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THE MIDDLE THEORY: A GUIDE TO BALANCE

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Written by Deshon Fox.

**For Dolly**

*I miss you.*

*Set before thine eyes God's unerring  
Balance and, as one standing in His presence, weigh in that  
Balance thine actions every day, every moment of thy life.  
—Bahá'u'llah*

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## Introduction

*There is a place of balance,  
a place of peace and happiness in all things.  
—The Middle Theory*

In every field of human endeavor an ideal state is attained when a condition of balance is realized. In Physiology, for example, it is well understood that to be healthy the body has to maintain internal balance despite changes in the external environment. In Statics, when all forces acting on a body are balanced, a desirable state of equilibrium is reached. Without equilibrium, buildings and bridges would collapse. Other fields of study—Biology, Kinesiology, Chemistry, and Economics to name a few— reveal a similar truth: balance is the ideal condition given a defined set of influences.

Turning our attention to our understanding of human consciousness, it stands to reason that balance—in this case, the balance of awareness—results in the attainment of an ideal state of consciousness. This ideal state would, no doubt, elevate our thinking, bring focus and clarity to our actions, and sensitize us to the promptings of our higher nature. Despite life's inevitable ups and downs, the net result of sustaining this state of awareness would be enduring happiness. Do we not yearn for this? *The Middle Theory* contains sweeping insights and practical approaches that can guide us to this enlightening place.

The knowledge contained in *The Middle Theory* was not derived from research and experimentation; it was sparked by a sudden shift in consciousness that I experienced shortly after my mother died of cancer. I was alone late one evening, crying on the couch, when my thoughts drifted back to an inexplicable experience I had years earlier in college: during a lighthearted chat with a friend, I suddenly became aware of myself writing a book. Emerald green with glimmering gold letters on its cover, this book appeared in my thoughts with such intensity that I was temporarily unaware of the conversation I was having. With childlike certainty, I immediately knew I would someday write a book of spiritual significance.

As I lay crying on the couch reflecting on this experience, a soft but commanding inner voice prompted me to begin writing. But what was I to write about? I had no idea. Enlivened by a flash of inspiration, I raced to the study and began scribbling sentences as fast as I could on a pad near the computer. I continued writing into the early morning, pausing only to read certain passages. I was astonished to find a coherent message, to survey words poetically strung together. Like a plane on autopilot, everything just seemed to be happening. My thoughts were still and yet words continued pouring on to the pad. The joy I felt during this experience is beyond my ability to describe.

For the next nine years I continued working on the book. There were times when I wrote a little and other times when I wrote incessantly. Over the course of my writing I was transformed; my awareness deepened and I found I no longer desired certain things. I stopped watching television, aside from a few news programs. I had little interest in anything that was not conducive to my spiritual growth. Though I am by no means a master of this material—I remain a humble student of this wisdom—I have experienced firsthand the empowering transformation that results when our consciousness shifts

towards a balanced state of awareness. You too can have this experience.

The remarkable thing about attaining a balanced state of awareness is that every facet of our lives is positively impacted. Because our state of awareness greatly influences how we make choices, everything in our lives is transformed when we choose from a place of expanded awareness. Our health gradually improves because we consistently choose to eat healthy foods and focus on uplifting thoughts. Our relationships are strengthened because we choose to communicate and behave in ways that foster understanding and trust. In general, we make choices with a deep awareness of their spiritual and physical consequences.

Unlike the gamut of spiritual books, *The Middle Theory* integrates the major elements of our life to form a comprehensive philosophy that addresses the pressing social and spiritual concerns that we have at both the individual and collective levels. As such, it provides principles for attaining inner balance, disseminates practical advice for strengthening the bonds of our relationships, addresses sensitive social issues, impartially explores the reality of God, and confronts divisive religious and social beliefs. It speaks openly of the oneness of humanity and the need for religious unity. It urges us to be guided by reason instead of superstition and blind ideology. As it does all this, its ultimate goal is to help us become balanced, fully functioning human beings that contribute to the betterment of humanity.

The Middle Theory's philosophy focuses on three key areas:

1. Self-awareness (Who am I?)
2. Relationships (How can I develop meaningful, nurturing relationships?)
3. Service (How can I aid the progress of society?)

These three areas define the common journey we are on. Each area is associated with a major life question that we seek answers

for at various stages of our growth. To the extent that we become aware of empowering answers that fill us with a sense of purpose, and that motivate us to adopt attitudes and beliefs that support our spiritual health and humankind's collective advancement, we spiritually progress to deeper states of balanced awareness. Conversely, when we are unable to find empowering answers to these major life questions, either because we choose to ignore the wisdom life constantly presents to us or because we choose to be at odds with this wisdom, we arrive at conditions that manifest disharmony and suffering. In essence, we become lost in a maze of our own creation, unable to see our way forward.

There is nothing more important than the process you are about to begin. Your journey of personal transformation is, however, never without challenges. The greatest challenge before you is not understanding what you read—this is not a complicated philosophy—it is being committed, truly committed, to the often arduous process of spiritual growth. If you remain committed to the transformative process ahead, you will come to understand the meaning of true happiness—you will attain balance.

Deshon Fox  
Nassau, Bahamas,  
April 2009

One

## Discovery

*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking  
new landscapes, but in having new eyes.*

—*Marcel Proust*

We exit our mother's womb with malleable minds ready to be molded by our new environments. We are given a name, told we are members of a certain family and race, admonished not to think and do certain things and, for most of our childhood and adolescence, defined by the beliefs and attitudes of others. Invariably, as we mature into adults, we feel a need to go beyond the superficial descriptions, the second-hand labels, and discover our true identity.

A good portion of our brief existence here on earth is spent searching for an identity that feels right. Life offers us many guises, but, like cheap suits, these guises never fit perfectly. We may use a guise for a period, only to discard it upon finding something that better suits our mood. This trying on of new hats, so to speak, is inevitable given the pace of change that defines the material world; nevertheless, we share a common need to feel whole, to identify something within ourselves that is constant, something that anchors us to our spiritual identity.

Some part of us knows we are more than physical creatures of bone, blood, and water. We sense, in those rare moments of clarity, that there exists within us a mystical, spiritual presence that holds the answers to our questions. We want to identify with this sacred self; to know it, to feel it, to communicate with it, and to somehow be changed once and for all by its mystical powers. But, because of fear and doubt, we hold back. Instead of going beyond the superficial and discovering the vastness of our inner reality, we settle for makeshift guises that cannot give us the deep sense of meaning we so desperately desire.

Something is missing from our lives. No matter how much we achieve through the exercise of our talents or by whatever other means, we arrive, eventually, at a place where material comforts no longer satisfy our inner longing. The essence of the human being is spiritual and yet many of us live as if we are no more than physical creatures. We accumulate wealth, dominate the land and sea, progress through the logic of science and philosophy, and

experience pleasure through the medium of our five senses. We do all this with great skill and still the pangs of emptiness drive us to search for something else; that something else is our inner being—our sacred self.

*The sacred self is a mystery. There is no place we can go to find it. It is not a thing we can touch. It is truly an extension of God, a marvelous reflection of God's eternal radiance.*

How can we go beyond the superficial and embrace our spiritual core? How can we behold our own souls? These are important questions that deserve our attention. At stake is nothing less than our happiness. If we ignore these questions, we, by default, reconcile ourselves to existing within a material world that has nothing more to offer us than trinkets and shiny things. Lasting happiness that anchors us to inner calm, peace, a sense of purpose and belonging is experienced when our hearts and minds are transformed by an awareness of our sacred self. After we experience this transformation, our lives feel immensely meaningful and we become acutely aware of our noblest ambition.

*Our noblest ambition is always to give of ourselves in some constructive way that benefits others; it is never to receive. When we give we receive automatically; when we are aware of the sacred self the heart wants only to give.*

What is missing from our lives is an awareness of our deeper reality. We imagine ourselves to be physical creatures that live for seventy or eighty years on earth and then return to the dust. Even though our great religions have taught us that human beings have

an eternal soul that continues to exist after death, we suppress this knowledge and live as the animals do, constantly seeking to fulfill our physical needs, rummaging through life in search of “treasures” to bolster our position, oblivious of life’s deeper mysteries. Ironically, it is in perceiving life’s deeper mysteries—the soul, the power of love, spiritual truth—that the human heart is charged with a spiritual energy that allows it to beat with happiness.

This moment is an opportunity for us to move beyond the superficial. Life can change for us right now if we choose to follow a different path: a spiritual path of balance. On this path the physical is still the physical, our bodies are still subject to ailments, we must still work to support our families, and, so long as we exist on earth, we will experience emotional and physical pain; but we will know who we are— this will make a world of difference. No longer will we be alienated from our sacred self, wandering around in search of our true identity; we will finally be anchored to an empowering sense of purpose that motivates us to attain spiritual enlightenment.

The remainder of this chapter includes five fundamental principles of the Middle Theory. These principles will help get us started on the balanced path. Perusing these principles during quiet moments when your mind is at ease and the environment is peaceful is advisable. If you are not in a quiet space, seek one before you proceed.

**Principle one:**

- *The beginning of wisdom is awareness of the sacred self.*

Either we will exist as conscious, sentient beings after we die, or we will evaporate into nothingness upon exhaling our last breath. If life ends at the point of physical death, then our existence is like vapor that vanishes almost as soon as it comes into being. If, however, as the great prophets and sages

throughout the ages have taught, life continues after we die, then the sacred self, the eternal soul, must be our true identity. The first principle acknowledges the importance of having an awareness of our sacred self. Without awareness of the sacred self, it is impossible to experience a full, meaningful life because we are ignorant of our true identity. In this state, we are necessarily agitated by a sense of something missing from our lives.

To cultivate awareness of the sacred self it is essential to realize that our existence has meaning beyond our brief time on earth. We should also recognize that such physical signifiers like our name, nationality, race, and religion do not define who we are. We are spiritual beings who share in the same vital energy that brought all life into existence. When we realize this, life no longer seems like a jumble of meaningless events or a rat race where the biggest, strongest, richest, or most beautiful always wins, but instead we begin to feel truly connected to those around us and to the environment. It is this profound sense of connectedness that is missing from the lives of many of us. When we don't feel connected to each other, we constantly feel isolated and alone. We act without compassion. Even though we may hold advanced degrees, or be the CEOs of big companies, our lives reflect a pain-filled separation from the spirit of kindness, service, and love.

Those who recognize that their inner being is not defined by their birthplace, ethnicity, or cultural heritage, but by their degree of spiritual awareness, sense that their lives are meaningful whether they live in a hut or a mansion. It is such persons whose deep compassion for all creatures, whose serenity in the face of dire circumstances, embodies true wisdom.

**Principle two:**

- *Only spiritual truth can lead you to your sacred self. Only love can open your eyes. To see your sacred self, love others. Love the “inner essence” of all things.*

Only the mind that is illumined by the light of spiritual truth can perceive the sacred self. Spiritual truth is not always easy to bear; sometimes it requires us to let go of ideas that are dear to us; however, spiritual truth, like a razor-sharp sword, cuts away those ideas and thought patterns that do not serve us in a positive way. When we hear such sayings as “love your neighbor as yourself” or “you are made in the image and likeness of God” we are moved. Some part of us recognizes this to be spiritual truth. For a split second we believe we could love our neighbors as we love ourselves; we think it is possible to be made in God’s image. These are moments when we, with our inner eye, behold the sacred self. Sadly, such moments usually do not last for very long. Our insight is quickly clouded by feelings of inadequacy or a multitude of misconceptions. We let go of our noble ideas and accept a lesser image of ourselves.

Moments of insight come and go. We all have them. We have all wondered what we would do if we had supernatural powers. Perhaps we would bring an end to poverty, heal the sick, or establish world peace. We should not let go of these seemingly childlike ideas about ourselves. We do have supernatural powers. At our core, we are beings that desperately want to connect with the world around us and within us. All of us carry the “supernatural gene” of love. Love is the divine energy that brought us into existence. Only when we love from our core—that is, with pure motivations to create peace—do we feel the divine energy of our beings. When the force of love drives our actions, we begin to realize that we not only desire to love and be loved, but that our core vibrates with love. We behold the sacred

self. The longer we hold an awareness of our loving core, the longer we are able to see the sacred self. Those who maintain an awareness of their loving core discover the sacred self in all they do.

