freak out thinking I can’t get under the hood to figure out what the matter is. Even if there’s no way to repair myself, there’s always a way to change my attitude about what’s happening to me if I use the metaphor of life as a school of self-love.

Being a spiritual mechanic is a wonderful career in life, and I wouldn’t have been led to it had I not suffered so severely from mental illness. Being able to fix my attitude toward my mood and depressions has helped me enormously to embrace reality with a Buddhist ability to accept reality without trying to change it in some way. “Optimistic realism” is my mantra. *It’s just fine the way it is.*

After I saw my way to mental health by getting myself out of the ditch and back onto the road, I then learned how to give myself periodic tune-ups. I don’t have to worry as much about being “beautiful” in others’ eyes anymore. I find I’m attractive to my self. I’ve become the powder blue 60’s T-bird I always dreamed of. I’m in the perfect vehicle for the journey I’m on.

I hadn’t needed long legs to dance; I could dance for joy with the legs I had. I hadn’t needed a 4.0 GPA. in academia; life turned out to be my school. I didn’t need anyone’s permission to love myself; the person sitting in the driver’s seat is “me,” and the person in the death seat is my “self.” I drive more carefully today than I did in the past because I know myself better.

Now that I'm a father to my inner child and grandpa to my inner teenage child's child, I have a baby onboard for the first time. And what a joy it is to be surrounded by the sound of his laughter. Now that I'm a spiritual grandpa, nobody can call me a dirty old man who wants to be someone's sugar daddy. I help others because it helps me. I don't do it for their sake.

In my dissertation on life in the school of self-love, I approved of me approving of me. Sometimes I loved *liking* me and other times liked *loving* me. In the past, I'd held out for the approval of my parents, teachers, siblings, friends, bosses and partners, all to no avail. I'd projected my love onto others, and then judged them unfairly for not giving it back with righteous regard. Children and small animals were the only ones I could say really liked me.

Today, I do everything for "me," "my self" and "I." These are the only three people I live for. But you'd be amazed how much "they" want to be of service to others. They're so bent on making this world a better place for everyone; it's almost embarrassing. I didn't know self-love could be this way.

I don't need to excuse others' hatred of me. Their hatred is not my fault. I've exonerated myself for my hatred of me, and that's all that counts. Other people's hatred of me disappoints me; it'll always surprise me. But I won't allow it to tempt me to get up on the cross with all the other victims of circumstances who think gOD has no control over what's happening down here. There's method to **His** madness. If you don't look for it, you'll just sing the all too familiar "They done me wrong" song from your coffin. And when you're there, it'll be particularly easy for the Messiah to hear it...

You have to fight for justice around you to get justice from within. The world is your laboratory, but you're the experiment. Are you going to blow up the lab like a Muslim extremist or shoot an abortion doctor because you so identify with babies? Or are you going to see yourself as in an incredible test tube gOD created for you in which to turn base mettle into spiritual gold?

Some of the richest people on earth are some of the poorest. And some of the poorest people on earth are some of the poorest. The Teacher will punish you with too much money or too little if you're not doing your homework. So you'd better ask yourself whether "enough" is enough.

The chances are that you're spiritually adolescent. If you're reading this book you've probably done your homework, taken your tests to the best of your ability and come to class regularly, even if you were too intimidated to ask good questions. That's adolescent, but it's

not juvenile. You know what a juvenile delinquent of any age looks like. I don't have to describe them to you.

But if you've spent years working on making money and amassing spiritual wealth as well, you're probably spiritually "sweet" and "sixteen." You know about the importance of "freedom," and you know about the importance of emotional "liberty." What you haven't yet done is reach the emotional age of eighteen. You haven't yet spiritually emancipated. You're not yet a "young adult" in emotional years.

To make your way up the ladder and into your second decade of spiritual life, you have to be enrolled in spiritual college in the school of self-love. And if your extremely precocious, you have to have graduated with your B.A., M.A and Ph.D. as well. School drags on longer than you may have imagined.

I trust myself more than I trust any other person on earth. My opinion of me matters more to me than anyone else's. My approval of me is the greatest gift I can ever have give myself. I'll cherish me for the rest of this lifetime because I no longer feel like a *victim*. I feel like a *victor*. Can you say the same?

gOD's promises to the Jewish people are as sweet as fruit. **His** grace on Christianity is as binding as bread. And the glory of **His** generosity rains down on Islam to nourish their souls like the miracle of finding water for those wandering in a desert. Can you imagine praying with people like you, not just working with them on the job?

The Jews sawed a hole in heaven and constructed a window for all the world to see what's going on up there. The Christians replaced it with a two-way mirror, so you can look down from heaven to see what's going on, on earth, and when you look up, see yourself righteously. But the Muslims are now busy replacing that two-way mirror with a glass ceiling. Congratulations to all three! We're all working on this together.

Life had been a white light, so blinding, that, at first, I couldn't see a thing. My mind had to become as hard and clear as a prism to refract gOD's light into spectral promises in every color meant personally for me. **His** hope for future rewards for me arches over my head from shoulder to shoulder like a rainbow that reminds me of a halo in a Medieval painting. When I perceived that, I had no further trouble with what yellow has to do with bananas.

The Post-Doctorate Program of Spirituality

63. An M.B.A. in Spiritual Marketing

My thoughts move through me like goods on shelves that I examine, goods I choose to buy, or not. If I do, I add to my inventory of ideas. I advertise and sell these ideas on me as though they were commodities I can't live without. But to become a satisfied customer of my own intellectual merchandise, I have to remember I always want to come away proud of my purchases. Every thought that goes through me needs to be of good quality and guaranteed to be up to my highest standards. No more will I buy my ideas that are useless, impractical or defective.

Paranoia is instigated by guilt. Paranoia comes from thoughts that aren't based on morally logical feelings. Paranoia is illumination of life that passes through a warped prism, splashing a rainbow of feelings internally where you can't understand their mottled affect on you. Once you're projecting distorted, splashes of color internally, you're fated to do the same externally. And the messier the colors in you, the more defiant and spiteful to others you're going to be.

Everybody is a little paranoid, in the sense of "afraid of himself with good reason." Nobody has the perfect prism reflecting perfect rainbows onto his self. But you can polish your prism to improve and focus your rainbow with greater conscious regard onto every activity you do.

Paranoia is a logical consequence of being out of touch with your spiritual, operating system. The fear of "nothing" makes a lot of sense when you know nothing about the internal, spiritual purpose of fear in motivating you to defy your self by loving yourself.

We really should spell "gOD's" name "gOD" because matters of the heart are paramount to self-understanding. The "g" stands for "Judaism" because without us our Ultimate Authority would just seem "OD." The enlarged and embolden "O" stands for Christianity because they brought the concept of gOD's love into the world. And the "D" stands for "Islam." Without this third letter capitalizing on His generosity and benevolence, there wouldn't be enough to do. These three letters correspond to the Abrahamic tradition that's meant to be assembled into spiritual concepts that will bring depth to all the words we use.

When you think of gOD's name spelled in this way, you can come to a few other interesting conclusions about life.

1. The name of the God of the Hebrew Testament is “Y.H.V.H.” This name is unpronounceable, but it’s an acronym that literally translates as, “will be – riches – will be.” The small case “g” should be a reminder to the world that **gOD** began revealing **Himself** by asking the Jewish people to convey the virtue of guilt to the world. This hasn’t been easy. We’ve been vilified since the beginning of civilization for our part to play.

2. The God of the Christian Testament should always be thought of as $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. The larger than life conclusion of the Christian world is the result of Jesus being human *and* an aspect of **gOD**. The emboldened view they hold on love is paramount for the world to evolve.

3. And the God of the Quran should always be thought of as **ALL**ah. They were given **His** generosity of spirit, which is the next, important step in the spiritual evolution of man.

In these ways, you’ll appreciate the interconnectedness of the Abrahamic faiths. They’re not three separate faiths with three separate gods. They’re three separate faiths **gOD** created for all of us to come to know **Him** in stages.

We live in an age when Judaism and Christianity in America have never been more united. It’s as though “God” in America is Spelled “**GOD**.” We’re doing everything we can on this continent to unite the guilt of Judaism and love of Christianity, but we’ve still got a long way to go before anyone’s going to feel comfortable with us spelling **His** name “**GOD**.”

The political struggles we’re presently having in the U.S. are merely a misunderstanding that’ll be cleared up when people begin to appreciate the different political lessons the left and the right are given as tests in the school of self-love.

Those in big business are the most sensitive to this phenomenon because they don’t wish to offend either side. They’ve come to realize that all prejudice is bad for business. Excluding Jews, gays, the divorced and the unmarried-with-children from the full range of

consumer products worldwide isn't only bad for financial business. It's bad for spiritual business, too. The BDS movement (boycotts, divestment and sanction) against Israel is purely anti-Semitic. It's bad for financial business because it's bad for spiritual business. It demeans all three of the Abrahamic faiths.

Praising and promoting my ideas to others isn't a waste of my time. I'm proud of the ideas my Teacher taught me, and because I've got my MBA degree in spiritual marketing, I know the importance of believing I'm a spiritual citizen of the world. Until every human being looks for the Jew, Christian *and* Muslim in him, the crusades won't end.

I only have to sell *me* on *me*, not on anybody else. But to do that, I have to question the spiritual product I produced yesterday to produce an even better product today. I have to look back at yesterday's spiritual purchases to glean faith in my merchandising skills while looking for ways to improve my production everyday. What I can realistically hope to accomplish depends on my thankfulness for everyone's gifts, whether they know they're giving them, or not.

A wise shopper is someone who knows *what* to buy, *where* and *when* to do the shopping, as well as *how much* to pay for goods received. I'm a wiser shopper today because I don't buy every crappy notion people wave in front of my eyes, no matter how sincere they are with their promotions and sales techniques. I'm an informed consumer who literally questions what people tell me within myself. And if I don't like the answer I hear me give myself, I don't buy their crap. I'm way past letting others tell me what I need. Now I tell *them* what I need. And if I don't hear wise, loving and generous words coming out of their mouth, I take my business elsewhere.

I don't need to hear complaining. I don't need to hear excuses. I don't need to hear sob stories or promises about what they'll do for me "next Tuesday for a hamburger today."

Now I want to know what they've done to improve themselves in the past. I'm not interested in their marriage, money or popularity. I only want to know what they've done to improve *their* reputation in their *own* eyes. From that, I'll decide for myself if they're going in the direction of self-love or self-hate.

If others don't have what I have inside, that's just too bad for them. "It's not my fault." I'll gladly tell them what tough love solutions I told myself when I was in bad straits, but I'm not going to take risks on their behalf unless I've been inspired with generosity of spirit...

In Israel, most of the prisoners are Muslim, but the Israeli government doesn't waste time and money incarcerating them without offering them a free education. A wiser prisoner is one fewer, returning prisoner. And because I was once imprisoned in myself, I know my education in self-love was the only way to get out of inner jail and stay out. "Depression" was the major cause of the violence I perpetrated against myself. Self-love was the key to getting out of jail free. And generosity of spirit was the only way to keep my recidivism to a minimum.

I buy what I can afford from any yenta who's got a good match for me, and I don't give myself any dark ideas that are only going to illuminate me to matters of a black heart. I *save* my money; I *spend* my good thoughts and feelings. And I capitalize on my purchases with greater generosity of spirit only when I sense my soul will be emboldened and enlarged by the experience.

The *more* I give of myself to others, the more I develop a desire to give to myself as generously as I give to them. Once I finally graced myself with a loving opinion of me, I saw that that wasn't going to be enough. I had to extend my self-love through generosity of spirit, and I knew I couldn't do that without **GOD's** approval. (I'm going to spell "**GOD**" like this for the rest of this book because from now on I want to express *in writing* the equal importance of all three of the Abrahamic faiths.

I made an investment in myself all my life, but I tried to sell all I was worth and "cash in my chips" with my two suicide attempts. But after those two bankruptcies, I decided to invest and reinvest in myself to the best of my ability.

The Buddhists say that suffering is caused by wanting things to be different from the way they are. But I believe that only makes sense *internally*. *Externally*, we need to change this world. Only internally do we need to appreciate it as it is. And doing so is easier than you "think."

For instance, I always wanted my mother to be a certain way, and I invested in disappointment without realizing it until late in her life. Now that she's old and frail, I know that my disappointment in her has paid dividends. I'm rich in disappointments... But I deserve it because I never accepted her as she was. I'm now willing to face my disappointment and do *nothing* to alleviate it. This is suffering I have to go through. It's a lesson from the Teacher that I have to study for hindsight, foresight and insight.

When I go to church services with my boyfriend and see the congregation crossing themselves, I slow down their process internally

to watch their hand move from their head to their breastplate. And when I do so, I think of “history.” I think of the external world. I think of my mind (head) and my beliefs (breastplate), and how the two of them have created the little world I have that’s part of a much bigger world I share with everyone. I think of science. I think of physical comfort. I think of money and my wellbeing.

And when their hand moves from their heart across their chest past their breastplate, I think of “mystery.” I think of my feelings and beliefs, and how the two of them have created my inner world. I think of **GOD**. I think of faith. I think of school. This is the Buddhist world where “Suffering” is an elective you’ve don’t have to add to your curriculum.

In my opinion, “history” and “mystery” are the essence of the cross on which Christ was crucified. It seems to me He died in **GOD**’s name to elucidates **HIS** ongoing plan for man.