**Principle three:**

- *Purge your heart of deceitfulness. See lies as darts that injure the spirit and dim the light of the soul. See truth as water that purifies the heart.*

Truth is like a mirror that reflects a clear image of the sacred self. When we speak truthfully with courtesy and kindness, we feel a sense of freedom. We feel empowered. On the other hand, when we pretend to be something we are not, or when we are outright dishonest, some part of us is weakened. We may not be aware of this, but after a few years of living a dishonest life we end up feeling powerless to make changes in our lives. We may, for example, constantly pretend to be happy when we are not. Or, to use another example, we may be in the habit of lying to get ahead. At some point the lying begins to take its toll on our emotions. Even though we may fool others, we always know deep inside what the truth really is—this inevitably causes us to feel unstable and unhappy.

An effective way to stimulate spiritual awareness is to practice being honest. This requires a firm commitment to being truthful with ourselves at all costs. Even when being honest is uncomfortable we must face our fears and speak from the heart. Whatever temporary benefit we may derive from being dishonest, remember that we betray ourselves whenever we lie and we weaken our ability to make positive changes. Deceit of any kind diminishes our awareness of our sacred self.

We are not always conscious of the deceit within our hearts. We are skilled at making ourselves accept things we do not believe at our core. We often forgo seeking spiritual truth, for

example, because we tell ourselves we have the truth already or we trick ourselves into thinking any effort to find the truth is futile. The end result is disillusionment. We should seek truth as though it were life-giving water with the power to cleanse us from the stain of disillusionment.

**Principle four:**

- *Speak words of peace. Do not ever wish ill for another because this hinders the soul's progress.*

All human beings of sound mind prefer peace to turmoil. This is because we all desire to be happy. Our happiness is, to a great extent, affected by the condition of others. If, for example, our children are constantly depressed we will also experience deep sadness. Similarly, if we have a close friend who is on drugs and is wasting his life, this will disturb us. The fourth principle encourages us to create peace by thinking and speaking it into existence. We are interdependent in simple and complex ways. Our peace and comfort depend upon the peace and comfort of others. Whenever we desire bad for another, we lose sight of one of life's most profound truths: *spiritually we are members of a single body*. It is silly to exalt the hand by spiting the foot. It is equally silly to favor one eye over the other.

Everyone should be treated as members of our spiritual body. Even those that “act up” and cause us pain should be treated with tenderness and compassion, the way we would treat a thumb that is throbbing with pain. When a part of our physical body is ailing and causing us grief, we do not wish for it to become sicker; we hope and pray that it becomes healthy again. By speaking words of peace and wishing good things for others—even those that hurt us—we acknowledge that somehow our spiritual energy is connected to all life; we practice compassion. Consequently, we become attuned to the reality of our loving core, the soul. In this way the soul progresses to higher states of awareness.

**Principle five:**

- *Find time everyday to be alone. Listen to your thoughts. Feel your emotions as they rise and swell within you. Do not judge your thoughts. Allow your sacred self to emerge from within the disorder of your mind.*

To attune our minds to the reality of the sacred self and experience lasting inner calm, we must perceive the divine order within “disorder.” Life is a series of seemingly random events that we are powerless to control. The traffic light turns red just as we are about to cross the intersection. It is raining on a day we planned to go to the beach. We get up with a headache. We are rear-ended in a long line of traffic. The baby gets sick. Our flight is delayed. Gas prices go up. We are fired. A loved one dies, and on and on. The point is stuff is always happening, and much of the time stuff happens that causes us to feel angry, anxious, sad, fearful, or insecure. These are destabilizing emotions that diminish our sense of balance. -----

The fifth principle encourages us to make quiet times of reflection a part of our daily routine. This not only has the beneficial effect of lowering our stress levels, but it helps to balance the “disorder” in our lives. We pause—usually two or three times a day—to nourish our physical bodies, but seldom do we pause to nourish our spiritual beings. Spending quiet time alone mindfully exploring our feelings and thoughts is an effective way to nourish our spiritual beings, and thereby strengthen our sense of balance. Despite the constant changes occurring around us, when we bring our awareness to the moment and allow the moment to fill us, we sense a stillness that anchors us to inner peace. Mindfulness can help us maintain a sense of inner calm even if peace is lacking in our external environment.

*To live mindfully, do not try to live mindfully because you will fail. Old habits will find their way back into your life; you will succumb to the distractions around you or you will grow weary. Mindfulness is as close to you as your blood. You need only recognize that all things exist because of a divine purpose, that every existing thing, from the pebble at the edge of the lake to the eagle soaring high in the sky, is a glorious miracle. Respect this miracle. Look upon it always as though you were looking into the eyes of God. If your heart attains this awareness, you will never again struggle to be mindful.*

The foregoing does not seem to gel with conventional wisdom, and yet it contains profound truth. We usually *try* to be mindful. Perhaps this is not the most effective way to live mindfully. Maybe mindfulness does not result from dogged effort, but from the perception of truth. When our hearts are moved by a beautiful image, for example, there is no effort involved. Our eyes behold something that is beautiful—beauty being the truth of the object—and this beauty transforms us, however momentarily. It is our perception of beauty that causes this response. So is it with mindfulness. When we perceive the truth about life—that every moment of life is a miracle—we are naturally moved to mindfulness.

Achievement does not always come through struggle; sometimes we achieve great things when we let go, when we exhale not inhale, when we desist to resist. Practicing mindfulness is more a function of our will to perceive the truth than of our mental ability to focus. We could, for example, focus all day long on a rock and receive no enlightening thought; however, when our focus is guided by our will to perceive the rock's inner beauty—its truth!—we perceive the rock as an uplifting miracle. To use another example, when we open our eyes first thing in the morning, we do this without much effort.

We simply will ourselves to open our eyes. The will is the thought before the thought; it is not simply the result of chemical reactions in the brain; it manifests the force of our innermost beings. We might simply focus our attention on trying to live mindfully, which requires effort drawn on our mental ability to control our thoughts, or could will ourselves to be mindful by accepting the profound truth that *every moment is a miracle that has purpose*. As we ponder this truth during quiet moments of reflection, we will be mindful with increasing ease.

Common to the five principles is the goal of balance. This entire book has but one aim: to help us experience the peace of balance. This is a peace we are all searching for. All human beings, from the moment of birth, desire inner and external peace. It is important that we realize that the journey to a comprehensive peace begins with awareness of our sacred self. Without this awareness, our lives seem like nothing more than recollections of random activities; we cannot help but feel that something vital is missing from our journey. If we are no more than physical creatures that live for seventy or eighty years and then die and disintegrate into nothingness, then there is little reason to develop such qualities as patience, kindness, generosity, steadfastness and love for all beings. Instead, in many respects, a survival of the fittest mentality would be fitting. But we are not only physical creatures. Our time on earth is the first chapter of our endless story. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we develop those qualities that will aid our spiritual progress.

Coming to an awareness of the sacred self is a great discovery. It is this discovery, and only this discovery, that can inspire us to look beneath life's material surface and behold its sacred beauty. It is only when we have a deep awareness of our sacred self that we are able to maintain our sense of internal balance even as we deal with difficult changes. Awareness of the sacred self puts us on the path to a life of balance; it is truly the beginning of a spiritual life of peace.

## Two

# The Middle Theory

*You will go most safely in the middle.*

—Ovid

The Middle Theory rests upon the idea that all existence yearns for a condition of balance and that this condition brings about health, stability, peace and happiness.

When I first began scribbling sentences years ago, I didn't realize that what I was writing would develop into a coherent theory. After many months of writing, however, I began to notice a common thread that knitted each chapter together forming a theory of balance. In this chapter I attempt to reveal the substance of this thread, to probe the fabric of the Middle Theory to tease out its most essential strands. Unlike in later chapters where the discussion focuses on the theory as it relates to a specific topic, we encounter here a revealing overview of the Middle Theory itself.

Life thrives when there is balance. In the absence of balance, we find confusion, pain, and death. The human body, for example, tries to maintain internal balance despite changes in the external environment. Physiologists call this involuntary balancing response homeostasis. All complex systems must have homeostasis to survive. The Middle Theory is a philosophy of

balance that teaches us how to do much more than survive—which is what we instinctively try to do—it teaches us how to thrive in an ever-changing reality.

Our external circumstances are constantly changing. Some changes cause feelings of joy, and others cause deep sadness. We cannot prevent change, nor can we control all the changes in our external environments; we can only determine the state of our inner world. Peace at every level of existence must begin in the invisible world of spirit before it can be manifested in the material world. The material world is a reflection of our inner reality.

The Middle Theory is framed by several important concepts: Sacred Self, Love, Peace, Happiness, Suffering, and Awakening. To grasp the Middle Theory's universal philosophy of balance we must understand the theory's view of these concepts.

### *Sacred Self*

In the previous chapter, the sacred self was defined as a mystery that is an extension of God. After the sacred self comes into being, it is like a child who has forgotten his way home. The sacred self constantly yearns to discover itself, to understand its source, to manifest its highest potential and attain a state of peaceful awareness. The sacred self progresses through knowledge and through the creative energy of love. Love and knowledge guide the sacred self to greater and greater states of balance. Balance is a state of heightened awareness that empowers the sacred self to achieve its noblest ambitions.

The concept of the sacred self is pivotal in the Middle Theory, for it is from the spiritual reality that all states of being originate. Happiness and unhappiness, though affected by what transpires in the material world, are rooted in our level of spiritual awareness. A person who has attained awareness of his sacred self, has found meaning through connecting with his deepest aspirations, may suffer great physical and emotional pain in this life, but such a person has a center of calm that is not destroyed

by material calamities. The opposite is also true. A person with little or no awareness of his sacred self, one who is not driven by noble ambitions, may achieve great wealth and prestige, but his inner being is necessarily unsettled. This constitutes unhappiness.

### *Love*

Love brought us into existence and only love can cause us to experience happiness. Our connection to each other, our environments, and animals is sustained by our need to love and be loved. For relationships to be the cause of true friendship, mutual fulfillment and spiritual edification, love must motivate our actions. True love seeks to serve, to understand, to protect, to know, to share and to exalt. The Middle Theory draws attention to our loving core and encourages us to nurture, first and foremost, our spiritual beings. By doing this, we access our inner wisdom, which helps us to make loving choices that facilitate inner and external balance.

*God is perfect love.*

### *Peace*

Peace is synonymous with balance. Peace is not merely the absence of conflict and fear; it is a condition of harmony created when distinct parts of a system act in the interest of the whole. Peace occurs when creation manifests its highest potential. Everything that exists has the potential to be used for good, to water the seeds of joy, health and prosperity. Any action, thought, or intention that deprives these seeds of nourishment fosters conditions of imbalance. Imbalance is the opposite of peace. Some symptoms of imbalance are apathy, greed, sickness, conflict, intolerance and confusion. Peace can never be created by

coercion. Only through the creative force of love— a force far more powerful than any weapon— can peace materialize.

*Happiness is the reward for utilizing the force of love to create peace;  
there can be no greater reward.*

### *Happiness*

Happiness is the experience of inner peace that occurs only when there is balance. Temporary feelings of elation do not constitute happiness, although any moment of joy, however brief, requires a measure of balance. Happiness occurs when the mind, body, and soul experience a synergistic union. Love cements this union.

Love is a creative force; to be happy we must continuously use the force of love to create conditions of peace for others and ourselves. A caring father who tenderly nurtures his child is using the force of love to create conditions of peace for his child. A visionary leader who enacts laws that benefit the masses is using the force of love to create conditions of peace for society. A kindhearted shop owner who sells goods at a fair price is using the force of love to create conditions of peace for the community. The Middle Theory tells us that we feel meaningful, and therefore happy, only when we consistently use our energy to create conditions of peace.