The world is a marketplace of ideas, and I’m my own middleman, buying and selling mine in ways that will make me more spiritually profitable over time. Business is brisk, but only because I’m so passionate about becoming as spiritually well connected to myself as possible. Many go financially bankrupt in this business. I went spiritually bankrupt, so I know I’m not going to return to that kind of poverty. I wanted to die a spiritual billionaire, and I already know for certain I will. Now it’s just a question of how many billions I’m going to amass.

I don’t feel the least bit guilty about my pursuit of spiritual wealth. To the contrary, I’m proud of every great idea I possess. Spiritual greed isn’t *good*; it’s *great*. You just need to learn *how* to be greedy in this way. **GOD** created “greed” so we’d use it well, not abuse it or ignore it altogether. Becoming a spiritual billionaire won’t harm the planet or reduce the opportunities for a single soul on earth. There’s even hope that it’ll help the environment and the animals who are already under such stress.

Wisdom, love and generosity of spirit is my *business*, a spiritual industry that’ll never go bust so long as I continue to make mistakes and learn from them. And as long as I find better ways of avoiding emotional mistakes and suffering rather than pay for the ones I’ve made, I can’t go wrong. The more wisdom I earn, the more I can become a spiritual fortune 500 company of self-love.

Before I can capitalize on who “I” am, I have to explore who “i” was. I have to learn to see myself as developing. I can’t promote myself within me if I don’t know what I have to offer.

I capitalize the first person, singular, nominative pronoun (I) first and foremost because of the rules of the English language. But I know of no other language that capitalizes this word. In my opinion, we capitalize the first person, singular, nominative pronoun in English because we recognize **GOD**'s presence in everyone. That's one of the reasons I think English is such a rich and beautiful language.

When I was spiritually well housed and arrogant in matters of self-love, I was my own worst customer. I wasn't a bad person. I simply didn't want to invest in expensive ideals like "dignity" and "pride," in the gayest sense of these words. I didn't want to have a loving relationship with the man I was becoming for the duration of our journey together. When I said the word "I" out loud, there was always a lump in my throat because I didn't feel like I knew the meaning of the word.

I was the kind of spiritual salesman who could twist my arm and stick my foot in the door to make a sale. I had to wait until I had the ability to convince myself I couldn't convince myself with evidence in the external world that I was admirable to earn the right to call myself "admirable."

Now I can't sell myself on any of my ideas until I see them as luxuries I don't have to have rather than necessities of life that I can't live without. If it's an idea that's meant to be, it'll eventually feel like a luxury I've come to love.

I understand that the religious fanatics want to impress upon us the importance of our "Teacher." But *promoting* school is a lot different than *going* to it. I appreciate their role as "truant officers" who are trying to get everyone back to class, but that's just not enough of a reason to behave in the obnoxious ways they are. Many see themselves as doctors of self-love simply because they pray in public on the Sabbath. But there's more to life than Friday, Saturday or Sunday school. School is in session 24/7. You can't sell something you're not buying *all the time*.

I have to consult my Partner on every deal I make with my self. I have to be sure **HE** approves of the ways in which I'm trying to help myself get rich quickly and easily. And I do so by running my thoughts and feelings through my conscience. I can't expect to do well in spiritual business and hope to be more comfortable later on in life if I don't communicate honestly with my Partner. I can't keep secrets from **HIM** in the hopes that the business will absorb the losses I keep from **HIM**. That's not just bad business; that's insane!

Of course, if **HE** doesn't approve of the deals I'm making with my self, that doesn't mean I can't make them. It just means I'm

running a shady business. And since my Partner's name is going to be sullied by my sordid transactions, I'm kidding myself if I think I can remain in business for long under those circumstances. Moral bankruptcy is commonplace. Bad spiritual business practices with myself are the exception that proves the Golden Rule.

Every emotional child of two is in business with the Man upstairs. It doesn't take emotional maturity to make a *killing* in the marketplace of spiritual ideas with a bad one. But you can't just thank your Partner by allowing you to collude with your self and then walk away from your bad deal guilt free. Sometimes you have to watch your guilt from a distance and then observe as it appears to grow closer... Ask Nixon. Ask Cosby. Ask your self.

Life is so much easier than it looks if you look at your life up close. Once you have your M.B.A. in spiritual partnership with your self, it's so much easier to do business in your inner world because you don't have to "do" anything. You can simply accept your inner world the way it already is and move through your suffering with dignity.

In the MBA program you'll learn the emotional difference between a "charge" and a "refund." A "charge" is the feeling of guilt. A "refund" is the feeling of love.

If you continue with a lifelong education in the school of self-love, you're going to make your way to an M.B.A in spiritual marketing after your Ph.D. to promote yourself as you truly are to you.

If life serves you lemons, don't get soured on your *self*. Take your punishment like the spiritual billionaire you are. If you're rich enough to do the *crime*, you're rich enough to see your potential to still become spiritually *sublime*.

64. Software I.T. Administrator in Computer Science

I took my mind out of its box at birth, like a new computer; assembled it as best I could; and turned it on. But I began installing software about the meaning of my existence long before I had enough apps to differentiate between those programs my parents were uploaded into me and the ones I was uploading each day by myself. I was on a spiritual network with them for many years to come.

I didn't have the time or forethought at birth to create an instruction manual for myself as I learned to use this marvelous, calculating instrument I'm in. I had to think as fast as I could from the moment I began. I had to make quick decisions without any way to validate my conclusions except with outcomes. I couldn't write my

own, personal instruction manual based on my impressions and experience until the metaphoric model of “thinking” that I was using became outdated and obsolete when I entered childhood.

I was an “apple” from the Teacher long before I became a P.C. I was an android without even knowing it. I was a smart *aleck* long before I could metaphorically see myself as a smart *phone*.

If I was the rotten “apple” in the bushel, it was because I was born that way. If I went from green to ripe to rotten seemingly overnight, it was because of the weather within me. When you treat yourself like forbidden fruit, the only thing left for you to do is to figure out for yourself just what kind of fruit you are. And if you discover you’re a tropical fruit, like a “durian,” you’ll discover soon enough that people think you smell like rotting flesh...

Despite the last paragraph, I’m going to move forward with the metaphor of man as a machine, not a fruit. I’m going to see myself as an “apple” *for* the Teacher in the technological sense of the word.

I believe I was programmed with good intentions from birth. From an early age, I perceived others treating me like a machine - an appliance to be used at their discretion - and I allowed them to do so, albeit it at a time in the past when some of the machines in around our house were an icebox, a record player, my dad’s brownie camera and his 1954 Duisenberg automobile.

It’s not that I was *really* made in **GOD**’s image, and **HE**’s a machine. It’s just that I was born into an age when machines were simpler than they are today and metaphors were less understood for their insight into the mystery of man.

I was born in an age that glorified machines. If a machine hadn’t been created to do the job in those days, people thought it wasn’t something that needs to get done. We still think our mechanical creations mark the limit to our abilities. We see ourselves only as machines because we don’t literally look much further ahead of ourselves than the smart phone in our hand.

You need only install the next generation of spiritual software into your operating system to move yourself forward with greater self-regard. After all the bad experiences with people in your childhood that warped your thinking in your own way, you now rely on the kindness of spiritual I.T. administrators to help you perform optimally. You can’t run you without help. The best you can hope for is to become a spiritual system administrator who’s responsible for the upkeep, configuration, and reliable operation of others; especially multi-user individuals, such as “servers.”

Every day I endeavor to do my best, I'm rewarded with a night in which I can consciously update new skills while I sleep, so I restart the next morning with an improved, operating system in place. But each figurative slip of my fingers on the keyboard adds to the glitches in my system, an error consciously observed on screen that gives me the opportunity to fix myself from the inside using the spiritual programming language I'm writing about in this manual.

The spiritual, software industry never seems to launch a new program without bugs, so I have to be especially vigilant about testing my self each day to make sure today's program isn't going to corrupt my operating system in some way or other. I have to look for bugs in the way I run that I didn't notice before. And I need the whole, spiritual web my Teacher is familiarizing me with at my disposal to make these corrections.

My parents weren't what you'd call "spiritual techies" who advanced me with ease through my spiritual upgrades during the first few years of my life. All this happened below the level of consciousness. We were all operating our selves with the metaphors available at that time. But there's so much more I'm able to program myself now that I'm so much more aware than I was in the past.

Homosexuality isn't software you need to have or need to wipe clean from your hard drive. It's a part of your hardware. Being Jewish is an operating system you can modulate with spiritual code. You can change a Jew; you can't eliminate us. We're **GOD's** first operating system, and we're still needed for our divine code.

There are spiritual I.T. administrators that come from every faith and philosophy, and you can learn from them all. You can't be gay or Jewish just by familiarizing yourself with our systems. But you can learn about yourself by interfacing with us. You don't need a firewall to protect yourself from downloads from us. We aren't viruses that are going to freeze your system.

A lot of xenophobia boils down to privacy issues. Nobody wants anyone looking over his shoulder to oversee what apps are on his smart phone or what he's thinking about. You're your own device. You program yourself any way you want to use yourself. And by the applications in your spiritual system and the photos of yourself you upload through body language, we'll judge you for the type of spiritual device you've chosen to become.

The ways you program your self physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually will even become *self-evident* over time. You are your own machine, given to you factory fresh and unused

many years ago. Use your self anyway you please, so long as you don't hurt others in the process.

There are religious hackers, just like there are computer hackers. There are those who spitefully want to disrupt your education in coming to know your self. They hate the idea of anyone being smarter than them. They want to hack into you to figure out how *you* run because they hate themselves too much to explore the mystery and majesty of how **GOD** made *them*.

It's one thing to put cameras on traffic lights. It's another to put them in bedrooms and religious institutions if people aren't conspiring in those places to hurt anyone. Anybody who's that interested in how and where I use my penis or pray should simply ask me outright. I'll be more than glad to tell them all about my "practices." But gathering information about my bedroom behavior and beliefs behind my back is just not cool unless there's evidence that I'm a physical danger to society.

You aren't the last and greatest model in human engineering. Someday you, too, are going to be replaced with a newer model. We're all limited to the level of spiritual technology available to us at our time in **HIS**tory. Do your best to contribute to the advancement of humanity's, spiritual progress. You may prefer to think of **GOD** as orthodox, conservative or reformed. But whatever your opinion of **HIM**, that says more about you. **HE's** all three. **HE's** like a father, a son and a spirit. **HE's** like a Jewish, a Christian and a Muslim. Like you, **HE** has what we'd metaphorically refer to as a head, heart and soul.

Humanity is constantly working to improve itself to make operating a human being as intuitive and easy as possible. Instant messengering has now reached down into our soul. At any moment of the day, our head can email our heart for emotional insight and instant message our soul for input into the moral implications of our actions. We don't have to rely on old-fashioned methods equivalent to "snail mail" of consulting with priests with confession or flinging roosters around the room to procure greater awareness of our sins. And it's high time for flagellation and stoning to become internalized...

Don't look back. The past is behind us. Your past is behind you. My past is behind me. We're all tumbling into the future as a clue to using the present to prepare us for a better tomorrow. If you wallow in the way it was, you'll waste the precious *present*. You'll spend your time working at removing the bow and the wrapping with the admirable intention of using them again, but you'll miss the gift inside.

The straight world was very foolish in not giving gay people equivalent, legal rights when we asked for them. We didn't need gay marriage. Most of us didn't even know why we were going for marriage in the first place, because it was legal equivalency that we were seeking.

The reason we went for marriage was deeper than anyone then could elucidate. Between the 13th and 19th Centuries, Europe was entrenched in a "romantic" notion that was poetically expressed through fairy tales. But the relationship of princes to princesses was really the relationship of sons to their mothers. It wasn't a sexual story, but a spiritual story. It wasn't about carnal knowledge, but about spiritual knowledge.

The romantic relationship in my life was with my mother. But by trying to project that relationship onto the men in my life, I suffered nothing by failure. Romance isn't sexual. It's spiritual. If you want a good sexual relationship be kind and attentive, not romantic.

This "romantic notion" was taken up by gays and lesbians to describe our relationship to our parents in abstract ways that straight people could then assimilate without worrying about the sexual implications in breaking the taboo of intercourse with our parents. We took marriage through heterosexual romance to spiritual love. We brought it back to the self.

We don't need to obey all the socially, conforming dictates of our parents anymore. Answers to moral questions may not yet be available on Google, but the personal intra-communication system of most people is sufficiently developed for them to rely on their own conscience to be their guide.

Nobody in his right mind is literally going to sleep with his father or mother. But there are many figurative ways to concede to this taboo unless you understand your operating system more deeply. You can't honor your father and mother if you can't internalize them and interface with them as though you were a child of **GOD. HIS** gift of two parents doesn't have to be literally true for you, to be figuratively meaningful to your self. If you become the child, you'll appreciate the parent. If you become the parent, you'll appreciate the adult. If you become the adult, you'll appreciate your Maker and how **HE** made you.

Become the i/I.T. administrator of your inner world. Model your relationship with yourself on your relationship with your smart phone. Update your software nightly so you don't lose any important data you've collected. Then, set your inner alarm, recharge your

battery and wake up to a new day of play with your precious device that was made to be practical, challenging and fun.

It's no coincidence **GOD** gave you a phone that can do everything except the dishes in the kitchen sink. Use your phone as a model for the smart relationship you've developed with every aspect of your self, and you'll become a spiritual, information, technology administrator who'll know what to do when you freeze.