The root cause of unhappiness is not due to physical circumstances; it is the misuse of our energy. Unhappiness is ultimately caused by a sense of self-betrayal, a feeling of incompleteness resulting from imbalance. To be happy we must resist the immature thoughts of the mind that trick us into thinking that we need something—more money, a better car, a sexier girlfriend, flatter abs, and so on—to be happy, and listen to our inner voice that reveals opportunities for us to create peace. When we genuinely seek to create peace for others, balance

increases in all areas of our lives. Our relationships improve as we become more attentive and more aware of others. We choose healthier foods and begin to exercise periodically, which gradually improves our health. Most importantly, our lives feel deeply meaningful because we use our energies to do what the soul was created to do. The end result is peace of mind, peace within our bodies, and inner peace—a synergistic union of body, mind, and soul.

### *Suffering*

Suffering at its worst is the feeling of meaninglessness, a loss of hope—the complete loss of balance. Many in our world are suffering because there is imbalance in our homes, on our streets, in our workplaces, government offices, schools, churches, mosques and synagogues, hospitals, beauty parlors, restaurants, and in the very air that we breathe. This pervasive imbalance has destabilized our households and communities. Our ability to parent effectively has been compromised because values taught in the home are not reinforced by our societies. Our governments also suffer the effects of imbalance because, as with other institutions, they reflect the imbalance within the society. Even our most venerable institutions—our churches, mosques, temples, shrines and synagogues— have been destabilized by the plague of imbalance that continues to sweep across our world.

The only way to restore hope to the hearts of humankind, to remove the symptoms of imbalance from our societies, is to restore balance to the human heart. This, as noted in a later chapter, requires a universal spiritual transformation, a global shift in the consciousness of humanity that awakens us to our noblest ideals.

Suffering is the result of a fundamental inequality that exists within humanity, an inequality that has existed for many millennia. The Middle Theory challenges us to minimize suffering not only through acts of kindness, but also by altering

our perceptions so that we see all human beings as our equal and our spiritual siblings.

*We can feel the eternal nature of our beings if we learn how to balance our physical and spiritual energies through the power of our awareness.*

### *Awakening*

The mind can think, hold images, recall past events, process information and formulate ideas; however, the mind does not choose in and of itself. Choice lies within the domain of the soul. It is the soul that perceives the inner essence of things and it is the soul that continues to exist after the mind dissolves. When the mind's energy is aligned with the soul's energy, we experience a heightened awareness of life that goes beyond our physical experiences. In order for us to grasp the deeper meaning of events that occur in our lives the mind must be sensitized to the soul's wisdom.

The mind's temporal energy unites with the soul's eternal energy when we attain spiritual balance. Before we are spiritually balanced, our choices are controlled primarily by the pleasure/pain response. We seek to avoid pain and experience pleasure. When the mind is sensitized to the soul's knowledge, however, we make choices to aid the soul's progress, regardless of whether or not we perceive they will bring us pleasure or pain.

The previous concepts are the essential strands of the Middle Theory. These concepts hold the theory together. Whether we are discussing balanced parenting or human suffering, at least one of these six concepts will be central to the discussion.

The Middle Theory is not simply a philosophy that says we can learn to create balance in our lives—as if creating balance is

something we can do in our spare time as we get on with life—but it says that balance is what sustains all life; without balance life is bereft of meaning and happiness.

But how can we be balanced when so much of what happens in life is beyond our control? How can we be happy when our happiness depends upon what we experience, and much of what we experience is out of our hands? This entire book is an answer to these and many other questions. In keeping with the intended broad scope of this chapter, I will address the previous questions by giving an overview of the philosophy of *The Middle Theory* for awakening to a life of balance. These ideas will be applied to specific topics in subsequent chapters.

All that happens in our lives, whether or not we instigate these happenings, will either move us closer to a state of balance (a positive impact) or move us away from balance (a negative impact). It is important to realize that the positive or negative effect of events on our lives is not determined by the events themselves, but by our response to the events. For example, a person involved in a serious car accident has an experience that we typically think of as negative. However, according to the *Middle Theory's* philosophy, this event is only negative for this person if, as a result of the accident, he becomes less aware of his deeper reality or if those qualities of a balanced being—patience, love, inner peace—are diminished within him. We see, then, that it is impossible to say whether any event is negative or positive simply by outward appearances. Winning the lottery is neither a negative or positive event. Getting fired is neither a negative or positive event; only our responses to events in our lives can determine whether these events impact us and others in a negative or positive way.

In order for us to move progressively towards balance, towards a happy and peaceful life, we should not focus too strongly on trying to control the events in our lives—which we only have limited sway over—but we should center ourselves so that the

inevitable stresses of life do not disturb our inner world. In other words, we should let go of our need to control our external environment and seek instead to nourish our inner beings. As pointed out in the previous chapter, we do this by regularly ingesting words of wisdom, by incorporating quiet times of reflection into our daily routine, and by living according to spiritual principles that inspire us to fulfill our noblest ambitions.

*No material thing can fill the void within  
the heart of humankind. Only an open mind that seeks  
the deeper  
truths of the spirit can ever know regenerating happiness.*

The body does not achieve internal balance by controlling its outer environment; the body maintains internal balance by adjusting internally to external changes. Similarly, if we are to know an abiding sense of inner peace, we must also develop our ability to remain peaceful within even as the world around us heaves with tumultuous changes. The Middle Theory offers us spiritual insights and practical methods to help us develop this ability.

In the previous chapter I mentioned that our peace and comfort depends on the peace and comfort of others, and yet I just said we must develop our ability to remain peaceful within even as the world around us heaves with tumultuous changes. These statements may at first seem contradictory, but they are not. Although it is possible to remain peaceful on the inside in circumstances where suffering, pain, and confusion abound, we are at all times connected, and therefore affected, by the experience of others. The body's core temperature, for example, remains within a tight range despite large fluctuations in the temperature of the external environment. Thus, human beings

are able to survive in hot or frigid temperatures. This, however, does not mean our internal temperature is completely unaffected by the temperature of our environments. As we all know, at extremely hot or extremely cold temperatures the body eventually dies. Even though we should develop our ability to remain peaceful within as we deal with life's inevitable stresses, we should also recognize that our health and well-being are affected by the relationships we share with others. These relationships determine the spiritual climate of our external world. It is therefore fruitless to try to develop a balanced inner life by concentrating on our own spiritual development while neglecting to nourish the relationships that define our human experience.

As we seek to bring balance to our relationships, we should be mindful of our limitations; we cannot control the inner workings of others. Each human being has a sacred self that chooses its own path. We must be, as Gandhi pointed out, "the change we wish to see in the world." The balanced life is primarily one of attention to one's inner workings. As we become more loving and peaceful within, those that we interact with will be changed by our very presence.

The Middle Theory characterizes balance as an ever-evolving phenomenon. Balance is dynamic. Its nature is to spread, to expand. When we are in a room, for example, we can bring balance to just that room. We may rearrange the furnishing, light a candle, or turn on soothing music to create a serene atmosphere. We may achieve balance in this room, but this alone cannot satiate our desire for balance. Before long our attention will be drawn to the outside. We will look out the window. If we notice that there is suffering and chaos outside of our room, we will want to do something to change this. We naturally will try to increase our "sphere of balance" by working to create balance on the outside. And if we are successful in alleviating those conditions that caused suffering in those areas just outside our

room, our hearts will be moved to create balance in the entire neighborhood. Eventually, we will become sensitized to the lack of balance in our country and, ultimately, our world. The Middle Theory provides us with insights to create balance in our inner domain (spiritual reality) and in our immediate environments (material reality). In the final chapters, one finds guidance for effecting balance in our world.

*The first step on the path to inner balance requires us to let go of all expectations and be at peace with change. This does not mean we retreat from life and pretend that nothing in life matters. We do the opposite. We recognize that everything in life matters, that every change has purpose and that if we are able to see the purpose of changes in our lives—even difficult changes—we would begin to feel a sense of detachment that is calming and liberating. When we are detached from outcomes and we are aware of purpose, we experience life in a radically new way. Our spiritual eyes are opened. Our hearts expand. We become still on the inside, even as we move through many changes.*

In the next three chapters we will explore the Middle Theory's insights on cultivating balance in our relationships. As you read these chapters, keep in mind that there is little hope of cultivating balance in your relationships unless you bring a balanced energy to the relationship equation. Darkness is not destroyed by more darkness, but by light. Anger is never diminished by more anger. A bitter spirit is not helped by added bitterness. As we seek to foster balance in our relationships, we must be attentive to our inner condition. This keeps us from trying to effect change in our relationships by focusing too strongly on what others are doing, and empowers us to inspire others to make the changes we wish to see.

The Middle Theory is a blueprint for a life of balance. It presents spiritual insights and practical methods for leading a life that is spiritually enriching and physically fulfilling. Is this not what we long for? Is this not worth more than silver and gold? I invite you to take this blueprint, to apply its principles to your life so that you become a force for balance in your homes and workplaces, and in every place where your presence radiates.

Three

## The Parent-child Relationship

*Children are not things to be molded, but are people to be  
unfolded.*

*—Jess Lair*

We begin our human journey as helpless babes, fully dependent upon the care of those around us. If things go well, we receive adequate care from our parents or guardians. Our parents are often our first teachers, and our first experience of love. It is therefore fitting that we begin our discussion of balanced relationships by considering the dynamics of the parent-child relationship. Our goal here is not to develop a rigid formula for balanced parenting, or to define the ideal parent or the ideal child. We recognize that parenting styles vary from culture to culture, and that the requirements for good parenting are constantly changing as societies evolve. Yet there are, I think, some fundamental ingredients of good parenting that are applicable in every age, and in every cultural setting. The Middle Theory says *there is a place of balance, a place of peace and happiness in all things*. There is a practical, simple—but not simplistic—way for parents and children to enjoy balanced, happy relationships. In this chapter we will see that a balanced relationship between parent and child requires much more than familiarity; it requires the parent to establish an open line of communication early in the parenting process. Using the Middle Theory's philosophy of balance, we will establish important guidelines for balanced parenting that allow both parent and child to maintain their individuality as they enrich each other's lives.

Understanding the dynamics of balanced parenting is important to everyone's development. Whether or not we have children of our own, we gain immeasurable benefits when we understand the causes of imbalance in the parent-child bond. How so? One's beliefs, be they about oneself or the outside world, govern one's behavior, stimulate one's passions, ignite one's desires, and in many ways, determine one's destiny. And what are beliefs? They are ideas that we hold as truth. Many of our ideas about life are interlaced with those of our parents. We cannot escape that we are molded by our childhood experiences.

We have all passed through a “molding process” and it is only through careful reflection on the relationship we shared with our parents during childhood that we can discover the origins of many of our insecurities, fears, prejudices, and so on. Once we understand the beginnings of our beliefs, we gain greater clarity about the state of our emotional and spiritual development. With increased clarity comes better focus, and ultimately, if we retain that focus, a strong identity and inner direction.

*All children need guidance, as do all parents.  
When parent and child enjoy a balanced relationship,  
they each  
receive correct guidance from each other.*

The parent-child dynamic can support progress at every level of our existence. We are protected by this dynamic and strengthened by it. Life in some form is always being born, and is in need of direction and protection; life is a child. And life in some form nurtures and guides its child; life is a parent. This is the natural dynamic of life, all life. Once we learn how to balance this dynamic, particularly as it pertains to our human existence, we will know great peace, and full happiness in the here and now. There is, as may already be apparent, more in this chapter than good advice for parents and children. This chapter, though specifically about cultivating balance in the parent-child relationship, contains information that is immediately applicable—and beneficial—to anyone who wants to have more meaningful human relationships.

Much of the scientific research into the relationship between parents and children has revealed that parents have a powerful influence in shaping the behavior and attitudes of their children. This is hardly surprising. Aside from scientific research, our own

observations show us that our behavior is shaped by the relationship we share with our parents. We may notice, for example, that we share many of our parents' philosophical and social positions, or that we argue like our parents, converse like them and share many of their strengths and weaknesses. We may even have noticed similar attitudes in our parents as we do in our grandparents. Whether we like it or not, we are all, to some extent, influenced by our parents' ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. This being the case, it is easy to see that the nature of the parent-child relationship strongly influences the condition of our societies. Everything that we are, or ever hope to become as a society, depends upon how parental figures and children relate. The parent-child dynamic is an important issue, one that is not only important to individual families, but to whole societies and nations.

Unfortunately, the parent-child relationship is often an unbalanced one, because neither parent nor child sees each other in a realistic sense. There may be no real knowing of the other, no real understanding of the other's personality, and often we have too many mistaken, preconceived notions to be able to share honestly. Parents may have unrealistic expectations of their child that are so powerful that they overlook the child's true character. And likewise, children are often unable to see the person behind the title of "mom" or "dad." This "not seeing" creates the perfect environment for pretense, limited sharing, disingenuous communication and stereotypical role-playing.

Young children who can rattle off their parents' birth dates, professional titles, and a few other interesting details may, for a brief stage of their development, feel like they know their parents. Sadly, a few interesting details may be all children know, even as they enter adulthood. Sometimes the inner minds of parents remain an unsolved mystery. It is not uncommon for children to reach adulthood and realize that they do not know their parents beyond their role as parents. This sense of "not

knowing” one’s parents is symptomatic of imbalance in the parent-child relationship. Often, it is only after many years of reflection and introspection that we come to realize the extent of imbalance that existed in the home when we were children. We cannot travel back in time to fix the problems that existed in the past, but we can, if we are aware of how the past has affected our present attitudes, fix current problems, or shall I say current imbalances. More often than not, our approach to parenting or teaching or simply giving guidance to those who seek our advice is hampered by similar imbalances to those of our parents. These imbalances, whether they are the result of our parental figures’ physical or emotional absence or their ineptitude are present with us, and will stay with us unless we consciously seek to restore balance to our lives. By seeking personal balance we are able to break the “cycle of imbalance” that repeats itself in different ways with each new generation.

Honesty is the main ingredient for balance in the parent-child relationship because it fosters respect and trust. For example, a brilliant teacher who, after making an error on the chalkboard, happily admits that she has made a mistake, instantly gains credibility in the eyes of her students. There is something about a person who willingly admits he has made an error that leads us to respect and admire him, particularly if he is likeable. I think we generally respond this way because we realize, if only at a subconscious level, that when someone is honest with us, they are showing us a certain amount of respect. On some intuitive level we understand “truth telling” to be a sign of respect, and dishonesty to be sign of disrespect or distrust. With this in mind, we readily understand why it is vital for parents and children to practice being honest with each other.

Honesty is not just about telling the truth, it is about being authentic, about being human, and about being yourself. It is about meaning what you say, and saying what you mean, and about leading by example. The seeds of imbalance are planted

when parents attempt to teach their children certain values that they themselves do not demonstrate. Dishonest parenting may take many “innocuous” forms, like when parents tell “white lies” to their children to avoid embarrassment or to skirt sensitive topics. Some parents may feel it is necessary to be dishonest when the truth could damage a child emotionally. Certainly, parents should always be tactful when dealing with sensitive issues, and information should be tailored to protect children against unnecessary anguish or concern. Generally speaking, however, if a child is mature enough to ask a particular question, he or she is mature enough to handle a truthful response. Any “protection” children receive through being shielded from the truth is short-lived; the truth comes out eventually. Case in point:

### **A typical exchange**

Note: The truth is mom and dad had sex when they were seventeen at a mutual friend’s house.

CHILD (16 years old): Mom, did you and dad have sex before you were married?

MOM: No we did not, dear. We decided to wait until marriage. It was never an issue for us; your father knew where I stood... It’s getting late sweetheart, maybe you should head to bed.

CHILD: Did you and dad consider having sex before you got married?

MOM: No we did not! Now please, stop with the questions and get ready for bed.

CHILD: O.K., O.K., goodnight.

MOM (breathes a sigh of relief): Goodnight.

### **An honest exchange**

CHILD (16 years old): Mom, did you and dad have sex before you were married?

MOM: I see there's a lot running through your head these days. (Takes a deep breath) When your dad and I were in our final year of high school, we went out to a party at a friend's house. I had never been out to a party before, so I was pretty excited. At the time your dad was, what can I say, a real sweet-talker. After the party we remained behind, and later that night we decided to experiment with sex. It was the first time for both of us.

CHILD: You and dad had sex at a friend's house, after a party!

MOM: Yes we did, but there's more to the story. After that night things changed. We developed all kinds of insecurities. Your dad thought I had been lying about my virginity, and I felt he had invited me out just to get in my pants. It was a mess. The innocence of our relationship was gone. We nearly split.

CHILD: But you got married, so it must not have been that bad.

MOM: It was bad. We had to overcome a lot of issues. Physically we were ready to have sex, but emotionally we weren't ready for the feelings that came after.

CHILD: I think I know what you mean.

MOM: Do you? Sweetheart, at your age it is natural to have sexual feelings. It's normal. But you have to be smart, and you have to do things at the right time. Aside from the risk of disease and pregnancy, sex with a man not truly committed to you can damage your self-esteem, and leave you feeling used.

CHILD: Yeah, I know what you mean, mom. Some guys are just out for one thing. It's like everyone at school is sex crazy or somethin'.

MOM: It was the same when I was in school. There was a tremendous pressure to be sexually active. I think that's part of the reason your dad and I had sex that night. I also wanted to prove my love to your dad. But sex doesn't prove love. Love is about commitment, forgiveness, acceptance, and honesty. Sex doesn't prove anything.

CHILD: You know, you've always said that to me, and now I am beginning to understand. Mom, I'm going to head to bed now; I'm getting sleepy.

MOM: All right Sugar.

CHILD: Thanks for sharing, mom. I love you.

MOM: Love you too, hun.

The point is to be open, honest, and authentic. Again, this does not rule out the need for discretion, but when parents tell their children bold-faced lies, or "white lies," children can sense this. And when the truth finally comes out, as it always does, children may feel resentful or even betrayed. It is important for parents to recognize that they are their children's natural role

models. As role models, parents must *demonstrate* the honesty they wish their children to exhibit. When parents constantly avoid sensitive issues, and give terse, incomplete answers to difficult questions, this severs the line of communication between parent and child. Children will feel as if they also should hide their mistakes and personal struggles from their parents, which certainly is not what any caring parent wants.

Honesty is like the sun, it sheds light on everything; it reveals the authentic person. The authentic person is usually buried beneath insecurities and fears. Only honest sharing can “unearth” the authentic person, and help us to feel connected to those around us. The end result of honest sharing is genuine relationships that are characterized by heartfelt exchanges. Honesty is the impetus for balance in the parent-child relationship; it allows parent and child to develop an enduring bond that can sustain them in the worst and best of times.

Anyone who has cared for a newborn knows that children begin mimicking behavior almost from day one. We realize then that the teaching of children should begin as soon as they are born. The two-year-old is watching, listening and learning. Early childhood is a time to begin talking to the child, in plain language, and introducing the child to certain sounds and images that may evoke feelings of tranquility and happiness in the child. The eight-year-old, though playful and childlike, is beginning to form complex ideas about love, friendship, commitment, and so on. Parents should talk openly with children at every stage. They should share stories about their childhood, ask specific questions about their child’s day, and regularly engage their child in frank conversation. The fourteen-year-old probably knows more than his or her parents realize, and is likely to have concerns about his or her own identity and sexuality; concerns about dating, God, fairness and many other topics. Parents should recognize that their teenage child is fast becoming an adult, and is about to enter an adult world. The teenage child is looking for straightforward

discussion that is down-to-earth, detailed, and true to the real world. The key to balance in a parent-child relationship is to keep talking, to keep sharing ideas, relaying stories, discussing issues, and imparting knowledge with utmost sincerity.

Most stories are never told. Candid, sincere exchanges between many parents and children are rare. So much so----- that the chance “heart to heart” usually leaves parent and child feeling odd. In many Western homes, parents and children fit into roles that have been played out generation after generation: mom fixes the meals, dad “brings home the bacon,” and little Johnny sits at the table asking questions that are brushed aside, or met with “age appropriate” answers. Beneath the façade of completeness is often an emptiness that surfaces in the child’s life during the teen years, or after he or she becomes an adult.

Parents and children often relate to each other according to stereotypical roles. Mom plays the part of the doting mother, while dad assumes the role of the busy, working father (clearly these stereotypical roles no longer apply to many families). Children quickly realize what role they should assume, and family life literally becomes a process of learning one’s *role* in the home. The problem with this is that roles are generic, and each person is unique. When we role-play without continuing *individual expression*, we miss out on the experience of true sharing, and the relationship between parent and child becomes based on fixed ideas and familiarity, rather than genuine knowing.

Parents and children sometimes confuse familiarity with closeness. No matter how familiar parents and children may be with each other, unless they communicate consistently and honestly, the parent-child relationship will be like that of classmates who share all the same classes, travel on the same buses to and from school, who have lunch at the same cafeteria everyday, but feel no deep connection to each other. To forge a balanced parent-child relationship, stereotypical role-playing

should be avoided. Parents and children should strive to bring their individual personalities and experiences to every shared occurrence. This will facilitate a more balanced, honest relationship.

*An enduring state of balance between parent and child requires mutual respect, honesty, and on-going, sincere exchanges.*

Why does balance in a parent-child relationship require parent and child to truly know each other? Isn't it normal for children to see their parents as parents, and nothing else? It's common, perhaps, but not normal. The sooner a child sees his or her parents as real human beings, with weaknesses and strengths, the easier it is for an honest relationship to be forged. This leads me to the answer for the former question: We can only enjoy a balanced relationship with someone when we relate to his or her authentic person. Balance between two people occurs when there is an emotional and spiritual connection between the two, a baring of the heart to the other. If we think of one's heart as one's spirit or essence, we realize that one's authentic person only shines through when all guises are removed, allowing one's essence to be felt, sensed, and known. Neither parent and child, nor spouses nor friends have any way of embracing each other's authentic person so long as they only relate to each other at a superficial level.

Honest relating, real relating, speaks to the heart. It addresses sensitive issues, and confronts personal misgivings. It happens often, when tears are falling, and when smiles are too big for the face. It happens late at night, and at sunrise. Honest relating between parent and child should be an ever-present pattern that begins the moment the child exits the womb.

Many parents wait for a problem to show up, or until it becomes painfully obvious that the child has concerns, to start

truly talking to their child. “She is too young,” they may exclaim. “It’s better if he doesn’t know, he’s just a kid,” might also be heard. Meanwhile, the child is full of unanswered questions, and senses mom’s and dad’s discomfort when certain topics are raised. And while the parents continue to wait, the television speaks, the radio speaks, the CDs speak, the friend at school speaks, the video game speaks, the Internet speaks; everyone is speaking but the parents. When parents finally decide to speak, they may find that the child is unresponsive and unreceptive to their advice. Children’s minds are like sponges. They soak up everything. Young children are busy watching, listening, and developing belief structures. If parents do not engage their children from early on, and actively flood their minds with constructive ideas and values, it is likely that children will develop harmful attitudes and behaviors.

In addition to honesty, balanced parent-child relationships are formed and sustained by space. Space, as it is used here, refers mainly to intellectual space. Along with honest relating, encouragement, comprehensive education, and other important care, children must be given space to develop their innate ability to self-govern. As children move through different stages of development, there is often an instinctual movement towards autonomy. This is normal and healthy. Children sense, instinctively, that one day they will be on their own, away from mom and dad. It is important that parents recognize this natural progression towards autonomy, and encourage children to strike out on their own. For the eight-year-old, this may mean occasionally allowing the child to prepare his or her own breakfast (something simple, of course). For the fifteen-year-old, this may mean encouraging the child to pursue more seriously something he or she has shown an interest in. Whatever the child’s age, parents can find ways to aid the child’s movement towards autonomy. Often what happens in families is that parents, in their attempt to set rules or assert authority, forget to

acknowledge their children's viewpoints and ideas. Children may become overly dependent, and lose any sense of faith in their own opinions if their ideas are constantly brushed aside. It is easy to see how this can lead to serious problems in the future.