65. Juris Doctorate for the Judge

I foolishly decided to sue the spiritual school system because I'd been given such inept tutors, seemingly one after the other, from the day I was born. After two suicide attempts, I was finally so frustrated with my overall education in life that I decided to fight back at the Source. I decided to become a lawyer of self-love and take my grievances to spiritual court.

(I knew that **GOD** also happens to be my Judge and Jury, but I didn't care. I thought I had a good case. I even thought it was good enough to make into a class action suit! "Barry Emanuel Zeve verses **GOD's** University of Self-Love." I figured with all the class clowns that had interfered with my education, my case had merit. And it's not like I had to wait long for the trial to be added to **HIS** calendar. The case was settled in the course of one day.)

I came up with my reason to sue, and I thought myself smart enough to prosecute my case myself. I lost. It was that simple. I left the courtroom in my mind feeling clever *and* awful inside, a curious combination of what it's like to have a good head and a bad heart.

Fortunately, I was no newcomer to the practice of making a fool of myself. And humiliating myself before **GOD** was far preferable to embarrassing myself before my self or shaming me before others.

Unbeknownst to me, in trying to sue **GOD**, my goal had really been to blame **HIM** rather than my *parents*. **HE'd** given me those parents, and **HE'd** brought all the other tutors into my life. I'd have looked around for different educators had I been smarter from the start. I couldn't have done better in the school of self-love given the tutors I got. I ended up right where I belonged twice, on a locked ward.

I wanted **GOD** to answer for the preparation I'd been given in life, even if **HE** wasn't accountable to me for my own decisions or actions. But **HIS** court system made it clear that I have only myself to blame for the way it turned out. And every other student of life is judged in the same way. We can't use the forbidden fruit reasoning

(Why me?). That voice in the Creation Story never made it onto the parchment.

I lost the case, but if there was anything good that came out of my lawsuit, it was the comments of the Judge at my hearing. In not using *man*'s, legal system to solve my problems, but by working them out internally, I actually was rewarded in **GOD**'s court with more esteem of my brains, more empathy for my open heart (albeit, black, ergo: guilt ridden) and more faith in my evolving conscience.

It's not that I reached a level of being so far above everyone else's that I could ever say, 'I knew it all.' But I really knew enough to know that self-ignorance wasn't "all" my fault. With so many people around me who were still working on their elementary school, spiritual education, how could I *not* have come to the conclusions that I was a genius amongst idiots, a post-graduate alumnus in a world of third graders? Why wouldn't I have assumed I'd graduate magna cum laud and was just hanging around on campus waiting for my diploma and a handshake from my Teacher when I leave this school?

It hadn't occurred to me that the tutors assigned to me were elementary school students because I was still in spiritual elementary school myself, despite my delusions of grandeur. It hadn't occurred to me that I was far less "evolved" than I thought. When I realized I was like an IBM selectric typewriter in a world where everyone is striving to become an "i" phone, I finally learned the meaning of the word "embarrassment." It finally got personal.

My mother may be dying as I write these words. She's 94, hospitalized after a fall, and coming in and out of delusions. I'm not afraid, angry or sad about it. I'm full of laughter in with my tears. I'm celebrating my sorrow. She taught me so much. A Jewish mother should never be compared to any other kind of mother. Jesus had a Jewish mother. Perhaps He tried another way to express what I'm feeling: love.

When I was a very small child, I discovered my mother wanted me to be helpful to her. She didn't say so in words, and she was never really a very helpful person to others. She couldn't even cook well. But she influenced me with her love in other ways. She seemed to grow in stature when I helped anyone.

The fifth Commandment, to honor your parents, is on the first tablet of two, the tablet of Commandments we do for **GOD**. Our parents are gifts from **GOD**, so we honor ourselves by honoring them after **HIM**. In becoming a helpful person, I've fulfilled the Fifth. I feel I'm in good stead with **GOD**.

I'd always held the attitude that this world would be a far better place if people would simply listen to *me*. I was sure I could solve the world's challenges if I were just given the chance to voice my opinions on the world stage. I thought of myself as the "answer *man*" even though I sometimes *felt* like a little boy inside.

I prosecuted myself in **GOD's** court of self-grievances by calling forth MeTube videos that exposed my attitude of the know-it-all in me. I had to watch these memories in my mind with **GOD** as my witness for me to be embarrassed by the way I thought of myself. My only defense was that I couldn't help being so smart... And that didn't sound very good to the Judge. It even made *me* wince, and I wasn't even on the Jury.

HE adjudicated against me, of course, siting a conflict of interest. In providing evidence of how smart I was, I'd undermined my case. I couldn't be a know-it-all pupil in the school of life who sued his tutors for having been unskilled because I only proved I'd learned a great deal from them, not that they'd taught me insufficiently.

In calling myself to the stand as a witness for the prosecution and the defense, I was given the opportunity to cross-examine myself. But I only proved to myself, and the Judge, that I was a hostile witness. I couldn't help my own case because I was against my self, right from the start. I wanted what was best for me, which wasn't to prove that I was smart. I only wanted what was best for me by proving that I was smart enough to find a way to lose the case. And so in losing, I won.

What I really wanted was to prove to myself was that I could discover my motives. And in that sense, learning took precedence over everything else in my life. Sure, almost everything in life turns out to be harder than it looks at first, but we're not here primarily to succeed. We're here to learn.

I wasn't delusional. (I knew deluded thinking thanks to my sojourns in mental institutions.) My attitude of ingratitude had merit, in my opinion. But blaming **GOD** and the world **HE** put me in was something I couldn't prove had been detrimental enough to me. I hadn't lost a limb. My parents lived to ripe, old ages. And I lived in America. The only thing I could use to prove my loss was the loss of my mind. That I had truly lost. That's what I thought I was suing for to get back, but the Judge said I couldn't have it back. What's gone is gone in my case. I had to live with my losses and my disappointment. I had to get over it.

At worst, I thought I was afraid I'd have to admit I was guilty and **GOD** was innocent. At best I thought I'd come out of **HIS**

courthouse innocent, having proved to the Judge that **HE**'d been guilty of crimes against *my* humanity.

There's a true story about concentration camp victims in Auschwitz putting **GOD** on trial (which may have been understandable there and then). But I was suing **GOD** in the *civil* court in my soul rather than in a makeshift *criminal* court in a concentration camp. I was seeking personal damages against individuals, while the Jews in Auschwitz were seeking a criminal conviction into what had gone wrong with all of humanity. (The creation of the State of Israel three years after the War might be considered the sign from **GOD** that the case brought before **HIM** had been given **HIS** due consideration.)

It feels to me as though the whole world may still be waiting for Judgment Day, but I'm glad I've already had my day in Court. Most people don't realize that the day after "judgment day" is called "tomorrow." Life goes on.

The whole Western world wants the Messiah to arrive - like a school counselor - to tell everyone what classes they're supposed to go into in the university setting of **GOD**'s school down here. Nobody expects to be told he still hasn't completed his elementary school education and is actually far from a spiritual college degree. Everyone is so clearly able to see how poorly everyone else is doing. Few are willing to admit their own grades aren't all that good in the emotional and spiritual sense.

It was humbling to discover I could be a post-graduate student in some classes and a fourth grader in others. It didn't occur to me that *without* fear I felt smart, but when I'd get frightened, I'd feel very young and insecure all over again. The degrees I'd achieved were all hanging on the wall in my *heart*, not my *head*. It was my level of self-love that determined my feeling of placement in this school, not the formal education I got growing up or the life lessons I had thereafter.

If you're behaving like a *smart* aleck in some of your classes; a *wise* guy in others; and swollen-headed while simply walking down the street chewing gum at the same time - and you still claim to be a sweetheart - maybe that can *all* be true about you. Maybe you're sharper than you think.

Even though I'd been a good student growing up as a child in L.A., I didn't become a great student until junior high. In elementary school, I was just average. But suddenly as puberty got closer, I began to really excel mentally, probably to avoid having to look at myself below the neck (and later below the waist).

Authority over my self needed to be addressed in stages. An infant has no boundaries. He blends head, heart, conscience and

genitals. A child has boundaries, but they're nebulous because he hasn't yet built fences inside to separate him from his neighbors. It's not until puberty that the first clear line is drawn in the sand between the past and the future, the parent and the child, the inner infant and child the adolescent no longer wants to relate to, which the pubescent individual lumps together to interpret as differences between males and females.

When I was an adolescent, that line in me was very well delineated externally. But internally, it separated the top half of me from the bottom like an electrified fence. I felt like a tin man filled with barbed wire, and then Someone suddenly turned on the juice. But it isn't usually that way today. We have metaphors to reach people like me before they do something crazy to themselves or others.

There were more boundaries in me then than I knew what to do with. There were fences in me that made me a good neighbor; there were frontiers in my future I looked forward to exploring. There were boundaries of good taste, but those I always seemed to want to cross. There was so much confusion inside me that I was only borderline sane for many years before I truly went insane. I could figuratively traverse myself and go from a screaming infant inside to a mature, adult male in a matter of moments. And I could go back just as easily. I became adept at crisscrossing frontiers. I just couldn't talk about it.

The letter of Biblical law is clear, but the emotional ramifications of our legal system can never be black and white. Because we're all in a hurry nowadays, we cut corners, even if we know doing so will cause an emotional affect that others may have to interpret with cynicism or disappointment. As drivers, we know pedestrians can't sue us for frightening them. And the chances of a cop seeing how we ignore the emotional ramifications of frightening pedestrians in a crosswalk and get ticketed for it are rare. But if we catch *ourselves*, instead of waiting to be caught by the cops, we should be able to admit we gamble with the emotional wellbeing of others all the time. We tell ourselves "They'll go over it." But do we? And what are the figurative ramifications of breaking the law?

If you're waiting for others to approve of you, you're also going to become embittered. But if you watch people carefully and listen to what they're "trying" to say, you'll also see how they're making an effort to be supportive. Reward them for what they're trying to do, and then tell them how you'd like to have it done. It's O.K. to ask for what you want. You'll reward yourself with pride for doing so, and any accusation of arrogance they may fling at you won't hurt so much when you realize you're doing it for *everyone's* sake.

What if this spiritual school system isn't flawed? What if all the students are disruptive at times in their own unique ways? What if I'm not the only one who's coming to class prepared with my homework, looking forward to the day's lessons, and even excited about the upcoming tests? What if I have as good an attitude as can be expected under the circumstances we're all under today?

What if there's no going back? What if you can only usher in a better future by living it now. You can't make up for lost time. You can only save time. You have to live with the grades you've gotten and work doubly hard on your work habits if you're going to raise your grades any further in the future.

There truly are losses in life, and "time" is one of them. We discover what the metaphor of 'a tree of knowledge' means to us personally when we look at our own losses over time. It wasn't just a silly, little piece of fruit **GOD** got **HIS** nose bent out of shape over. The Hebrew Bible begins with a metaphor for loss (forbidden fruit) and how loss leads to learning (a sense of banishment, self-disappointment and efforts to make up for it).

The Creation Story tells your story. It consolidates your life into a few pages, asking you to question what you mean to yourself. If you take this story literally, you'll miss the rest of the lessons of the Hebrew Testament. You'll see the Jews as foolish people, not wise people. You'll see our journey to a land of milk and honey as a material goal. You won't see the milk of life as love and the honey of life as wisdom. You'll misjudge us.

Learning diminishes us over time in some ways, but it enhances us in others. Learning is a humbling experience. Learning teaches us to perceive that we're undergoing moral challenges at every moment of every day. Learning teaches us that we're all trees of knowledge that have blossomed with fruit that sometimes isn't appreciated. At worst, others steal from our tree. But they often just take our efforts to root ourselves and thrive in this world for granted.

The mountain (Judeo-Christian world) will come to Mohammed. But then the Mohammedans will have to climb it. And if the Muslims think they're going to be able to get a foothold in our Western world without modesty, humility and loyalty to our way of life, they're kidding themselves. It'll only show that they still don't have a clue how **GOD** operates using universal principles based on virtues **HE** gave to each faith and philosophy for us to unite ourselves.

The good deeds I did for others in past seasons are no longer visible. I have to account to myself for all the good I've done for myself, and others, with more good deeds today. I'm bigger, taller and

have branched out further. My roots go down deeper, whether or not others can perceive that. And my fruits are the ripest and sweetest they've ever been in this, the fall season of my one and only year.

All it took to take **GOD** to court was to pass the spiritual bar and then organize a class action suit to try to blackmail **HIM** into rewarding us all out of guilt for what we've been through. I thought I could get everyone on earth as witnesses for the prosecution to strengthen my case against **HIS** Ultimate Authority. I thought I could become popular enough with people, to win in the court of public opinion...

I thought I could prove that the emotional tuition of "guilt" in the school of self-love was too high a price to have to pay. And I thought I could prove our innocence. I hoped to get everyone a rebate (if not a refund) on the cost of his education. It was a conspiracy that had merit because it created a false sense of "cooperation" amongst men. But it did so by creating a conspiracy against **GOD**.

I wanted to plead my case before **HIM**. I wanted **HIM** to agree to remove the embarrassment, shame and humiliation that made me feel guilty for the way it is and the way it looks like it may turn out. I wanted **HIM** to close an eye to my lies and self-denial.

But the best I was able to achieve was an increased sense of modesty, humility and self-loyalty out of this spiritual exercise for doing it wrong *only* in my head, and not making a fool of myself in public. In my mind's eye, **GOD** refused to exonerate me for my guilt. My guilt wouldn't go away, especially after my TIA (which it turns out now was probably just severe dehydration). That scare had been like a shot across my bow. It still reminds me I'm mortal and won't be here forever, but I feel a little closer to my self now that I know I'm a *mortal* fool like every other.

Basically, I was so afraid of **GOD** that I hadn't wanted to admit it to myself. I hated pain even more than suffering, and didn't look forward to any more of either as I entered older age. I only wanted **HIM** to promise **HE**'d treat *me* better than I saw **HIM** treating **HIS** other students, but I couldn't wrangle a guarantee out of **HIM**.

We're made in such a way that all of us bring the outside world in; not only intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, but physically as well. We breathe, eat and drink. We literally take in the outside world, use it and discard what we don't need of it. In that sense, the major openings in the human body, the mouth, the urethra and the anus are tunnels through which our dependence on the outside world is literally determined by what we put into our body.

We're like a bagel with a hole at the center, and as the whole thing gets figuratively bigger and bigger like a loaf of challah, we perceive a "tunnel of love" with the world literally and figuratively going through it. But no man lives on bread alone. He must discover for himself what it means to be holy bread in communion with himself before he can appreciate being in communion with the Lord.

I'm going to approach this message from another direction using a different metaphor. This whole book is about the "elbow." I've been trying to teach you what it means to be a spirit in a human form by focusing only on one small part of the human body, the elbow. To understand this incredible joint, you have to contemplate the metaphoric importance of bones, sinew, muscle, nerve, blood vessels and skin. You have to appreciate what it means to be "straight" and "bent." And you have to understand what it means when I say that when **GOD** tells a joke, the Jews have their work cut out for them in trying to explain it. This whole book is no more than an attempted explanation of what it means for **GOD** to have created us all with a "funny bone."

As a child, I was somehow inspired to study hard at school, a focus of my intentions that was later directed into becoming a ballet dancer, a teacher and finally focused in business. I was inspired to grow like a tree is inspired to grow. I branched out; rooted myself in one place I called home; budded, blossomed and bloomed. My modesty unfurled like leaves, and my guilt turned them into flaming red, yellow and brown until they fell off each winter. There's a season for all feelings, and there's a reason for every season. I became fruitful, but I also endeavored to multiply the emotion I most wanted to grow: love.

I was so intellectually sophisticated that I couldn't always identify only with the spiritual, botanical world of trees. I chose to graduate to spiritual biology. I recognized my boyfriend was like the "thing" I most cherished in my life. He was to me like the shopping bag I was clutching in my hand as I walked down the street; the device in my pocket that I rely on to keep me abreast of the world; and the vehicle I loved to enter and sit behind the wheel as I'd drive him to heavenly delights.

When you get to the level of spiritual "J.D." (Juris Doctor) degree, you get to become a lawyer of the self, and people become containers you respect because you're in one of them, too. You begin to realize their contents are their own business and how they fill themselves further is none of your concern.

Our Teacher fills each of us differently, but **HE** made each container identically, even if your eyes tell you otherwise. This is the essence of the spiritual laws of the universe. This is what it means when it says in Genesis that “**GOD** MADE MAN IN **HIS** IMAGE.” [Genesis 1:27]

I can’t describe the inspiration of childhood without using spiritual botany combined with spiritual physics. I need to employ words like “sunlight” (wisdom through illumination) and “water” (love through feelings). With that scenario in mind, spiritual photosynthesis is wisdom within (illumination combined with spiritual chemistry) that when mixed with love (water) produces the energy for spiritual growth.

Paranoia from fire, rot and infestation by thieves who’d steal away all that I worked so hard to create is not an unreasonable emotion when I see myself as a tree. There are people who behave like moths, worms, mold, mildew, mistletoe and wilt. Paranoia “is-real.”

GOD only knows what **HE**’s planning for my future, but I wouldn’t be surprised if paranoia were still a motivating factor in my life in years to come. I was already figuratively struck by lightening with mental illness. And that taught me that no tree in this garden is immune to blight. If a tree falls in the forest, listen, whether or not you hear anything. It’s falling for you.

And guilt – don’t get me started on guilt. If not for my guilt at having tried to kill myself, my head would be as flat as a board, my heart would be as shallow as a kiddie pool, and my soul would be as translucent as the air in Beijing.

I don’t envy those for whom ignorance is bliss. “Bliss” looks “blessed” on the outside, but it isn’t inside. I wanted out of the spiritual misdemeanors I perpetrated against my humanity in the hopes I could then make a case for dismissing my spiritual felonies. I wanted to stop being afraid of **GOD**, and start loving **HIM** just the way **HE** was toward me. But I didn’t have anywhere near enough evidence to sue **HIM**. It wasn’t logical. It was emotional...

My grandmother should have taken my mother to England or America after my grandfather died in 1937, where they had family, and not wait for things to get so bad for the Jews in Germany. My grandmother ended up in concentration camp and my mother ran as a fugitive throughout the War. When they miraculously were reunited after the War in 1945, my grandmother had typhoid, and died nine months later. Although my mother got an apartment for the two of them, my mother spent much of her time with my father whom she’d

just met. My parents were in a blissful dream after a horrible nightmare.

My mother never resented her mother for not having saved her from the Holocaust, but my mother did spend her whole life bemoaning the way she'd treated her mother at the end of her life by not having given her more time and attention while my grandmother was dying.

Now my mother may be dying, and I sit here in San Francisco writing instead of being at her bedside in L.A. She's struggling to leave this world, just as we all once struggled to enter it. "It's not my fault."

I love her dearly, but I can't help her. My sister and her have to concentrate on their relationship right now. My sister would resent me if she had to share our mother's physical presence. I told my mother this, and she agreed. She and I have worked on closure for many years. Now it's just time to say "goodbye." And she already knows that.

My mother isn't literally inside me, so I can't help her out of this world and into the next as she helped me out of her to enter this world. I can't push anywhere to help her out. I can't open myself like two legs to let her leave. Breathing deeply isn't going to make this less painful for me. I can only fill myself with the experience. I can only promise **GOD** that our *spiritual* umbilical cord will never be severed. Our lineage is eternal.

Only now can I see that her Holocaust and my holocaust were the result of a spiritual, tutorial EVENT that didn't consciously prepare us for the world either of us had gone through in our youth. We had to struggle with our fate and turn it into our destiny.

Every generation has to learn to forgive the generation that came before it. Every individual has to struggle to prove to himself that **GOD** gave us the tutors we got with good reason. If you want to *understand* life, come to the Jews. If you want to *love* life, go to the Christians. And when the Muslims come to understand and love life, they'll be chosen to present their gift of generosity of spirit to the world for all of us to celebrate.

Ignorance of the law isn't an excuse you can use to sue our Teacher for the gaps in your education. Insanity isn't an event you can use as self-defense. Self-ignorance is the problem and self-love is the only solution. People usually have no idea how magnificent their parents are. They have no idea how magnificent their early tutors were. So how could they possibly extrapolate how magnificent **GOD** is for allowing this world to be just the way it is for today?

Be grateful **GOD** only allows you to “think” about killing other people. There are people out there **HE** allows to do much worse. **HE** allows their insanity to go much deeper than yours or even mine. And if those people don’t choose to do better, it’s not our fault.

That doesn’t mean we don’t have to take action. It only means that the action we take must be motivated from love, not guilt. And the way to perceive the border between guilt and love must be decided individually.

You can’t sue **GOD** for what you’re doing to yourself or what **HE**’s done to you. You can’t blame your tutors for insufficiently preparing you for tomorrow’s tests. The bad grade you got on a previous test was the result of some spiritual question you didn’t fully understand. If you question why you had to go through what you went through, **GOD** will help you find your own answers.

The time for asking good questions often comes *after* the exam. That won’t change your grade on the previous test, but it will change what you know about yourself before the next test comes.

Conservatives have gotten the wrong answers on their civics exams for a long time now. It’s time for them to open the Bible anew and learn to read it another way. Literal interpretations of **GOD**’s WORD aren’t sufficient. They’re only the tip of the iceberg. Conservatives are going to have to dive into the very cold waters of the their heart and swim down into the dark waters that surround the other tip of that iceberg. If some liberals can do that without **GOD**, most conservatives can do it, with. The Bible is far richer than almost everyone imagines.

You can’t blame the Teacher for your attendance in the school of self-love. You can’t say you were sick and therefore couldn’t study for the test. You can’t say you fell asleep in class. You have to ask *good* questions in a timely manner. And you have to rely on the humility your tutors taught you to listen to your self.

Some are struggling to get out of this world while they’re young. My mother has only been struggling for a few days, but she may not need to struggle much longer. How long do you want to struggle? It’s all a matter of attitude. You’re only born once or twice.

Rhetorical questions, cynical statements and damning disbelief of where you are and what you’re doing here aren’t going to give you the kind of results you’re surely expecting when you “graduate.” You’ve got to change your work habits. You’ve got to learn how to learn about yourself to make sense of what you’re going through.

Most everybody thinks he’s an A+ student in the school of life. Everyone thinks he’s a lawyer for the prosecution and the defense,

myself included. Everybody expects to be rewarded when he receives his sentence and walks out of this courtroom. But I recommend you think about what you're doing at all times. Do you really want to judge others? Wouldn't you be far more contented using your expertise to judge yourself?

The depth of your spiritual education is your choice. The Teacher can motivate you with pain and suffering. **HE** can even punish you severely by ignoring your mistakes entirely. (If the Israelites could wander around in circles for 40 years until **GOD** was ready to let them enter the Promised Land, **HE** might do as much to you.)

HE can motivate you to know how it feels to lose something special by forcing you to feel the loss of someone you love. I feel as though I can hear my mother cracking like a tree. I can her branches groaning under the weight of a burden her roots can no longer contain. If Moses could describe the loss of one special, forbidden fruit in this orchard that was especially dear to **GOD**, I can learn to take the trees that are dear to me more seriously. So what if I'm a "tree hugger!" Who really cares how deeply I can love a tree?

If I cry in public, doesn't everyone already really know why? If my eyes get misty and wet, don't others already know the morning dew around you? If someone's leaves have fallen and his branches are bare, what reason do we have to be embarrassed by it? There's a season for all *things*.

You'll only learn what you *want* to learn in this garden of delights. Denial will always be there in your inner sky, like a black hole at night, sucking up the light and taking it to some mysterious place we don't yet know about.

Denial is so far away, and our shared reality is so close at hand. You don't have to worry about all you don't *want* to know. Just dig your roots in a little deeper to know what you *do* want to know a little better. Secure yourself and you'll be fruitful and multiply.

The "Good Books" have all been written. The good students in the front row have been turning around for generations describing what they've learned; doing their best to tutor others and pass the tests back that the Teacher has given them. So what if the bad student behind you is tapping you on the back, trying to tell you a thing or two you don't need to know. It's always up to you to decide what you're going to do about it. The Teacher didn't seat him there without reason.

It's 11:00 PM on Friday night, August 14th, 2015 using the objective time of the Christian calendar. I just spoke to my mother. She told me she's cleaning out her closet and there are other people's

things in there. I told her it doesn't matter. I told her to love everything in there whether or not it's hers. She agreed.

I told her again how much I love her and admire her. I told her that I'll try to fill her shoes. I told her she did so much for the world; that this world is so much better thanks to her having been in it. And she agreed.

If you consistently refuse to *learn* or insist on only *teaching*, you shouldn't be all that surprised about your grades, your trouble on the final exam or your diploma. In the end, it's every student for himself. In the end, it's all going to be about you. Whether you die in love with yourself with good reason will only matter to you. You'll always get what you deserve.

Popes and presidents aren't exempt from these lessons. Prime ministers and priests are also being tested. The metaphors of life are as real today as they ever were. Only today, the students are getting so much smarter sooner...

None of us can fully see the greatness of the image of **GOD** in which we're made. The big picture is just too big, especially when we all get lost in blame games on the playground of life, and then want the Teacher to excuse us for coming late to class. It's normal. It's how the "C" students have always acted.

If you're a "yenta" like me, at least you know that the Teacher is watching. At least you ask yourself why irritating people have been brought into your life. At least you know that irritation begins within and that the people around you have been brought to you to question yourself, whether or not you have a need or a desire to literally question them.

The yenta has landed. She's set foot in my mind. "One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind." I'm not alone anymore. I left my heart and made it back into my head. I'll never be alone in there ever again. But what a trip it's been. I had to make sense of my outer world to come to appreciate my world within. It's been such a journey!

It's Saturday morning, early. I called the hospital. My mother said she's in the basement of a building waiting to take a train out of here. She said she was taken into an office, and they want her to sign a document. I told her to sign anything, but not to miss the train. She said she had forgiveness in her heart, and I told her to spend it all on herself, that there was nobody else who needed it. On the one hand, she's delusional from all the pain meds. On the other, she makes perfect sense to me.

A spiritual lawyer in the school of self-love has to be able to *prosecute* himself as much as he needs to learn to *defend* himself using the law. Pointing fingers at others is only practice in learning how to prosecute your head in the courtroom of your soul with your heart on the stand testifying for and against you.

A spiritual lawyer also has to know when to advise his parents when they need his advice and leave them to work out their own business when they don't.

In 1957, my mother told my half-sister that she was leaving our father. And my half-sister begged her not to go until the following year when she and her fiancé would be married. She didn't want to be alone with him. My mother agreed and staying one more year with my father for *his* daughter's sake. Who does that? When have you heard a story about such a righteous stepmother? This morning she brought up my half-sister by name. She hasn't forgotten her.