The idea of trust was brought up earlier. We know that trust is connected to honesty and respect. Why, in particular, is trust so important to balance in the parent-child relationship? It is important because we cannot be truly honest with someone we do not trust, and we cannot value the advice of those we do not respect. If children do not trust their parents, they cannot respect them; and if they cannot respect them, they simply will not value their opinions. There will be no baring of the heart to the parent, ever. When a child feels trusted by his parents, he will feel confident about his own decisions. He will feel loved and valued. He will be less likely to develop destructive habits, or to suffer from low self-esteem. Also, he is likely to pursue his own goals and ambitions instead of those of his parents. Clearly, such a child will be better equipped to face life's challenges as an adult than a child whose parents have shown little interest in his viewpoints and ideas.

The balanced approach to parenting encourages the child to assume responsibility for the outcome of his own decisions. If a child feels responsible for his own life, if he feels he has a stake in his own destiny, then he will be more likely to approach problems head-on, to become a thinker. Depending on the age of the child, a problem could be as simple as what color outfit to put on, or as complex as deciding whether or not to have an abortion. It is important for parents to know when to step in and give guidance, or even firm direction, but equally as important for them to know when to step away, and say, "Do what you feel is best, I will support your choice." When appropriate, allowing children to make important decisions is not only important because it helps children to become more responsible, but, as discussed earlier, it helps children to feel trusted by their parents.

It is evident that children who feel and sense their parents' genuine trust are more likely to live up to those values and standards taught in the home.

Some might very well argue that children should be trusted only after they show themselves to be trustworthy. This seems logical, but it is also true that children often behave as they are expected to behave. If a child is constantly labeled "rude" or "mischievous," he is likely to adopt this identity. Although parents' level of trust is justifiably affected by their child's behavior, it may be helpful for parents to try to adjust their child's inappropriate behavior by continuing to show the child that they expect "good things" from him, and by reinforcing positive behavior.

The Middle Theory's common-sense approach to parenting is shared by many experts in the field of family therapy and psychology. Dr. O'Callaghan, a licensed clinical psychologist and family therapist with over thirty-three years experience counseling families, had this to say:

Balance involves defining the things that parents must control, as well as the less essential decisions that can be left to children. Parents must have the last word when the issue involves something fundamentally important, such as guarding the health and safety of their children, or teaching kids respect for others. But there are many less momentous decisions that can and should be left to the kids, such as how to comb their hair, where to do their homework, or how to decorate their room.

Balanced parents are mindful of their children's rapid development; they see the whole picture, they approach each stage with new tools, new rules, and new formulas. They are not fixed, because children are not fixed. Children grow. They go

from babbling, to saying full sentences, to asking probing questions, to dating, to marriage, and on they go. Balanced parents grow *with* their children. They follow their children's development closely. They are aware of subtle psychological, physical and emotional changes in their children. And because of this awareness, this knowing, they meet their children's needs, be they emotional, physical, or otherwise, at every stage of their children's development. Balanced parents are not afraid to let their children find their own path, because these parents want to empower their children to become the people they *choose to be*. Ultimately, balanced parenting allows both the parent and child to express love deeply without parent or child having to sacrifice their individuality.

The onset of a child's "autonomous decision-making process" is, for some parents, associated with the dreaded teen years, and it may also be seen as a sign of impending discord. There seems to be an inherent tendency for teens to "act up." As teens become more aware of their individuality, the likelihood for disagreements between parent and child increases. Teens are actively engaged in a process of *identity mapping*. They are trying to find who they truly are. The teenage child experiences rapid biological development and hormonal changes, which can affect behavior. Teenagers are often faced with new responsibilities, and greater expectations at school and at home. For some teens, this can be a trying time, and many develop destructive habits. Minor rebellion during the teen years is to be expected and is normal, but serious rebellion—rebellion leading to physically destructive behavior—is cause for concern. When teens become physically violent or begin using drugs or behaving promiscuously, we can usually trace their emotional state to imbalances in the parent-child dynamic. This is not to say that in every case, parents are responsible for the delinquency of teen children, but certainly, if a teenage child is violent and otherwise

wayward, there are likely to be unresolved issues associated with his or her early childhood.

There are many, many reasons for imbalance in the parent-child relationship. The parents may be domineering, constantly telling the child what to do, but not living up to their own standards. Or, the reverse problem may exist: the parents may be aloof, providing minimal structure and guidelines for the child. Whatever the cause of the imbalance in the home, it usually manifests itself in the socially rebellious behavior of the children. Many teens develop destructive habits because they feel lost, hopeless, as if their lives are irrelevant and meaningless. Serious rebellion in teens usually indicates that the teenage child feels out-of place in the home, and is perhaps desirous of parental attention and affection. Or, as is often the case, rebellious behavior may result as teenage children attempt to assert their individuality as a kind of protest against their parents' rules and values. It is impossible to pinpoint all of the causes of teenage delinquency, but the main point made here is that *most* teens develop destructive habits because they do not have a healthy, balanced relationship with their guardians. Parental figures provide a much needed support system for the teenage child. If this support system is not functioning or is not present, the teenage child will look to other sources for support. Many times these sources are other teens who are also in need of guidance. Many of our teenagers are failing the tests of life because parental figures in the home and in the society at large are failing to provide them the necessary direction and support.

In many families parents and children feel close simply because they see each other every day. The daily drive home together, the yearly family vacation, dinner each evening, and other shared experiences can easily create a pseudo sense of intimacy even in the absence of authentic sharing. Balance in the parent-child relationship requires much more than episodes of togetherness or occasional bonding over dinner; it requires

consistent, honest communication; without this, the relationship between parent and child can be dangerously unbalanced. Evidence of this abounds. We have all been saddened and shocked by the deaths of young persons at the hands of other youths who, by all accounts, come from stable families with loving parents. The immediate question that arises is, “How could these seemingly normal children, of loving, supportive parents be so violent? What went wrong?” we wonder. Why didn’t the parents recognize that their child was in desperate need of attention? The answer to these questions is, I believe, the parent and child, though familiar, were emotionally distant, and were sharing a superficial, unbalanced relationship. There are many different factors that may contribute to a child’s violent behavior—a mental disorder may exist, or a hormonal imbalance, etc.—but surely the child’s relationship with his or her parents weighs in heavily. We must remember that honest, consistent communication is the main ingredient for balance in the parent-child dynamic. Without this ingredient, any recipe for balance is not only incomplete, but also poisonous. Like a slow-moving cancer, superficial sharing can spread undetected, preventing the spiritual and emotional connection needed for a healthy parent-child relationship.

I once heard an older gentlemen say, “If you don’t catch your child before he or she becomes a teenager then forget about it.” Many social workers and family therapists subscribe to this way of thinking—with good reason I might add—yet I do not believe rebellious teenagers are hopeless. Parents can exert a positive influence over their children, even if this begins during the teen years. Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, in his groundbreaking book *The Road Less Traveled*, emphasizes this point when he writes, “...good parenting during the latter years [late childhood and adolescence] can heal many and perhaps all of the wounds caused by earlier poor parenting.” Parents of rebellious teens should know that it is not too late to start communicating honestly with

their children. Children of all ages benefit from having an open, honest relationship with their parents, no matter when this relationship begins.

Balanced parenting cannot occur unless parents have attained some measure of inner balance, and are fundamentally satisfied with their personal lives (in a later chapter, we will discuss specific ways to become more balanced). Parents' emotional and spiritual condition is mirrored in the way they express love to their children. If parents' personal lives are unbalanced, without direction and marked by issues of self-hatred and apathy, this "depressed state" will invariably affect their parenting; they will be unable to express balanced love to their children, no matter how hard they may try. The same principle applies to rearing balanced, self-assured children. Parents cannot foster in their children what they themselves are lacking. It is simply impossible. We cannot hope to inspire our children to greatness if we live uninspired lives.

When parents are happy and leading personally fulfilling lives they are able to tap their *intuitive parental wisdom*. Books on parenting may offer some useful information, but a list of Do's and Don'ts of parenting can only go so far in teaching balanced parenting. Each situation is unique. The balanced approach to parenting is dynamic and calls on the parents to seek their inner parental wisdom. When parents are centered, they become aware of a boundless source of inner knowledge. If you are a parent, realize that your level of balance affects your relationship with your child. If your child is struggling socially or otherwise, you must deal with your personal imbalances before you can truly help your child. Also, if you desire to have a more balanced relationship with your own parents (it doesn't matter if your parents are advanced in years) be more engaging with them; inquire about their past, and as much as possible, share your unfolding life's story with them. Make a sincere effort to get to really know your parents (your parents will have to be open to

more frank exchanges for this to be of benefit). The parent-child relationship can be wonderfully supportive, and emotionally fulfilling if parent and child are committed to finding personal balance and communicating honestly.

Communicating honestly is as important to a balanced parent-child relationship as columns are to the stability of buildings. And without trust, honest communication is a hopeless venture. But is there a conflict between honesty and trust? The conflict seems to be this: Honesty, when it requires us to reveal something distasteful about ourselves, may cause others to lose respect for us. And if we lose another's respect, trust goes out the window. The parent-child relationship can seem especially complicated when we consider how it is affected by this apparent conflict. There is no real conflict between honesty and trust; the real conflict is between the sacred self, and our egos. The ego is concerned with its image; the sacred self, with its true identity. The ego has a fear of losing the other's affection or approval, and is dominated by this fear. The sacred self is only concerned with truth. Parents and children should always remember that *honesty builds trust; it does not jeopardize it*. The key to honesty in the parent-child relationship, or any relationship, is to silence the ego, and to let the sacred self speak. When mistakes are made, or when questions arise about sensitive issues or past indiscretions, an honest, tactful approach is always best. Honesty requires more than a willingness to tell the truth when it serves our own interests, or when the truth improves our image; honesty must be a way of life. Parents and children greatly improve their chances of establishing a balanced relationship when they are committed to being honest with each other. This commitment will endure only if the parents consistently demonstrate it. It's no use to teach our children to be honest only when it is easy, because that would be a lesson in how to be dishonest.

There is no conflict between honesty and trust once parent and child recognize that they are imperfect people who will occasionally make mistakes. Imaginative parents will use past mistakes as teaching tools; they will share the lessons they have learned from past indiscretions and embarrassing, silly behavior. They will be honest with their children in a sensitive, thoughtful manner. In this type of parent-child relationship, the ego may suffer a few bruises now and then, but it will heal; and the sacred selves of parent and child will have their rightful place.

*Earnest communication lines the road  
that leads to a balanced parent-child relationship.*

Parents can learn a lot about their level of balance by being aware of the way they relate to their children. For example, parents that are clingy with their children, overbearing and overprotective, may be expressing what I call “fearful love”; that is, love motivated by a fear of loss. This type of love is unbalanced because it is stifling. Perhaps such parents, those expressing fearful love, suffered a devastating loss early in life. This loss, whether it was due to someone’s death or a failed relationship, was an emotional trauma that may have gone unattended, and thus, has lead to an emotional imbalance. The child becomes the one thing the parent believes he or she can protect; but the normal instinct of the parent to protect his or her offspring is distorted by the parent’s emotional imbalance with regard to loss, and the instinct becomes an obsession. Similarly, parents that are aloof and uncaring may be dealing with childhood traumas. Maybe these parents were neglected by their parents, and, as adults, selfishly seek to be parented by others, which leaves them without the determination to attend to the needs of their own children. Of course, there are many parents who have had traumatic childhood experiences and are excellent parents; it is not my intention to portray parents as helpless products of their

past, but to alert parents to the need to seek inner balance as they seek to become better nurturers. This advice is not only useful to parents, but to anyone who wants to have better relationships with family and friends.