The "B+" student in the school of self-love is averse to feeling self-pity because he learned his lessons *too* well. He doesn't want to admit his inner world is harder to appreciate than he "thinks." He's surrounded by an inner sky that feels like it's various shades of blue (sorrow) some of the time, and looks black (guilty) the rest of the time. "Sky blue" (self-pity) is a combination of "blue" (sorrow) and "white" (love). You can't paint your rainbow of emotional colors within or around you without a blue sky in your soul. There are no rainbows possible in the night sky.

Those who only learn to defend themselves intellectually with distrust of everyone are educationally behind in perceiving the emotional canopy of their soul. How much does it have to rain inside before they're willing to look at the rainbow in their soul and admit they can only perceive it after they feel sorry for themselves? To give in to the glory and the wonder of this world, you have to see blue skies shining above.

When I put myself on the stand and cross-examined me before the Judge in the supreme court of my own little mind, my testimony against **GOD** wasn't persuasive. Although I'd thrown my blame of **HIM** at the wailing wall within, my petty excuses and accusations for not knowing or loving myself just didn't stick.

Self-love is the answer. "LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL THY HEART, WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIGHT," [Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27, Mark 12:30] for **HE**'s doing everything **HE** can to make your life a lesson you'll never forget. The whole point of life is to learn to *feel* and *believe*, not just to *think*. There are enough smart people in this world. There are enough soppy slobs who cry only

about others. What we need are more people who feel sorry for themselves and then are willing to do something about it to make themselves happy. If you can't see yourself as a contribution to the world, just do any little kind thing for others, and you'll have to admit you're able to listen to yourself and do what you tell yourself to do. Just repeat that exercise a dozen times a day, and you'll see huge changes in your self-esteem.

We can't make peace with the Muslims without believing in their desire to contribute to humanity even if the vast majority of them are still behaving like the world was made only for them. The Christians used to believe that way, and long, long ago before the time of Jesus, the Jews did, too. Everyone accuses others until they're ready to internalize their blame.

Peace of mind won't come to you with more facts and figures. Facts and figures are important in knowing the truth, but they may not bring you a sense of inner beauty unless you work at being good to your self. I had to make *self*-adoration my goal. I had to adore my self (not just my pets, portfolio and pomposity). And I had to share that adoration with **GOD**. Adoration, in the religious sense, must come out of adoration in the personal sense. I can't give to others that which I haven't first given to my self.

In turning my life into a courtroom drama, I learned not to accuse the Teacher or the class of getting in the way of my education. There are no coincidences. There's a queer in me who deserves my blame. (He just doesn't deserve anyone else's.) There's a Jew in me who deserves to learn how to fight to survive. (I just shouldn't have to fight my neighbors to keep the homeland **GOD** gave us.) And there's a mentally disturbed individual in me who deserves my love. (There isn't a pill they've invented that will cure me, and treatments for my disease will never be enough.)

I couldn't win my case against **GOD**, but I didn't really lose it either. All I could do was go back to class and try my best to know and love myself a little better. Conspiring against **HIM** in an effort to look like I was cooperating with others was no way to feel good about me in the long run.

My father wasn't good at being a father, and he wasn't good at being a husband from what I'd observed, either. But he made an incredibly loyal friend. He had a childhood friend with whom he shared his youth, concentration camp, and life in America. They were best buds. And from that relationship, he modeled for me the kind of relationship I needed to have with my self. That was actually good parenting, even if I had to learn it from him indirectly and then apply it

to myself. My mother was my best friend, and father was my finest enemy.

My love for my body was probably the most intimate relationship I've ever had in my life. I've adored my body while trying not to make myself obnoxious to others about it in the process. But now that I'm not so hot anymore, my vanity has turned into conceit. I've turned that heat further inward to adore my self-loyalty rather than my physicality. Now, I've got the discipline I need to grow old gracefully. Now I can appreciate my contents thanks to having taken such good care of my container. Moving from the surface inward wasn't such a bad idea by the time I reached middle age. I may have wasted my youth on others when I was young, but I've wisely spent middle age on myself.

Having been gifted with the body I got, turned out to be a great beginning in my lessons of self-love. It eventually showed me how magnificent **GOD's** plan has been for me all along. The fact that it took what it took for me to see that, only makes the mystery of **HIS** ways all the more intriguing to me.

Life can be a trial. There's just no way I could get along with ,e without ending up suing myself in small claims court from time to time for the little things I do wrong. I had to admit to myself that I can be litigious at times to the point of quarrelsome, but I try not to prosecute myself for nonsense. That would only make me irritable and hard to be around. It's better to feel guilty for all the little things I do that make me uncomfortable in my own skin than to feel frightened, angry or sorry with myself. When I work on my guilty conscience through the minutia of my life, I'm often spared the really big tests that can be so cumbersome to get through.

There are days when I'm so busy prosecuting and defending myself for every little thing I do wrong that I have little time left over for anything outside myself. On those days, I'm in court from dawn till dusk.

I don't just *profess* spiritual law to others. I sue myself all the time. The smaller the case and the more incidental the moral issue, the louder I sometimes make my case to **GOD**. I don't always win, but I never lose.

Moses started spiritual metaphors with man as a "tree of knowledge," but I left the garden he described in Genesis to compare myself to others, as did Cain with Abel. In doing so, I figuratively then collected lumber from so many trees of knowledge that I had enough to fashion a boat, like Noah. And I filled the hold with animal instincts above and below the waterline. In this way, the Bible stories make

more sense. (read my book The Forbidden Fruit's Perspective: Torah For Straight People)

My mother is ahead of me. She's in a tower at the moment babbling. She told me today she's in the basement of a building waiting for a train and they want her to sign some documents. I told her to sign anything they put before her, but not to miss the train. (The tower is coming down. I can sense it.)

Life can't be summed up in a single metaphor. So, if you mix your metaphors, question the metaphors you mix. Observe how deeply and thoroughly you combine many meanings to make sense of yourself using figurative speech.

The Bible doesn't literally teach anyone how to take his first breath. It doesn't diagram for a baby how to suckle at his mother's breast. It doesn't describe how to reach your first orgasm. And yet people insist on taking the Bible *literally* when to can only act as the instruction manual of life if you take it *figuratively*.

The Hebrew Bible, Gospels and Quran are meant to bridge your inner world and outer world like flying buttresses hold up the ancient walls of European, gothic cathedrals. These Good Books are meant to teach you how to appreciate the magnificence of **GOD** having created you for the sheer pleasure of you learning to love yourself as **HE** loves **HIMSELF**. That can't be described literally. It has to be inferred.

Believe it or not, it helps the animals and the environment if you think good thoughts about yourself. The oceans will get cleaned up for the whales if you wail a little less out loud and listen a little more carefully when you wail within. Life will make more sense when your head, heart and soul see, perceive and admire the big picture. The whole world is connected because everyone's inner worlds are becoming more connected within themselves. But your influence on *others* can never be greater than your influence on your *self*. If you want to change the world, transcend your self.

Getting through the emotional infancy of self-love and surviving your emotional "terrible twos" isn't the end of the maturation process. You'll only graduate spiritual nursery school and move on to an elementary, spiritual education when you're ready to learn to be helpful to your self for the sheer joy of it.

Graduating the trials of youth and entering the work force didn't make you a man. The childish brat and juvenile delinquent in you didn't magically disappear the day you got your driver's license or drank legally in public. The lessons didn't end when you got married, had children or retired. The tests didn't stop when you had money in

your pocket or got a smile from someone you found attractive. School life continues every day including the day you die.

But life *does* figuratively end every time you turn off your conscience; then you go to sleep somewhere inside. But you turn yourself on again and are reborn every time you use your conscience once again to guide you. If you don't make your conscience *your* guide, you won't be able to celebrate helping others love themselves. You'll bite off *your* nose with unreasonable demands to spite *your* face. You'll only do good for others begrudgingly, and you'll end up hating yourself for improving so slowly. Self-intimacy will become a guilt-ridden burden that you'll pray will come to a speedy end. You'll become suicidal like I was.

The fundamental dogmas of the three Abrahamic faiths are self-hating because the people running those religious institutions are self-hating. Teach them wisdom. Teach them love. Teach them to express the generosity of spirit that you've witnessed in yourself, and you'll see the wars in the Middle East magically disappear.

Once you pass the spiritual bar and become the prosecuting and defense attorneys in your own trial against your inhumanity toward your self, you'll face the questions of your guilt and innocence dozens of times a day. You'll gleefully go to court every day curious to see if you'll win or lose your next case against you.

It isn't going to be easy becoming a moral student of life all the time. But, in doing so, you'll begin to overcome the embarrassment, shame and humiliation that may have unconsciously ruled your life in the past; the metaphors you lived by without knowing it; and the attitude you took toward yourself without a second thought.

It's hard to take "no" from yourself for an answer. It's hard to face your own authority in all those little ways you may have only told yourself you "should." It's hard to make life a moral experience by using that judgmental attitude you may have saved only for others on *yourself* instead of *them*.

Wall Street is depending on you to fail in this quest. Diet pills and candy-coated merchandise are waiting on real and virtual store shelves for people like you. Consumerism depends on you not being able to take "no" for an answer. Much of our economy is based upon your indulgent nature. None of us are the exception to this rule. Self-indulgence *is* the rule. Self-love is the exception to the rule.

Not wanting to live from the *inside* in but habitually from of the *outside* in may have made you want to take the whole world to court. But you'll lose your case with **GOD**, I assure you of that. Life is an inside job. You have to fill your cup for yourself and only let others

sip from the overflow that ends up in your saucer. But the bigger your cup, the bigger your saucer! Therefore, we need people with bigger cups, not bigger bellies.

“Accidents” and “Illnesses” are *incidents* in which you sue yourself physically. “Incidents” are *incidents* in which you sue yourself emotionally. “Financial upsets” are *incidents* in which you sue yourself spiritually.

Coming to spiritual class in your soul is the only way to learn what you’re doing to yourself. Everyone should endeavor to become a fulltime philosopher while doing everything else he’s doing. You can’t afford not to become a philosopher/undertaker in the school of self-love. You need yourself until the bitter end.

There’ll always be accidents and incidents in which life will sue *you*. And you won’t win every one of those cases, even if you’re innocent. Losing when you know you’re not at literally fault is humbling. And sometimes **GOD**’s plan in you having to lose is beyond explanation. It therefore has to be addressed figuratively to be meaningful. That’s what back burners are for. Just let it simmer. Over time, it’ll make more sense.

Once you’ve passed the spiritual bar, it’ll be the lawsuits in which you take *yourself* to court that will be the most interesting. You’ll finally agree that you deserve to be in an adversarial relationship with yourself, but you’ll then agree that it’s better to sue yourself in spiritual *civil* court than ever have to sue yourself in spiritual *criminal* court, as I had to do with my charges of “murder” against myself. You’re going to win *and* lose either way, so you might as well learn as much as you can about yourself from your misdemeanors and avoid the felonies at all cost.

Homosexuality was once considered a spiritual felony, but it was reduced to a misdemeanor. Like pot, it’s now tolerated in the privacy of a man’s home, although some still insist it stinks when they get a whiff of it in public. (I haven’t had a drink, a toke or smoke in over thirty years. But I can’t say the same thing about a bloke...) Choose your forbidden fruits carefully.

The Republican agenda is about the right to be born, the right to be straight, the right to be Christian and the right to be right. The Democratic agenda is the right to live a decent life, the right to be gay, the right to believe any way you like, and even the right to be wrong. You choose...

Everyone needs a lawyer of the heart who’ll defend him against a prosecuting head. Everyone is sentenced to community service for

crimes against his own humanity. Everyone needs to do that community service with a loving heart to strengthen it.

Use people to improve yourself. Use their influence over you in your imagination as much as you can. Force yourself to excuse others whenever possible. Then force yourself to forgive them if you've succeeded in excusing them. **"THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."** [Luke 23:34]

Everyone mirrors the face of **GOD**. Some look at gays and lesbians and still point fingers in raucous laughter. Some pretend to respect blacks while secretly scorning them. Some look the other way in fear and disgust when they see someone who's physically disabled, while pretending outwardly to be cool with it. And some believe all women are equal to men, with the exception of their own mother. There are spiritual misdemeanors that you may not even know you're committing. But **GOD** can turn that finger around and point it at you if you don't do it yourself. Do it yourself.

Some would rather steal from the blind than steal a real good look at themselves. And some would prefer to kill their *neighbors* rather than have to love *themselves*. There are many ways to avoid looking at the face of **GOD**. But that doesn't mean **HE**'s not looking at you.

Some would say the Israelis are the least aware people on earth. Some would say their country is a bastion of self-hate. They'd accuse the Jews of crimes against humanity. And yet, in what other wars in history, have you ever heard of the enemy calling up their adversary to tell them they're about to bomb their building? Have the Palestinians ever given the Israelis that courtesy?

We're all in a struggle with our self. We're all in an inner "israel," a struggle with **GOD**. And you may not yet even know that you're projection your war onto the Middle East. The Jews don't literally want to take over the world. Zionism is a political force that doesn't concern anyone who isn't Jewish. But Judaism is a spiritual force that concerns everyone. We only need you to know yourself as we've come to know our selves in the past 3,000 years. If you resist us being who *we* are, you'll only find you're going to struggle with *your* self all the more.

Gays and lesbians are no better at loving our selves than anyone else. Our spiritual deformities are no more deformed than anyone else's. We can't love others any more wholly than our neighbors can. But we realize our spiritual challenges are individual, not collective. We refuse to be anyone's collective scapegoats.

Those of us who are physical and mentally disabled have containers that are no different than yours. We have to learn to operate ourselves in exactly the same manner you do. The only difference is that we know our contents uniquely filling, while the abled community still pour us all into one cup that they project their self-pity onto, instead of feeling it for themselves.

Moses saw that the Israelites weren't all that different from the Egyptians. **GOD** told him he was leading a stiff-necked people, but the Israelites were ex-slaves who were spiritually no different than their previous masters. Jesus saw that His followers weren't any different from the rest of the Jews at that time. That's why He could ask our Father to forgive us all.

Mohammed saw that he was no spiritually different from all higher classes of man even though he didn't even know how to read. He could see and unabashedly say that the mountain would come to him. (He just didn't literally mention that when it arrived, all his followers would have to climb it.)

Everyone disobeys the Hebrew Testament, the law, which is the foundation of all religion. There's a price you have to pay today for not having a slave. There's a price to pay if you refuse to stone disobedient children. There's a price men pay for sleeping with other men. But that price is love. And it's worth the price.

The Jews already paid the price for love another way. We already know Christ's love. We made our way out of our head into our heart when we joined the Christian world in the New World. But the Muslims will have to come out of their soul to come to know us from their heart. We already have souls we're proud of. It's now time for the Muslims to prove to us that they can appreciate our hearts from their heart.

Who doesn't want to read Torah without thanking our ancestors for crossing off some lessons learned, like chores on a to-do list? Is there anyone left who really cares about the moral consequences of mixing wool and linen? Thank **GOD** we've gotten some of our spiritual lessons out of the way.

It's but a minor infraction to spoil your servants, children and boyfriends. It's an indulgence we grant ourselves with a wink-and-nod. When you're as spiritually rich as we are today, it's preferable to pay the price by taking these issues *personally* rather than wrestle with *literal* adherence to **GOD's** laws.

Liberals don't want to be literal. Progressives don't want to be spiritually thrifty. We don't want to be "mean" in the English sense of

the word. We don't want to be black (guilt) and white (love). We rely on shades of gray to show us **GOD's** merciful nature.

Individually together we can get through **GOD's** first two Good Books, the Old Testament and the New. Those who can *perceive* the goodness of man's heart can help those who are emotionally *blind*. Those who can walk tall can help carry those who are limping in pain or suffering from an emotional miscarriage of justice. Those who can love can teach those who still hate. Those who are bent over can help those who are straight. It just takes a little *humility* to give to your *self* and receive from your *self*.

Mental illness ate through me like a cancer. It left my mind so decayed and rotten that I could finally *see* that I couldn't *perceive* the goodness in my own heart. In mental institutions, I finally heard myself inside screaming above the din around me, telling me to "Shut up and listen!" And yet on the outside I never said a word. There's a lot of noise in silence, even in a Buddhist meditating...

In the parade of life, I could smell my own stench. Open your heart emotionally and soul spiritually with your imagination and you'll smell what it's like inside you. But your heart and soul are no dirtier than your physical body since you probably take great pains to keep your body clean.

I could still dance ballet with mental illness, the most rigorous physical demand for the human body. But I had trouble taking baby steps toward the next level of self-love without being able to put my heart and soul into what my body was doing. I had to glean humility from my experiences to allow me to help my self *slowly*.

People were always for practice. There comes a time when I had to stop practicing on others and open a practice in helping my self. There's no way I could have become who I am today had I not continued my spiritual education after I had my Ph.D. in "Me." I had to lawyer up. I needed spiritual, legal assistance.

66. Engineer of Self-Love

I started out life so spiritually untrained, so ignorant and illiterate, and yet have managed to figuratively go through several, spiritual careers – doctor, lawyer and computer science administrator. And, at last, I'm working to become a spiritual engineer.

A spiritual engineer is someone who can see the integrity of every person as a building, well supported with "I" beams. A spiritual engineer gives thanks to the bridges she crosses with patience and the freeways of friendship she takes each day to do her spiritual work.

A spiritual engineer knows there are tools that must be mastered in order to obey the laws of spiritual physics that underlie human nature. She has a respect for discipline and the procedures she's studied in an effort to understand why every spiritual structure must be sound. Spiritual systems are put in place to achieve respect for the self, and the integrity of the self is built upon a foundation of attention to her spiritual details.

An engineer can handle the emotional thermostat inside her that regulates the cold (fear) and heat (anger). She can modulate the inner humidity caused by sorrow. Her inner environment is under her control because she has the spiritual education necessary to maintain her self as needed.

As an engineer of the self, I'm keenly aware of my mother, the woman in me who may be on her deathbed. I'll survive my mother, but I can't live without the feminine aspect of my self. I may look like a man on the outside, but I'm more like a woman within.

An engineer of spiritual infrastructure venerates mindfulness for being the concrete that builds edifices and roads in the soul. She praises passion as the spiritual caterpillar cranes that hoist love to unbelievable heights where the public works of the self are erected.

She's an engineer of the conscience, soldering ethical thoughts to loving feelings to create moral structures with views out on the world that others will find magnificent. Her body is self-inspiration personified.

My passion for spiritual engineering is illustrated in the following essay I published in 2009 in Outward Magazine:

Marrying Myself

Being able to marry a man has become more important to me than ever before. It has become a sign that humanity is not only willing to embrace religious and ethnic differences, but other ways of expressing love as well. I yearn for everyone to reach that level of awareness, but until that day comes, there is another form of union I aspire to, the feeling every day of being happily married to me.

In childhood, I hated being me, and my experiences at school only intensified that hatred. As an adult, I used drugs and sex to escape myself, and eventually sought the ultimate breakaway from love by attempting suicide. Once I got clean and sober in my thirties, I met a special guy, and through him I actually came to *like* myself. But when our relationship ended after fourteen years, I realized I was either going to revert to hating myself or I'd have to seek self-love.

After my separation from my former partner, I figuratively dated myself, asking myself if I were the kind of person I could spend a lifetime with. And I suddenly realized I yearned to share myself with me, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, until death we do part. Last April, I finally popped the question and eloped to Israel where I married myself at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem with **GOD** as my witness. As part of my marriage vows to myself, I promised never to divorce myself from me again with substances, cynicism or suicide.

Learning to accept *me* as my soul mate was the greatest act of love I've ever been given. It made peace with my parents and my past, and brought me the feeling of a future filled with hope.

In the brief time I've been wedded to me, I've had to assure myself of my fidelity with thousands of figurative hugs and kisses. I've had to have faith in me, believe in me and put my trust in me. But as a result, my self-confidence has risen and I respect myself in a way I never could before.

Others even seek out my company now to learn how to keep the hope of gay marriage alive by marrying from the inside out. Ironically, my marriage to me has been a new beginning in getting to know *others* better, and my relationship to my community is stronger because I carry myself like a happily married man. Giving myself a fairy tale ending every day doesn't precluded me from loving others all the more. In fact, it makes it much easier.

When the gift of gay marriage finally does arrive to include us as equals in the joys of matrimony, I'll be better prepared in already having tied the knot with me. I'll be able to give another, special guy all the love and devotion I've already grown accustomed to.

If everyone married him/herself before getting into commitments with others, I think romantic relationships would be strengthened and more lasting. And if the next generation of youth marries themselves earlier in life than I did, they'll surely come to see gays as a people who give *greater* meaning to the bonds of matrimony.

My personal covenant with the Teacher sustains me. **He** is the Judge that married my mother and father and made me. I'm the union of a man and a woman wedded into "one" for my lifetime. I'm the two triangles my parents brought together to create the star of david I call "me."

I'm a fragile wine glass wrapped in the sacred fabric of reality. I'm a gay-Jewish groom who's crushed myself under foot. I've been shattered into countless shards in an effort to remember my promises

to the Temple that was destroyed in an effort to teach Israel to construct her temple within.

I mix metaphors like a drunken guest mixes drinks at a wedding. I dance with my arms raised, hoisting myself up as if in a chair, joyously, gaily prancing around the room with me in my arms. I'm drunk on my love at this, my wedding, in the late June of my one and only year on earth. I'm part doctor, part lawyer and part Indian chief. I'm my own little tribe. I'm a perfect match for me, a match engineered in heaven.

67. C.P.A. of Self-Love

There's a bookkeeper within me that keeps track of every feeling I've ever experienced. This bookkeeper balances my emotional books by requiring me to offset every intellectual debit with an emotional credit, and every emotional debit with a spiritual subtotal. Every "tit" has to have its "tat." There must always be an "aye" for an "eye."

But my bookkeeper drove me crazy because he kept two sets of books, and I don't mean one for my heart and one for my soul, but one to keep track of the behavior of others, and the other to keep track of my own. It was totally, spiritually disreputable. I had to send that demented, little, inner bookkeeper to spiritual college to get a degree in spiritual accounting. I had to turn him into a C.P.A of spirituality.

My mother's maiden name was "Herter," or "herdsman" in German. The first herdsman was, of course, Abel, in the second story of Genesis. His blood cried out from the ground for justice. But Cain, the farmer, eventually cried out for mercy from **GOD**... If you don't recognize these two parts of your self, you won't be able to reconcile your own accounts.

My mother's second last name, her first married name, was "Zeve" which means a "ray of light" in Hebrew. She married my father after the War and saw the light, or, to be more poetically precise, married into it.

Her third last name was "Roos," Dutch for "rose." Her second husband was Belgian. His father was Jewish and his mother was Christian. My mother's father was Christian and her mother was Jewish. Her name became "Bella Roos," the beautiful rose.

My spiritual inner accountant has to be able to balance the books of *my* life, however, not my mother's. He has to be able to account for how I've loved my *self* and how I've loved my *life*. If I keep one set of books for others, and a second, for myself, I'm going

to appear disreputable in my own eyes. If I only appear to balance my books without accounting for my belief system, I'll be exposed as a hypocrite one way or another. To become a C.P.A. of my soul, I had to enroll myself in this special, degree program in my continuing education.

The only things we have to do in life are die and pay taxes. But spiritually speaking, we have to do both on a daily basis. There's a tithing to your container called aging. There's a tithing to your contents called, for lack of a better word, "taxes."

If "time" is the tithe you pay each day externally, than "space" is the tithe each day you pay internally. A little bit of inner space is given up to **GOD** each day, leaving you a little more spiritually cramped inside. By the time you die, there really isn't much more inner space for you to move around in. You *have* to leave the premises.

A spiritual accountant begins by recognizing the difference between "holiness" in Judaism (separation) verses Christianity (unification). A spiritual C.P.A. has to be able account for his ability to separate and unite himself. He has to be able to separate that which is his each day from that which he gives up. And then he has to unite all that's left with a sense of satisfaction.

Growing old is easier than you think because you've been doing it for so long. It's just that nobody ever told you what you were doing. You were paying spiritual taxes until the day when you have nothing left to give.

The Jewish people were separated from the pagan world and made holy by **GOD** through that separation. **GOD** chose us before *we* chose **HIM**. This separated the Jews from the rest of humanity, a separation that we've honored from the start and still honor in our relationship to **GOD** today.

The Christian people, however, were given a spiritual choice the Jews didn't have. They could continue as Jews, or they could make the choice to follow Jesus. And for this reason, they aren't "The Chosen People." They're the people who can choose. This freedom to choose **GOD** through another spiritual path united them with **HIM** in a whole other way.

On the personal level, you've got to have separation before you have an option for unity. You don't have to be chosen before you can choose. But you do have to feel chosen in order to freely choose. If you use that sense of specialness to feel superior or resentful, you're only going to miss the point of **GOD** having created these two steps up to **HIS** throne.

In order to avoid the arrogance of spite, you've first got to separate from your mother before you can reunite with her. You've got to separate from her physically (birth); emotionally (puberty); and spiritually (death). And you've got to believe in the sanctity of your separation from her. Like a toddler learning to walk, you've got to leave your mother and father's arms and move in the direction of your Mother and Father without leaving "*them*" behind.

In order to honor your father and mother, you have to first learn how to separate from them *gracefully*. This is done by looking for evidence that you're practicing separation from others each day just by getting a day older and paying your spiritual taxes to **GOD**.

Republicans who insist the government is too big also believe that **GOD** is too small. They want to shrink government and expand **GOD's** influence in our daily lives. Their intentions are good, but their methods are terrible. How would they like if we on the left shut down churches for a few Sundays to make our point? No. The issue of external authority and internal authority must be discussed far more rationally than it's presently understood.

It's easy to use words in clever ways. Words are cheap. It's easy to load boxcars with goods and bring them to market verbally without even bothering to mention the metaphor implied beneath the words used. We're all poets who know how to use words to our advantage, but only on the level of consciousness we take for granted in our self. It's much harder to perform deeds that reflect the depth of words in ways that *everyone* can relate to.

Each of the three Abrahamic faiths is itself filled with separations internally. They can't proclaim unity for humanity because they aren't unified within themselves. Separation and unification, therefore, have to be strived for in the individual, using whichever faith you choose. Those who strive for this unification through a melding of their thoughts (head); feelings (heart); and beliefs (conscience) – will become soulful. Those who do not will be enrolled in classes in the school of self-love befitting their level of awareness.

Appreciation of life for those of us who are spiritual accountants must take into consideration history (religion) and mystery (psychology). A human being lives at the intersection of both of these roads. Every human being is crucified on the cross of beliefs and thinking. It's only as we writhe in pain at what we're doing to ourselves that we realize how our feelings are contributing to our experiences.