Along with sincere exchanges—a major point of our discussion thus far—balanced parenting requires parents to recognize and respect their children’s individuality. Each child is a unique individual with a unique mind, physical form, and spiritual energy. Parents who have entrenched, preconceived ideas about their children are really disengaged from them. Children of such parents often feel a great pressure to fit the mold that their parents have for them. No matter how grand the mold may be, or how impressive its dimensions, children will never be happy in such a situation. Those children that successfully fit the mold will end up feeling insecure and emotionally divided, and those that do not, may feel like complete failures. To avoid this, parents should allow their children to develop without any undue pressure to be this or that. Children are to be nurtured in a way that allows them to discover and pursue their own dreams, not those of their parents. When a child feels respected as a unique individual by his parents, he is more likely to feel a sense of freedom to explore his own mind, and feel empowered to realize his goals; and the parent-child dynamic will be wonderfully balanced.

In homes where there is more than one child, parents should be careful not to adopt iron-clad rules that apply to every child as he or she reaches a particular age. Children, especially pre-teens and teens, should not be afforded privileges simply because they have reached a certain age, but rather because they have demonstrated a certain level of maturity. Fairness is not compromised by this approach to parenting, so long as each child is made aware of the parent’s parenting style, early on. Parents have the right to set guidelines for their children, but if these guidelines are going to aid each child’s unique development, they

must be tailored to each child's individual needs and interests. For instance, a child that has no interest in becoming a doctor should not be coached in this direction. One child may be athletic, another musical, another artistic, and another academic. If parents rid themselves of their preconceived notions about their children, they will be able to truly see their children as they are, and to nurture their children's innate gifts and talents. This accepting attitude will help to foster a balanced parent-child relationship, and will allow each child to develop in a more organic way.

Balanced parental love is not about rules written in stone; rather, it is about treating each child as an individual with unique emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs that are constantly changing. In order to meet these changing needs, parents must be in touch with their children, they must know them inside out, and, in a caring manner, ensure that their children assume responsibility for the activities they are mature enough to handle.

A powerful way to foster a balanced expression of parental love is to follow this simple guideline: *Be acutely aware of your child's abilities, and allow the child to do many of the things he or she is capable of doing.* By this, I mean do not constantly do things for your child that he or she is able to do. If your daughter is mature enough to pick up her toys after she is through playing, let her. If your son is able to program the T.V. remote, encourage him to do so. There is a natural tendency for parents to assume their child's responsibilities, and sometimes this tendency continues long after the child needs such assistance. Any assistance beyond what a child truly needs does more damage than good, because it inhibits the child's natural movement towards autonomy. Children are adults "in waiting"; a parent's main role is to prepare children to deal with the responsibilities of adult life.

No discussion of balanced parenting is complete without considering the importance of the male and female energies in

the unfolding of a balanced, well-adjusted child. One of the major problems in Western society today, as I see it, is that too many children are raised solely by their mothers. The absentee father has robbed the home of the balance that is created when there is a strong female and male presence. Boys *and* girls have suffered. In some cases, the father's absence is due to illness or death and is therefore unavoidable. In many cases, however, fathers are emotionally absent in the home by choice. This is a problem that will not go away until the society changes many of its unbalanced ideas about the roles of men and women in the home. The formation of a child requires the merging of male and female cells; it is only natural that raising a balanced child should also require the male and female energies.

Parenting is a tough job. It is difficult for even the most balanced parents to gauge just how much discipline, praise, freedom, direction, and space children need as they mature. There is no magic parenting formula. The balanced approach to parenting requires no preset rules or rigid protocols, only honest, consistent communication, and respect for children's individuality and intellectual space. Parents who communicate often with their children are likely to better understand the unique needs of each child, and they are likely to be intuitive parents rather than parents who rely heavily on the views and advice of others. Children don't need perfect parents; what they need are parents who are committed to finding inner balance, and who are willing to be open and honest.

No parent is perfect in the strictest sense of the word, but many parents are exemplary. Such parents are whole people who have developed healthy attitudes about life. They love their children dearly, as most parents do, and they have found a way to express that love in a balanced manner that facilitates their offspring's unique development. We know these parents by the way they live their lives. They are honest, straightforward persons, whose characters solicit the trust and respect of friends

and relatives. Good parents love themselves; they are accepting of differences in others, and their lives follow a natural rhythm. The art of good parenting is really the art of good living.

*Balanced parental love does not seek to decrease a child's responsibilities; it seeks to prepare the child to be a responsible, competent adult.*

From balanced parenting, we get balanced children—children who are responsible, directed, caring, and honest—and balanced children become balanced parents. The cycle repeats itself. The effects of a balanced parent–child relationship are far-reaching. The health of our communities depends upon the parent-child relationship. The strength of our school systems, our universities, our churches, mosques, and synagogues all depend on the nature of the parent-child relationship. Even our romantic involvements are affected by our childhood experience of our parents. The parent-child bond is always a part of us; it is the life-giving water that sustains our emotional and spiritual growth. It is ours to use. We must use it wisely, nurture its existence, and purify its components. This is our job as parents and as children. It is our job as human beings.

## Four

# Romantic Relationships

*Falling in love with someone isn't always  
easy...Anger...tears...laughter...It is when you want to be together  
despite it all. That's when you truly love another. I'm sure of it.  
—Keiichi Morisata*

I do not know when it was I first heard the statement “love is blind,” but I have always thought it to be a peculiar way of describing love. It promotes a view of romantic relationships that is misleading and out of balance, because it suggests that romantic love somehow causes us not to see what is right before our eyes. As the thinking goes, romantic love is intoxicating and causes one to lose all sense of good judgment. The man in love can see no wrong in his beloved. The woman in love loses all objectivity. What we are describing as romantic love is, I think, more akin to infatuation or sexual attraction. On the contrary, *balanced romantic love* is not blind. The Middle Theory will show us the way to experience *balanced romantic relationships*. There are no guarantees, even when romantic relationships are balanced, but when we approach romance having the right perceptions, we give ourselves the best chance of forming a true and lasting relationship with someone we really know.

True romantic love is born out of our desire to connect with another at a most intimate level. This love wants to *know* its beloved, to see inside the heart, to caress the soul. This love sees. It sees the whole person, it knows the sound of the other’s voice, the way the other moves, the other’s likes and dislikes, and it beholds the other’s weaknesses. Like happiness, true romantic love is beyond feeling; it is a spiritual union between two persons, a state of oneness. This state of oneness occurs only after we have embraced our partners fully.

Claiming to love someone romantically without knowing the whole person is no different from, for example, supposing to understand the culture of a country after viewing a few scenic photographs in a magazine. Our ideas about people can be very powerful, and sometimes, especially in romantic situations, we see what we want to see. *Balanced romantic love is not a feeling; it is a knowing*. It is the complete acceptance of another person. As Karen Casey, best-selling author of *Each Day is A New Beginning*, puts it, “Truly loving another means letting go of all expectations.

It means full acceptance, even celebration of another's personhood." Balanced romantic love is the celebration of the whole person, as he or she is, with their "cuts and bruises," and their quirks. If romantic feelings fall short of this, they stay within the domain of infatuation.

*To truly love someone romantically you must see the person  
as he or she is, not as you want him or her to be.*

The first level of balanced romantic love: *Acceptance*. When two persons meet for the first time, an initial assessment occurs. That assessment might include noticing the other's physical attributes, or simply noticing the other's mannerisms. If romantic feelings develop, a period of dating or courtship usually follows. During the initial stage of courting, new lovers are like children in a new school. A new teacher is giving lessons, and new lovers must decide whether or not to *accept* these lessons. Is this person who he or she seems to be? Can I trust this person? These are the thoughts of new lovers. Even as new lovers gaze into each other's eyes as though looking toward heaven, they are deciding what to accept about each other. The problem that arises here often results from subtle deceptions between couples, caused by the natural tendency of new lovers to want to impress each other. At this level, strong forces of attraction are at work, and it is only natural for us to attract our mates by making ourselves appear more attractive (humans are no different than animals when it comes to ploys of wooing). This often means hiding the "bad stuff," or at least stuff perceived to be bad, and emphasizing those character traits perceived to be good or alluring to your partner. During our courting dance, we sometimes try to make ourselves appealing by behaving like someone we are not. We become actors without even realizing it.

For some couples the acting continues indefinitely, and lovers end up holding incorrect perceptions of each other. To complicate matters further, lovers frequently ignore what is displeasing about their partner, and focus on what they find satisfying, even when their partner is open and honest. By doing this, lovers trick each other into a feeling of acceptance, when in fact they are accepting only those things they want to accept, those things which are often not representative of the other person. This is not true acceptance; this is not acceptance at all. When you truly accept a person, you see that person for who he or she is, and though you may wish to see certain changes in the individual's behavior, you are not preoccupied with changing the person. You are able to say, *I see all of you*, and *I accept all of you, not just the parts I like*. If your feeling of romantic love continues after you have accepted the whole person within an atmosphere of openness, and after a reasonable period of courtship, then you are in a good position to utter the words, "I love you" and mean, "I love all of you."

Acceptance is like being at the top of a mountain and looking down at the entire landscape beneath. You see every curve, every rolling hill, and the unsightly rocky patches—you see everything. Through acceptance you are able to determine if your feeling of love for another person is based on a correct image of that person. Clearly, acceptance does not mean you will like everything you see. You might see more rocky patches than rolling hills. Yet if the rocky patches are there you must look at them, see them, and accept that they are there. Only then can you address your concerns, engage in honest conversation with your love interest, and ultimately make informed decisions about the continuance of the romance.

Romantic relationships that continue with lovers having distorted impressions of each other eventually lead to disappointment and frustration. Arguments will be characterized by statements like, "I didn't know you were like that" and "I

thought you didn't like dancing" and so on. Persons in such relationships may feel a tremendous pressure to be different in order to meet their partner's expectations. In the end, however, our true character always shines through; we can only pretend for so long. At some point in every romantic relationship the pretense ends. Many romantic relationships also end at this point because of unmet expectations; persons may feel as if their partner has suddenly changed and is no longer the person they fell in love with. If we entered romantic relationships with our "eyes" wide open, prepared to accept our partners fully, we would know early on whether or not we want to remain involved, and we could avoid forming emotional attachments to persons we know deep inside are not the right match for us.

In the broadest of senses, we should love everyone; however, the expression of that love should be based on the context of our relationships. Ending a romantic relationship does not necessarily mean that our feelings of love are gone, but it does mean the relationship no longer meets our context for romance. The decision to end a romantic relationship should not be seen as "falling out of love" with another, but simply as changing the context in which we express love to another. Perhaps, as is the case in many failed romantic involvements, the expression of love changes to one within the context of friendship. If that is not feasible, for whatever reason, persons should part entirely, but they should continue to love each other—not in a romantic sense of course—within the context of a shared existence with all humanity. Within that context, we should express love to everyone.

People do change, sometimes drastically, but it is advisable to base our decision to remain involved with someone on our present experience of him or her. It is foolhardy to live in hopes of a 180-degree about-face change occurring in your partner—a change that would make the relationship viable. It is reasonable to want certain aspects of your partner's behavior to change—

this sentiment may be addressed through open dialogue—but unrealistic to expect him or her to develop a new personality. No one should ever be pressured to form a new personality—no one ever could anyway—but emotional maturity and spiritual growth do allow us to seek new and more appropriate ways of relating to our partners. Our readiness for a romantic relationship is determined, by and large, by our readiness to make reasonable changes in our behavior. Romantic relationships require us to be flexible and sensitive to the needs of another—this is the experience we are after.

Does acceptance mean throwing your hands up in the air and taking whatever is dished out? Certainly not. The challenging discoveries of the Acceptance stage are sorted out in the second stage of balanced romantic love: *Restructuring*.

Let's say Bob and Sue are a young, recently married couple, who share a balanced romantic relationship (implies complete acceptance). Bob enjoys listening to music at a loud volume, while his wife prefers soft music at a low volume. As you would assume, this presents a problem that demands a compromise, if the relationship is to remain peaceful. The compromise may be, for instance, that Bob only plays loud music when Sue is away from home, or perhaps they agree on a volume level they can both live with, even though it is not ideally what they each prefer. It is important to note that neither Bob nor Sue criticizes the other for their volume preference. They accept the difference, and they find a way to work around it (restructure) without disturbing the peace of the relationship. This simple example makes an important point: *Restructuring is a necessary part of a balanced romantic relationship*. Many relationships fail because individuals become frustrated with the restructuring process. The effort and commitment that the Restructuring Stage demands is daunting to many persons and often people will end a relationship and search for a new one to avoid ever having to restructure their lives. "Things should just fall into place," may be

the thinking. The idea of things falling into place is an idealistic notion that makes for a good ending to a movie, but in the real world, conscious effort is required to ensure a stable, balanced union. Without compromise, romantic unions are sure to fail. Restructuring allows you and your partner to find common ground, where you each can thrive and express your uniqueness. It is the process of making two into one. As we merge with our partners, adopting some new behaviors, and making various concessions, we usually find that the relationship becomes more balanced and mutually enriching.

There are two questions that persons in a romantic relationship can ask themselves to monitor the relationship's balance:

- 1) Do I feel secure and nourished?
- 2) Is this relationship peaceful?

If the answer to those two questions is affirmative then the relationship is fundamentally balanced. If, however, the answer to either of those questions is negative then a conscious effort is needed to stabilize the union. This may mean any number of things ranging from more communication to less contact.

Restructuring is an ongoing process that occurs in as many ways as there are differences in people. Some relationships require a greater degree of ongoing restructuring to maintain adequate balance than others. The dynamics of restructuring depend entirely on the interplay of preferences, temperaments, fears, beliefs and so on between persons in a committed relationship. It is important to point out that every relationship goes through periods of tension, periods of restructuring, and that sometimes it is in these periods that lovers discover new and beneficial things about each other. Every relationship needs a little friction to keep things interesting, and also, believe it or not, to balance the romance. This is because when we argue, as we

may, say, in a courtroom, there is an exchange of ideas, leading to a “meeting of the minds,” and this allows, at the very least, both arguing parties to be understood by each other. When we truly understand our partners we are better able to address their concerns and to be considerate of their feelings. And we are better prepared to forgive what we might see as their failures. Not only is the occasional, mutually respectful, heated discussion beneficial because it allows for greater understanding between partners, but also, when we “argue” with our partners, there is a mingling of mental energy; ideas meet and feelings lock, creating a sense of activity that adds the necessary spark to keep the flames burning. The occasional heated discussion might also indicate that persons in the relationship feel comfortable being honest about their feelings, even if they sense their partner’s resistance. There is nothing wrong with disagreement—many relationship experts believe occasional disagreements are a sign of a healthy relationship—but it is vital not to allow disagreements to become disrespectful.

The interesting thing about balanced romantic relationships is that it takes two well-adjusted individuals to forge a new balance that allows *oneness* to be experienced. This takes us to the final stage of balanced romantic relationships: *Unification*.

The most fulfilling level of romantic relationships is the Unification stage. At this stage, love springs from the simple pleasure of knowing one’s beloved. Your beloved becomes your intimate and trusted friend, and your friendship is one based on understanding, not blind devotion. Unified lovers have learned each other well; this learning has brought about a deep *knowing* of the other person. These persons often have intuitive notions about their partner’s well-being; they communicate effectively through nonverbal modes: a smile, a giggle, or squinted eyes. They begin to share similar thoughts, and can often be heard finishing each other’s sentences. They may even begin to look alike. Unified lovers express a form of romantic love that goes far

beyond sexual desire, or any feeling associated with physical gratification. This experience of romantic love is durable, sincere, and liberating. There is no pretense, no acting to please each other, just a deep awareness and appreciation of the other person's individuality. The paradox of the Unification stage is that as we become more aware of our partner's individuality, our identity becomes more intertwined with theirs. We remain true to ourselves, aware of our own unique qualities, and yet deeply involved in our partner's spiritual and physical development. *Unification* is the ultimate goal of every relationship forged by the force of romantic love.

The Unification stage is the last stop on the "romantic journey," and one's experience of love at this final stage is not only passionate and invigorating, it is also *lasting*. Love like this is rare, because often things get confused at the other levels. To begin with, most people have not progressed to a state of knowing and loving their inner person, so there is no chance of accepting another. Also, if two well-adjusted persons meet and learn to accept each other, the Restructuring stage often proves too great a challenge. Well-known author and lecturer, Leo Buscaglia, beautifully expresses the requirements for unified love, or as he calls it, perfect love:

"Perfect love is rare indeed, for to be a lover will require that you continually have the subtlety of the very wise, the flexibility of the child, the sensitivity of the artist, the understanding of the philosopher, the acceptance of the saint, the tolerance of the scholar and the fortitude of the certain."

To reach the Unification Stage of romantic love requires the coming together of two well-adjusted individuals, who have accepted each other fully. The relationship is allowed to develop in an atmosphere of acceptance, and at the Restructuring stage,

disagreements are generally handled with mutual understanding and sensitivity. Eventually, without even realizing how and when it happens, these persons find that they have become one and have partaken of one of life's richest experiences.

The greatest pitfall to unification in romantic love is taking the other person for granted. The security at this stage is intense, and sometimes lovers cease to nurture their love. This is a great danger; it is sad when a relationship ends after having reached the Unification Stage. When such a relationship fails, lovers have to overcome painful emotional wounds in order to regain a sense of normalcy in their lives. In some cases, this never happens. After such monumental "break-ups," persons usually experience an emotionally shattering hurt, and may find it difficult to love again at this level. Fortunately, it is unusual for a relationship to end once it reaches this stage.

I'm sure some of you in relationships (married or dating) are wondering at what level your relationship is. That would be an interesting discovery for you. No one outside of your relationship can tell you. Here is my litmus test for each stage.

### **ACCEPTANCE**

You have reached this stage if:

You find yourself observing both negative and positive traits in your love interest. The positive traits intensify your attraction and the negative give you reason for pause, but you respect your partner's openness. You may feel a need to discuss the "negative" aspects of your partner's behavior, but you have no hidden schemes to try and change him or her into someone else.

*Remember, you can only accept someone if you are willing to see both their negative and positive traits. See what you see, and be honest with yourself.*

### **RESTRUCTURING**

You have reached this stage if:

You feel strongly that you know your partner, and you feel like you can be open and honest about everything. You are not afraid to disagree, and generally you and your partner handle disagreements, or differences, with sensitivity and understanding. There is generally no ridiculing, no harsh criticism, just a sincere effort to find solutions that keep the peace in the relationship. You are both happy and feel supported.

### UNIFICATION

You have reached this stage if:

You have an abiding sense of security in the relationship. Your beloved is your trusted friend and knows your most intimate thoughts. You and your beloved share a common language; you “get” each other. You are open and honest with each other, and the relationship is deeply fulfilling, spiritually enriching, and mutually supportive. Sometimes, you find yourself thinking the same thoughts as your beloved, and accurately finishing each other’s sentences. You are also able to sense your beloved’s emotional state without him or her being in your presence. You communicate effectively through nonverbal methods (e.g. touches, glances, or clasped hands). You are happy and feel a deep sense of satisfaction and wholeness.

*Remember, the greatest pitfall at this level is taking the other person for granted.*

We have identified three distinct stages of romantic relationships, and we have discussed the general signifiers of each stage. This has laid the groundwork for us to enter a deeper discussion. Before we move onto this discussion, let me clarify a few things. Thus far, our discussion of the stages of romantic relationships has been somewhat simplistic. We meet someone, learn to accept them, work through differences, and then, voila,

we become one with them. Any reader who is, or has been in a romantic relationship, knows that the transition from stage to stage is not so smooth, nor are the three stages necessarily independent of each other. We may be actively engaged in restructuring, even as we are learning to fully accept our partners. Or, we may be at the Unified Stage, secure in our relationship, and deeply fulfilled, and still experience periodic episodes of restructuring. Romantic love is a complex phenomenon, and though we may identify three discrete stages, we don't necessarily graduate from one stage before moving onto the next. It is safe to say, however, that the process of balanced romantic relationships begins with two persons learning to accept each other, and that without mutual, fundamental acceptance we cannot successfully progress through to the Unification Stage. That said we must now discover precisely what it is that makes romantic relationships work. How do we cultivate balance in our romantic relationships? And how do we maintain balance in our relationships if it already exists?

Just as in a parent-child relationship, space, especially physical and emotional space in this case, is a vital factor in maintaining and cultivating balance in a romantic relationship. When we first meet someone, there is almost a natural balance of space that exists, because often we live separately from our new love interest. Space generally only becomes an issue once the relationship continues beyond the first few steps of courting. Thus, our focus here will be space, as it concerns long-term (I would say, more than one-year-old), committed relationships.

The space that exists between new lovers helps to create the air of excitement that surrounds many new relationships. Certainly, the novelty of a new attraction is inherently exciting, but enthusiasm is also fueled by the sense of adventure that is created by the ongoing "to and fro" dynamics of young relationships. In general, new lovers live separately, and cannot see each other as often as they would perhaps like. Frequently it is

the case that they find themselves missing the other person and desiring to be in the other's presence. Usually, as romantic relationships proceed beyond fledgling love, contact between lovers increases, and, in the case of marriage or committed, long-term relationships, living arrangements become common. Is there anything beneficial to be learned from the previous observations? I believe there is. New romantic relationships are exciting because there is a sense of discovery about each meeting. We become playful again when we begin a new relationship. Our child-like spirit re-awakens and we look forward to the shared activities that lie ahead. This playful, child-like spirit is often replaced with a heavy, dull feeling after many years with our mate. Excitement generally decreases the longer we are with someone because our sense of *discovery* decreases. This is the lesson of our observation.

If we approach each day with our partners with a sense of discovery, long-term commitments can be continuously exciting. My experience has shown me that this is possible. I met my wife in high school and we dated for eleven years before we married. We have often been asked if we tire of each other's company, and how we stayed together through the years. Looking back I now realize that part of the reason our relationship has remained fresh and exciting is we maintained a sense of discovery about each other. Whether we are heatedly debating a particular issue or driving down a highway together, I always expect to learn something new about my wife; and I often do. Maintaining a proper degree of space, which fuels a sense of discovery, is much more difficult now that we are married, but we know that the sense of excitement that characterized our extended courtship will continue if we each maintain a healthy level of independence.

*Learn to see your partner as a continuously evolving and "involving" being. The person you met twenty years ago, or even ten minutes ago, is not the same person that he, or she, is right now.*

*Every meeting with your beloved is a new occasion, a new opportunity to discover something unknown to you. Forsake all thoughts of your lover as a static creature, whom you know everything about. You never know everything about anyone. Find joy in each meeting, cherish each kiss, notice every touch, and, behold, you will find that an enduring commitment can be an ongoing escapade of excitement!*

Excitement in long-term relationships dwindles for many different reasons. It is perhaps impossible to give a reason that applies to all relationships. Yet we will attempt the impossible. In keeping with the Middle Theory's fundamental concepts, we can conclude that excitement in *all* relationships is somehow connected to balance. If we find a way to maintain balance in our romantic relationships we will discover a way to maintain excitement throughout its existence.

*The way to maintain balance in romantic relationships  
is  
through an effective use of space.*

Many long-term unions are cold and stagnant because of an improper use of space. Either too much time is spent together to support an ongoing sense of discovery about the relationship, or too much time is spent apart and out of contact for frequent discovery to occur.

We will deal first with the case of insufficient time spent apart. Physical space is much more difficult to maintain when you share mortgage payments, child rearing, and other important responsibilities, not to mention the same bathroom. Committed relationships may be a difficult tight rope to walk, but maintaining a sense of excitement and newness in a long-term commitment is possible. If you are married, or have been dating the same person for several years, you no doubt understand the need for personal space. Personal space, or private-time, is an

important part of a healthy romantic union; long-term relationships can become antagonistic, tense, and predictable if the inherent need for private time is not met. To keep things fresh and exciting, couples in long-term commitments should ensure that they are spending sufficient time apart, engaged in personal activities (not job related) unrelated to the relationship. If no outside interests are catered to, long-term relationships will become stagnant, trite—uninteresting. Life is dynamic, it wants movement; it craves to have new experiences.