As a C.P.A. of spirituality, I not only have to be able to account for spiritual matters in society. I have to be able to account for them in

myself. This brings me (once again) to the question of my homosexuality.

Everyone is in a homosexual relationship with himself. There's no way a man *can't* know what it feels like to have sex with a man. He *is* a man! Of course he knows. Whether he wants to have sex with *another* man isn't the question. The question is whether he's willing to enjoy the homosexual relationship he's in with himself, or vilify it. This is a matter of the heart.

Self-love is homosexual by definition. If you're so disgusted by the look of your own penis; the thought of you having an orgasm; or the thought of you touching yourself - you won't ever be able to claim you love yourself. Such people will always look at gays with disgust.

If you're a heterosexual male you can't possibly conclude that you're good in bed if you can't stand the thought of being in bed with yourself *and* with a woman at the same time. You have to at least *like* your self to enjoy the company of another person in bed with you. Whether you're gay or straight, if you've given up on sex altogether, you ought to question how you feel about *you*, not *other* people.

You can't possibly be sexual, sensual, erotic, carnal, fleshy or sexy if you can't stand the thought of self-love in the physical sense of making love. Masturbation is the beginning of a lifelong love affair with sexual intercourse with others, while self-indulgence is the fib you'll perpetrate on yourself instead.

Just because I earned a spiritual degree giving me the right to consider myself a certified, spiritual, public accountant of my self doesn't mean I'm automatically the secretary of my own treasury. Balancing my inner budget has turned out to be a monumental task.

All my life, I had all sorts of spiritual get-rich-quick schemes that left me feeling momentarily and monetarily cheated. I robbed myself over time, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but always in ways that left me feeling much poorer than I was before. I stole love out from under myself and gave it to people who didn't deserve it. I even found figurative "whipping boys" to take my punishments for me.

My emotional indebtedness to my self was what has caused my posture to slump slightly, my hairline to recede a bit, and my emotions to fall into self-pity from time to time. If I'd treated myself more fairly from the start, I'd probably have aged more gracefully in every way.

Now it's too late to go back and change the figures to make it look like I've always balanced my books. The truth is they were terribly out of balance, but they've been balanced on a daily basis for quite some time. I'm no longer spiritually broke and in debt. I owe

GOD more than I can ever repay thanks for having given me the mother **HE** chose for me, and I suspect **HE**'s going to want me to repay society for that instead of **HIM**.

I should have run myself like a federation of united, inner states of positivity, not a homeland of insecurities. If my mother could have ended up with a name like a nation (Bella Roos/Belarus), I can certainly be inspired to be a symbol of Israel.

When I found myself emotionally bankrupted and indebted to "me," I wanted to die to get out of the spiritual obligations I was under. Neither religion nor psychology was rich enough to bail me out. You can't buy yourself out of hell even when you're the president, supreme court judge, secretary of the treasury or senator of your federation of inner voices. You need a **POWER** greater than your self. You need the truth.

This morning I spoke to my mother. She told me she wants me to come to her to help her take off her "jacket." I told her it's her body she wants to take off, and that she has to take it off herself. Then she told me she's going to take it off in layers, and I replied that that was a good idea, and she should make herself comfortable and go home if she likes.

Then she told me that she's through "playing games" at night. (She played cards every night with the girls in the Jewish Home.) I told her she didn't have to play games with people anymore. Then she said she's worried about the "schedule." So I said she, my sister and I are each on our own schedule. She shouldn't worry about being late. She can leave any time she wants.

Then I spoke to her nurse, and she told me that she doesn't think my mother is dying. She said she's even a little better than yesterday. So, now I'm just concerned that when my mother finds out I've been telling everyone she's dying, she won't go through with it just to embarrass me...

This evening I spoke to her again, and she does sound much stronger. I told her how majestic she is in my eyes for sticking around to help my sister and her children change their attitude. She agreed. I told her heaven and earth will never be able to separate us, and she agreed that our relationship of mother to son was amazing. And I told her that when we say "goodbye" on these calls, it's only "adieu." And I told her that her husband must also be so proud of her choosing to stay and help my sister and her children rather than reunite with him.

I needed to *do* something to make *my* world a better place. I had to fight for *my* good, not just approve of myself for the reputation I had in others' eyes. I have to turn a cheek to the mistakes I make to

look at them more closely, not to exonerate myself for anything. Then, to see my world from a better perspective, I have to turn the other cheek to look straight ahead where I'm going.

Forgiving myself for what I did didn't work. Hating myself for what I didn't do didn't work. Running away from myself for what I couldn't get myself to do didn't work. The subtle conspiracy against my effort to be good had begun within me and it had to be *accounted* for.

My mental health made it mandatory that I balance my own books. I can't force another person to account for his actions, let alone account for *mine*. People can be very recalcitrant about tending to their mental health. They'd often rather go crazy or do insane things to others rather than take responsibility for their actions. They'd rather not go to class in the K-12 of spiritual life on earth to indulge themselves in the autonomy of playing games on the playground of the school of self-love instead.

When I discovered I was as guilty as everyone else for cooking the books, I realized there was no way to avoid paying my back taxes. I needed a spiritual C.P.A. to tell me I couldn't afford to go on vacation every day anymore. I had to, at least, learn how to calculate my own spiritual taxes and earn enough each day to pay them.

Some of the poorest people on earth have plenty of *dollars* and no *sense*. If they don't use their emotional and spiritual wealth to invest in a little train travel to see their world, they're really not going to be able to say they got very far when they reach the end of the line.

The Jews watched the Christians for hundreds of years as they squabbled over the meaning of Christ's life as they divided themselves into Catholics and Protestants in Western Europe. Today, we're all watching as the Sunni and Shiite Muslims are doing something similar.

It may seem crazy to tell the Muslims that they need to become accountants just to account for all their commutes by train. Without an understanding of the metaphor of life as a school and thoughts as trains, this statement is meaningless. But it does seem to me that unless we use multiple metaphors to help the Muslims figure themselves out, they're going to continue *fighting* when they could, like the rest of the Abrahamic faiths, just enjoy *arguing* with one another.

If you look at a baby, you can see such goodness in its eyes. And as babies turn into toddlers, they're still filled with love and awe at a world they haven't yet come to hate. But the spiritual wealth

they're born with, like baby fat, dries up as the world taxes them in unavoidable and cruel ways.

The grape turns sour. Then it turns into a raisin on the vine. And then it falls off and another season starts the spiritual process all over again. When will man turn the blood in his veins into wine?

We have to reduce the cost of the spiritual education of today's newborns after they're born. We've got to feel accountable for the success of the next generation to feel that our own spiritual education has been worthwhile. A good life is one well *lived* inside and out, not one you can say you just barely managed to *survive*.

The Jews established compulsory literacy in our communities 200 years before the birth of Jesus. The British established compulsory literacy in the 19th Century... We've got to make secular education compulsory for everyone worldwide, but we've got to encourage people to pursue their spiritual education earlier in life as well. We've got to teach our children how to read the handwriting on the wall, not just how to text one another on their screen.

As a spiritual accountant, I can tell you that if you're not ready to invest your love generously in yourself, you're going to see it quickly inflate and thereby diminish in value. You've got to *have* love to *make* love. You've got to *do* good to *be* good. And you've got to *believe* in the good that you're doing with a light heart to have *faith* in yourself.

Some Christians believe that the body and blood of Christ must literally be consumed through communion. Some believe it must figuratively be consumed sexually. And some believe it must only be consumed spiritually. It doesn't really matter how you find the passion to believe that your life is important. What matters is that you live life passionately and lovingly. Your motivation isn't important; it's the results you achieve. **GOD** knows your intentions. Do you?

Those rich in passion will always get richer, and those poor in passion will only get poorer until they question their intentions. So choose which direction you're headed, because you're sure to arrive, wherever you're going.

If you want to account to yourself for the journey you're on, you're going to have to give up a little bit of your estate to "the powers that be." Some have to give up a limb; others a relationship; some their pride; some their money. Whatever you have to lose to learn about loss will surely disappoint you, but you'll still discover that $1 - 1 = 1$

Can you live another day knowing that the math they taught you in the second grade doesn't conform to spiritual math? If you want to become a spiritual accountant in the school of self-love, you're

going to have to learn to subtract if you're going to be fruitful enough to multiply your blessings until they're large enough for you to see.

68. Graduation from the School of Self-Love

I'd treated life like a game I was going to play forever. Then it became a sport with winners and losers. But when I was through playing games and ready to use my imagination more constructively, life became a school, and I became my major. Ironically, that's when my interest in the secret of my life really began. You can't imagine what it means to graduate with honors until you learn what it means to be enrolled fulltime.

I now find I'm actually in a healthy competition with everyone, especially my family. I told my mother she's my queen, my elizabeth, and I'm her mary. I wonder why we were so favored, and why **GOD** presents **HIMSELF** to us in such an odd, mysterious way. What is the future of this child within me? How is he going to reveal the better part of me?

I now see how important it is to treat everyone with the respect they deserve. I now see how important my conscience is in guiding me to do so. My reputation is always on the line. My name is always in question. Life is a tightrope, and I could easily fall from grace if I don't grip the wire with my soles.

I can no longer improve my grades without looking deeply into my "desires." What I want is always in question. Therefore, I must be willing to use my head, heart and conscience/soul to labor with every step I take. I need my penis more than ever. I need to be able to listen to the voice of my power to help me direct my life-giving force.

My father created life by helping to create me, but *my* desire is to *improve* life, not *create* it. I thrust my desires upon others to make their inner world better. I have no desire to debate about what'll improve their lives in the political/social realm. With personal freedom, liberty and emancipation, they can decide that for themselves.

My mother is the foremost member of my congregation, and I am her rabbi. My job is to guide her toward her finish line. My mission is to help her raise her self-esteem with joy at the way her life has turned out. In that sense, I'm her savior. If I should die before her, I can already see the gleeful spite in my family when they'd tell her of my demise...

The boyfriend **GOD** has given me makes me feel like the luckiest man on earth. He's a secretary in a Catholic church, but he's

all the apostles rolled up into one for me; such a good man with such good and loving intentions. Having him by my side is a privilege and a joy. I know **GOD** loves me even more than I thought.

When I was through imagining my success out in the world, I was ready to envision, picture and then conceive of my success in my inner world. But I had to go through my lessons in self-love in stages, each moving me spiraling inward toward peace of mind as the conduit to peace on earth.

I'm really not a writer in the conventional sense of the word. I'm a "journalist." I journal. And my books are diaries, not spiritual "self-help" books. My books are all "*self-help*" books. And that's quite different. There's no cry *out* for help.

Only after I could conceive of myself as a spiritual being learning to drive this physical vehicle I'm in could I then see that I was actually getting somewhere despite all the inner detours along the way. The spiral inward and away from the outer world hadn't been obvious at first. Nor did this road run smooth. But everyone's on it whether they see it so or not.

It's so difficult to speak about the thinking process that organizes our *head*; the emotional process that organizes our *heart*; and the belief system that organizes our conscience/soul. We're really just one person. But together these three systems create the spiritual process we can then perceive, if not fully in our self, then surely in others.

I couldn't have become who I am today without having overcome my aversion to talking to my self. For this, I needed **GOD** at my side as my Witness. At first, I needed to talk to **HIM** before I could hold these conversations with my self. I needed prayer before self-dialogue. I couldn't stand the claustrophobic feeling that came over me when I talked to my self for any length of time without imagining **GOD** inside me with me. Being that alone and by myself unnerved me.

Once I developed the skill of being by myself with my self, it became easier to go for longer periods of time without **GOD** consciously by my side. That's what I call "doing my homework." That's the difference between "loneliness" and "solitude."

Some people criticize Christians for dividing **GOD** up into three aspects (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) when there's only one **GOD**. But nursery school, level children in the school of self-love don't divide *themselves* up either. They're afraid if they figuratively separate themselves into pieces, they'll fall apart.

Feelings are just as morally important as thoughts, beliefs and desires. I know from my experiences that my sensations, urges, impulses and wants are all “desires” that play an important part in interfacing with my feelings. Previously, I’d felt locked in a closet with no one but me to talk to about such thing, so I couldn’t figure out that that inner closet was actually my heart. The sensation of “staying in” rather than “coming out” had been so unpleasant that I had to distract myself from me in as many external ways as possible.

Conservatives who insist on cramming gays back into the closet are, themselves, afraid of coming out. They may not need to come out gay, but they need to come out of their heart, nevertheless. Cramming us back into the closet like Japanese pushers on a subway platform is a projection of an inner urge they need to learn to overcome. They want to get the whole world back in the “closet.” They want to stop the competition in matters of the heart. They’re terrified of losing; that their love won’t be strong enough to succeed in impressing **GOD**.

Without poetic license, my inner process seemed ugly and base; too simplistic to be worth mentioning aloud. Without poetic license, I felt like a caricature; a lonely gay man who was tied to his mother’s apron string. I wasn’t yet someone who could call himself a “man.” I felt like a woman or a bunch of women seeking a man. I felt like the equation: $x^x + y^0 = y^0$

As a middle-aged man, I now have the ability to smile at young men on the street with warm regard. I can sometimes see what they’re going through without any urge to “do” anything about it. I can see they’re often terrified about smiling back at me, and it may not be because they’re afraid they’d have to sleep with me if they did. True, a smile might lead to a conversation, and a conversation might lead them to feel bad if they thought they’d have to reject sexual advances. But most young men have enough self-esteem to know how to say “no” to their peers. It’s just that they may worry about having to use that word on someone like me because of my advanced age. They don’t want to hurt anyone.

They may also not smile back because they may be a little envious of what they suspect I may know about the secret of life that they don’t. Or, they may not be curious enough about the secret of life to spend a few minutes engaging with someone who’s been exploring it longer. Some of the secret of life can be held just with a smile. Never forget that. A big smile goes from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet, and in that sense, it naturally includes your penis.

The imagination tries on attractions like jackets to see which fit well; which look good; and which feel comfortable. Sexuality,

sensuality and feeling good about ourselves are outfits we don. They're what we wear to conceal our embarrassment at being totally nude, naked and exposed before our Creator. Get comfortable with your spiritual wardrobe.

It's not a sign of intelligence to allow feelings to override thoughts. It's wiser to reject the intellectual ideas of others unless they build your confidence by telling you what you're doing right and telling you how you might improve upon that. Criticism of others rarely works unless you point out to them how they may be critical of themselves with or without just cause. Otherwise, just support people. Don't fill people's pockets with opinions that will only weigh them down.

It's acceptable for very small children and very old people to smile at just about anyone. But only those near birth or death are forgiven for giving their love so freely. The rest of us expect one another to *trade* our love in our effort to compete for **GOD's** approval. If we give our love away, people will suspect us of devious intentions.

Sadly, it's not just young, straight, black and Muslim Americans with handsome faces and pleasing torsos who dare not smile at any man they don't know for fear they turn out to be a gay-Jew. It could be said of you.

The world is losing reasons to smile at a dangerously alarming rate. If there's any assignment I think our Teacher ought to be giving **HIS** students, it's lessons in smiling. I don't know what **HE's** been waiting for. People so easily wipe the smiles off their face as though their smiles weren't real to begin with.

Your face is **GOD's** chalkboard and bulletin board. It holds vast amounts of information, but since you can't literally see it during the course of the day, you have to use your mind's eye to perceive what's written upon it. You'd be amazed at the posters hanging from your eyes, the words written with your nose, and the underlining emphatic comments made with your mouth.

Today, few people die with a smile on their face (probably because they were so afraid to smile while they were alive). It takes a lot of courage to smile, especially in the face of adversity. It takes a lot of courage to smile, especially when it might mean you're opening yourself to new ideas that you can't yet quite tell how they'll affect you.

We must ask ourselves why **GOD** connives with the rapist against the victim and condones the terror inflicted on parents by kidnapers. We see **HIS** hand is in every human tragedy as well as in the vicissitudes of natural calamities. But we don't ask ourselves what

rape has to do with one's self and kidnapping with one's inner child. We don't ask ourselves what earthquakes have to do with the ground beneath our being; what floods have to do with feelings; or why the desert is the harsh landscape of the Abrahamic traditions that mirrors the wilderness within.

We don't understand the wisdom of **GOD's** loving intention in first having created our inner world before **HE** put us in the world we share with others that mirrors our inner world. We wonder why there has to be a world around us as well as a world within. And so we question **HIS** love when we should be questioning the wisdom of *self-love*.

We're determined to get an accurate prediction of the weather for the weekend, but we don't do much to predict the weather within. The inner storms, tides, currents and the ebbs and flows of feelings can be mastered if we apply the scientific method to matters of our heart. This is the reason for the field of psychology. This is the *science* of religious inquiry when viewed from the heart.

The lessons you're working on are always about self-love. You can't love the one you're with if you don't continue to explore yourself until the moment you die. The student must believe in the benefits of a good education until the very end. If you imagine giving your Teacher a smile, it'd help enormously since you can't literally give **HIM** an apple (especially not the apple that Adam and Eve took from **HIM**).

Start by recognizing that **GOD** got over that apple a long time ago. It wasn't a big deal then, and it isn't a big deal now. It was just an example of the little things we take for granted that are so much more important than we realize.

You *can't* go back; you *can* go back. You can't *literally* go back and change anything, but you can *figuratively* go back and change everything. You can rewrite *your* history from your *heart* if you don't try to rewrite *our* history with your conniving *head*.

The lessons in the school of self-love on campus earth boil down to finding ways to say the words, "I love me," and believe them. The challenge is that in order to *believe* you love yourself, you first need to *know* yourself and then *feel* good about how you're changing yourself for the better on a daily basis. All this requires is a sound mind, a good heart, a desire to learn about yourself, and a conscience that's getting cleaner by the day.

Obedience to yourself is far more difficult to achieve than obedience to others. In order to be obedient to yourself, you have to tell your self what to do, *and do it*. But even learning to obey yourself

is a waste of time if you don't use your love for you to dream really big. You've got to proclaim your love for you loudly in all those ways that are so special to you. You can't whisper your love. You can't be embarrassed by it.

When you graduate from the school of self-love, you should endeavor to die with a smile on your face. You should leave school with *gratitude* to the Teacher; *appreciation* for your own hard work; and *thankful* to your classmates for their help in parenting you when you couldn't parent your own inner child. There's no point in having been enrolled in this institution of higher learning if you don't have anything good to say about all those you learned to love indirectly, while you were here learning to love the one you're with.

69. Forwarding My Transcript

The school of self-love will end when all the classes you're attending are dismissed and the Teacher graduates you. All the subjects you were enrolled in will show up on your transcript; those passed, those failed and even those not completed. You can only hope your spiritual education on earth will get you where you want to go after life. **GOD** knows, you won't get very far when you leave here if you couldn't even learn to love *yourself*, to say nothing of loving the secret of your life, all your classmates and your education.

All the world within you can be summed up with the two words "truth" and "beauty." The truth of your life can't be described in words. It has to be seen as your story. But the beauty of your life can be summed up with the word "self-love." If you've come to know beauty in any form, you've familiarized yourself with self-love.

Resentment of others that doesn't go away will eventually become a mirror of all the hard work you didn't do for you. Your resentments of others will haunt you and become personal. Hard-nosed principles that make you defiant of others won't be evidence of your love, but of a diffused anger you'll find difficult to address. Callousness of *your* feelings will only distance you from yourself...

Try not to be frightened by you. Try not to be angry with yourself. Try not to be sad about your self. Remember that forgiveness leads to joy, even though joy includes some sorrow. Don't settle for crumbs from your own table. Don't go away hungry to be someone you're not. Don't go away thirsty for someone other than you.

Make sure there are no "incompletes" on your spiritual transcript. That would indicate fears, resentments and anger about classes you walked out on in frustration. There's no need to graduate

vexed with your education down here. Complete every class you were enrolled in credit/no credit if you find it too hard to take for a grade. “Average” is actually a very high mark that’s getting higher all the time at this institution of learning...

It’s a waste of time to apologize to the Teacher for your grades. Apologies always turn into excuses, blame of others or resentment of the curriculum you were enrolled in. Just thank **HIM** for **HIS** help. Ask for more help in understanding your schedule of classes, and then get busy on the assignment before your eyes.

Not every experience will create pleasure, pain or suffering in order to make it personal and real. Sometimes ambivalence and disinterest will be the consequences of your experiences. So suck up your pain, suffering and vacillation with a little self-pity. You’re better than you think. When you imagine your transcript, you’ll agree.

70. Lifelong Spiritual Learning

Life is like a good book you’re in the process of writing. Therefore the last chapter should tie up all the loose ends that haven’t been resolved and prepare you for the sequel. You need closure on you, and if you don’t get it, you may not rest in peace even after you “rest in peace.”

The challenge for most people is in going back to infancy where so many chapters were started and left unfinished. They may not want to face that kind of vulnerability and helplessness unless they feel they can access it without serious internal conflict.

You can go back even as far as the day you were born using your mind’s eye without unnecessary pain and suffer. You got yourself out of the first tight spot you were in, and so there’s a lot from that lesson you can apply to the rest of your life.

You can go back with the insight you have now and witness your inner infant with the current meaning of life you’ve achieved. You can go back with curiosity about how each nursery school lesson you completed got you enrolled in a subsequent course you took. If you go *back* with the goal of self-love, you’ll move *forward* with the rewards of self-adoration.

“Prodigal” means generous, lavish, liberal, unstinted, unsparing and bounteous. It also means to spend resources freely and recklessly; wastefully and extravagantly. I am the “prodigal son” who returned to my mother’s house after literally experiencing **GOD**’s extravagance on a grand scale - traveling all around the world in the 1970’s; dancing professionally in an Israeli ballet and modern dance company; buying

a houseboat in Holland; and using my Midas touch to make just about all of my dreams, except love, come true. I came back to America from an early adulthood of bounty; and then went insane. But in the process of growing up *my* way, I learned the positive meanings of the word “prodigal.”

I returned to my mother and learned to honor her virtues and forgive her vices. I came back with questions rather than proclamations. I learned to *ask* if I am my mother’s keeper, while my sister remained stuck with the menial chore of literally caring for her.

My mother was my father, and my sister was the obedient son in our family. My sister became more and more jealous of me because I got the special attention that comes with ignorance, loss and failure. What she missed out on was the extraordinary way in which I got to fix, repair, mend, revamp, restore, refurbish, overhaul and patch up my relationship with my self.

Don’t be afraid to learn to *love*, *like* and *adore* your self. You’re as adorable as a baby when you feel that *you’re* your baby. When you pursue self-love by showing you that you can *like* yourself, you come to *adore* yourself for all the right reasons.

You can still hold on to your vanity and conceit. You don’t have to give up your love of your body (vanity) or your mind (conceit) for **GOD**’s sake. You don’t have to throw your pride out the window either.

Go back to being a baby again, but in a celebratory fashion this time, not with angst and irritation at the infantile side of yourself that may cry out for justice only for others *or* yourself. Go back to infancy with the joy of being held in **GOD**’s moral arms at all times.

If you’ve developed an inner mother who loves you enough, she’ll be able to hold you through your tears. If you’ve developed an inner father wise enough, he’ll be able to hold *her* as she holds *you*. Learning more about your self may, at times, seem embarrassing, shameful or humiliating, but it can also be exciting, enlightening and joyful.

Guilt will always lead you nearer to self-love if you feel sorry for having thought (head), felt (heart), willed (penis) and concluded (conscience/soul) something that wasn’t sacred about your self.

The nurse called me at 4:00 A.M. this morning to tell me my mother was agitated, and asked me to calm her down. It turned out, my mother was upset because my sister had treated her condescendingly, and my mother told me how deeply she wants to be respected and treated like an adult, not a child. And, of course, I had to agree. The lesson I learned from her when *I* called *her* in 1984 and told her I

couldn't go on anymore, and asked her to help me get back on psychiatric medication was that I, too, wanted to be treated like an adult despite my circumstances.

It's six weeks later, and it doesn't look like my mother is about to "go" anytime soon, even if she's not ready to leave the convalescent hospital she was transferred to, to make her way back to the Jewish Home where she enjoyed independent living. Today, I had to tell her that she's embarrassing me by being defiant, stubborn and childish toward the nurses. That was very hard to do because, above all else, she never wanted to be a burden or an embarrassment to her children.

I've done my best to encourage her with accolades, compliments and kudos. I've impressed upon her how much she's inspired me and made me the man I am today. I've told her that no man can claim to love women any more than he can love his own mother. And because of my mother's relationship with her mother, she intuitively understands what I'm saying.

My mother instinctively knows she has more to live for in the continuing, adult education classes after her Ph.D. in self-love. She's well aware of the *mystery* of **GOD's** ways. Like all of us, she can't anticipate what **HE's** going to do next, but she's learning to believe in herself more little-by-little even at the age of 94.

When you extend the metaphor of life as a school to the max., you realize you're not only going to graduate with a diploma. You're going to graduate with a résumé. You're not only going to shake hands with the Teacher at your last ceremony. You're going to present **HIM** your curriculum vitae and silently await your next task in serving **HIM**. But you're going to want to proudly show **HIM** all the wonderful skills you've learned on earth that you hope you'll be able to use on your next assignment.

The wisdom of self-love leads to joy, but you may have to go through many unpleasant emotions along the way before you get there. If you manage to work your way out of your guilt in being who **GOD** made you, you'll find a freedom, liberty and emancipation you may not have recognized before.

GOD doesn't have to limit **HIMSELF** to the morality of man. **HE** can permit **HIMSELF** to do things no one else should. And tolerating, accepting and admiring **HIM** can only happen if you first practice tolerating, accepting and admiring your self with the highest of moral self-regard.

There are those enrolled in this academy on earth only to achieve the highest degree possible, but who never choose to go back to discover the basics. Only those who make their way painfully

through the sorts of things we think are “elementary” will discover how advanced they really are. Ironically, they become the greatest aficionados of their education here on earth.

Love the outcomes of your life by learning from *all* of them. They’re intended to teach you something new and different about yourself from now until the very last moment of your life. Disappointment can turn “happiness” into “joy.” So do your best to die joyously, not gleefully.

Table #2 Self-Love

| | | | | |
|--|--------------------|------------|------------|--|
| W I S D O M | The Pursuit of Joy | | | E M A N U E L I P A T I O N |
| | Guilt | Other-Love | Faith | |
| | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | |
| | | | | |
| L O V E | Humiliation | Sorrow | Admiration | L I B E R T Y |
| | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| G E N E R O S I T Y | Shame | Anger | Acceptance | F R E E D O M |
| | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| The Pursuit of Happiness | | | | |

Other Books by Barry Emanuel Zeve:

Becoming:

89 Poems of My Love for Me

The Forbidden Fruit's Perspective

Torah for Straight People

A Guest At Their Table

My Gay-Jewish Review of Christ's Feast of Self-Love