We are multifaceted beings. Romantic love is but one experience among numberless human experiences. Variety is indeed the spice of life. The quickest way to invite boredom into a romantic union is to neglect the need for personal time. Take time to be with yourself. Maintain or develop personal hobbies. Keep in touch with family and friends. *Be with yourself often.* When it comes time to reunite with your spouse, or long-term love interest, you will find that there is more to talk about—new ideas to express, new experiences to share, new suggestions to make. Most of all, periodic separation keeps the “to and fro” movement going. This recreates the air of excitement found in new relationships, and it allows you and your lover to appreciate each other more fully.

Periodic separation also results in momentary feelings of *missing*. It is in the missing that we recharge our energies and fuel the spark that keeps us wanting more. When you are apart from your lover you are actually able to “see” him or her better, because your thoughts about him or her become more reflective and expanded, and in many cases you begin to develop a new awareness of your mate. Within the periods of separation your thoughts about your significant other are broader—you begin to “see” the whole person, the way you see a whole painting when you step away from it. You recall their scent, their touch, their voice, the way they walk, their smile, their eyes, their spiritual energy, and so on. Eventually, such thoughts give rise to a feeling

of missing, which creates a feeling of longing. It is this sense of longing to be with your lover that is at risk of dissolving once the predictable routine of committed life sets in.

There always needs to be a balance between the experience of a thing and the longing to have that experience. This balance is sensitive, and it is important that it be maintained. If you continuously have an experience of something, you will not appreciate it, and after a while the experience itself will lose its value. If you always long for a thing, never having an experience of it, you will become discouraged and gradually lose interest. These are both undesirable extremes; the balance of these extremes brings contentment. In particular, in romantic situations, this balance fosters an on-going sense of discovery.

Now the case of too much time spent apart. Many long-term relationships lack a sense of discovery and romance because too much time is spent apart. Constant separation is not good; instead of fostering a healthy longing, it brings about a frustration with the relationship. To maintain a vibrant romantic relationship requires us to *relate* often with our partner. If communication is inconsistent and shared experiences uncommon, the bonds of the relationship will grow weak. The sense of “missing” and “longing” ignited by brief periods of separation may change to anger or even indifference if separation becomes excessive. *Every relationship has a special place of balance*; this particularly applies to the amount of time spent apart and together. There is no amount of time apart or together that is suitable for all relationships. No two relationships are the same. The Middle Theory is a guide, and thus it can help us to discover the balance-point in our relationships, but guides only point us in the right direction; we must find our precise destinations on our own. *The balance-point is always a personal discovery.*

No one other than you and your partner can discover the balance between togetherness and separation that is needed for a stable union. This balance is as unique as your relationship, but it

can easily be discovered if you pay close attention to your feelings. You can only do this if you are in touch with yourself. Follow your intuitive wisdom and let it guide you in your romance. Communicate your feelings often to your partner and navigate together towards that place where experience and longing balance each other to form an ageless union.

If you find that you feel cramped, then you may need more personal time away from your partner. You may do any number of things: join a book club, take dance lessons, take the dog for long walks—do whatever you find interesting, just change your normal routine. If you are feeling lonely, and your partner always seems preoccupied with something else, then time apart is the last thing you need. In this case, you and your partner need to spend more time together, and to share more. Plan a special night out, take a trip together, or simply spend a relaxing evening at home watching a movie. Again, do whatever pleases you, as long as it involves sharing. This “balancing act” is an ongoing process. It doesn’t end with one stabilizing activity. Balance in a romantic relationship requires constant effort and creativity. You have to be sensitive to the needs of the relationship, and use your feelings, intuition, and perception to monitor the state of your relationship on a daily basis. Communicate your feelings to your partner, and find creative ways to maintain balance.

It may seem like I have failed to consider the intense, often overwhelming, emotions involved in romantic relationships. Whatever happened to “animal attraction,” the “forces of nature,” and the uncontrollable desire to be with someone? Aren’t we supposed to lose ourselves when we fall in love? Isn’t reason the first thing to go? Are we really supposed to have the presence of mind to be honest about what we see in our mates? These questions center on an idea that has been with us for centuries: when we meet that special someone, we fall hopelessly in love; we become blinded by our own emotions. This idea, though based in our experiences, undermines the noble purpose

of romantic relationships. Romantic relationships may be initiated by an intense feeling of attraction that seems to erupt spontaneously; however, like a flame without oxygen, our romantic relationships will burn out quickly unless there is a deep and abiding love that firmly connects us to our partners. No matter how intensely attracted we are to someone, we should not allow our conduct to be guided solely by our emotions. Our emotions (emotions are transient feelings; this is different from our deepest feelings) can sometimes lead us astray and betray the purpose of our hearts. Our emotions must be balanced by the power of wisdom and honesty. As human beings we have the capacity to override our emotions and make wise choices. If this were not the case, we would helplessly follow the dictates of our every whim.

What we call “love at first sight” is really intense attraction at first sight. We see someone for the first time and we feel a deep attraction that generates an emotional response, which we may perceive as love. This intense feeling may be a lot of things—karmic, exhilarating, and intoxicating—but love is not one of them. In order to love someone romantically in the truest of senses, we must know him or her intimately (especially in a spiritual sense). It is impossible to know someone intimately whom you are meeting for the first time. A few enjoyable dates may produce feelings of intimacy, but enduring romantic relationships require much more than feelings. They require a deep knowing, honesty and commitment. Hoping to know someone intimately by the end a few dates is like hoping to get a five star meal from McDonald’s—it won’t happen. Balanced romantic relationships take time to cultivate (there is no fixed amount of time, but it’s safe to say it’s more than a few days or weeks), because they require us to look beyond the physical exterior, and get a glimpse of a person’s essence—a glimpse that could take many months, even many years. In the most fulfilling

romantic relationships, the sense of getting to know each other never ends.

When we are uncentered, as many of us are, our experience of romantic love often makes us feel like we are being swept away, or like we are losing ourselves. These sentiments are valid, but what is being discussed here is balanced romantic love; love that *grows* out of the soil of *knowing* and *acceptance*; love that blossoms when two individuals learn to love honestly without fear. The experience of this kind of romantic love differs from the overly played out, unrealistic notions of romantic love that have become a part of the “instant everything” culture of today. Our misguided thoughts about romantic love have become reality. Romantic love has become something you “fall into” or “out of”—a feeling that just happens. The balanced experience of romantic love is not something you “fall into,” but something you “grow into.” It is not something you fall out of, but an experience you may consciously decide to change. In balanced romantic relationships you do not lose yourself anymore than you lose your voice when you are silent. Because you are in touch with your deeper self, your union with another doesn’t cause you to lose yourself; instead, it helps you to see more of yourself.

We have made romantic love into a feeling that is only skin deep. In the West, our movies, music, and many of our books have helped to create a culture where the spiritual components of romantic love are ignored in favor of physical ones. We have taught our children, either implicitly or overtly, to expect “fire works” when they fall in love, and we have made romance into something that is incomplete without candles and wine.

Many things can be seen as romantic; however, *true romance* is known when we weather life’s storms with a person, when we are able to find that special something in someone after the pretense has ended and after we see the whole person. We are learning though, albeit the hard way, and our experiences in life—the many failed marriages, the bitter endings to seemingly ideal

romances, the nasty arguments, the emotional and physical abuse, the broken hearts, the fatherless children, the suicides, the infidelity, the lies, the pain—are beginning to show us our error. We are beginning to see that true romantic love is not a momentary experience that leaves us giddy, but a process of growth that can lead us to a higher awareness of our partner and ourselves. Because romantic relationships are ever-changing, there is *always* something new to learn, some new experience to share with our partner. And most of all, I think we are beginning to realize that without *acceptance*, the process of genuine romantic love cannot begin.

To *know* someone means *understanding a person's essential qualities through shared experiences and communication*. We never know everything about anyone; therefore it is apparent that we do not have to know all there is to know about our mates to attain balance in our relationships. We are always getting to know our mates; however, when we have a deep and abiding awareness of certain representative aspects of their unique personages—their goals, passions, fears, strengths, weaknesses, medical history, pet peeves, philosophical and religious beliefs, talents, cultural heritage, childhood experiences and so much more—we can with confidence claim to know them. The more we know about our partners, the more we realize that there is more to know. At some point along the never-ending process of “getting to know,” we feel and sense that we truly *know* our beloved. Indeed, this is the point at which a balanced romantic relationship begins.

Balanced romantic relationships are sustained by much more than physical attraction and sexual desire. Balanced romantic unions are created in an atmosphere of acceptance where there is an ongoing, sincere effort to resolve conflicts without excessive aggression. There must also be a fundamental meeting of the minds that fuels an abiding spiritual connection. Physical attraction can be seen as the beginning of a balanced romantic

union, comparable to the cover of a book. A few shared experiences may get us to the end of the first page. Yet if we want our romantic relationships to be characterized by a revitalizing sense of discovery—if we want our romantic relationships to be balanced—we must patiently read the whole book with an open mind and an honest heart. Only then will each line speak to us and help us to make wise decisions.

Five

## Relationship To God

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with  
all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.*

—*Luke 10:27 (The Bible)*

We are all, to some degree, in the dark when the topic turns to God. The entire universe exists and operates on its own without the need of any assistance from humankind, or, so it would seem, from any distinct being—a great mystery indeed. Yet, although we do not fully understand how life originated, our existence impels us to consider the reality of a powerful, eternal life-source that organizes, creates, and transforms the physical and non-physical world.

I like the way Werner Von Braun, one of the world's first rocket engineers and a leading authority on space travel, puts it: "One cannot be exposed to the law and order of the universe without concluding that there must be design and purpose behind it all...The better we understand the intricacies of the universe and all it harbors, the more reason we have found to marvel at the inherent design upon which it is based." Many notable thinkers and scientists have come to the same conclusion.

There are compelling, rational reasons to believe in an all-powerful, all-knowing Creator, but a belief in God is not enough. The human mind is not satisfied with proving the existence of things. We want to know why things exist; we must find meaning in existence. To develop a meaningful relationship with God is the greatest longing of the human heart.

*God is at the center of our search for meaning*

A true relationship with God is based in experience, not ideas. Faith brings us to the door of the divine, but without the confirming effect of experience, we never fully enter a state of divine awareness. As we learned earlier, the beginning of wisdom is awareness of the sacred self. Now, we go further: perfect wisdom requires us to perceive our eternal connection to that quickening Spirit, that Supreme Intelligence that breathed life into existence. Inner peace, perfect wisdom, lasting happiness, a

pure heart...a balanced life, is the result of having a meaningful relationship with God.

A few words about my journey to a deeper awareness of God is perhaps appropriate at this point. I grew up on the tiny island of New Providence, the capitol of a chain of Bahamian islands situated just off the east coast of Florida. Per capita, the Bahamas has more churches than any other country in the world. As is typical in the Bahamas, I attended church each Sunday. I was moved by the “hell-fire and brimstone” sermons of animated preachers. At the age of eleven I accepted Jesus Christ as my redeemer. By accepting Christ I had, I was told, accepted God into my life. I was on my way to heaven.

For most of my early teen years I was a happy believer, at times even a little fanatical about my beliefs. By the time I graduated from high school, however, I was beginning to question some of my teachings. I was not entirely comfortable with the idea of someone being condemned to a burning pit for all eternity, simply because he or she was not a Christian. To me, this doctrine seemed severe, simplistic.

I began university as an ambivalent Christian. My belief in God was as strong as ever, but the God of my heart and the God of my religion seemed like different deities. Eventually, after years of searching for answers, I realized that God is the God of all peoples, the source of every divinely inspired religion, and that when we fix our eyes on the Sun of Truth, wherever it may arise, we are carried by mysterious forces to the presence of God. Truth became my “religion.” I realized then that truth could be found in the sacred texts of religions other than Christianity. The doors of my heart were flung wide open as God’s wondrous truth entered in. It seemed at times that I could hear God’s voice in the sounds of nature, or see God’s face in the eyes of a passerby. I was finally experiencing God in a profoundly personal way. God became a truth more real to me than the ground I walked on.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will ask fundamental questions about God; the kind of questions a thoughtful child might pose. The answers will help to open our spiritual eyes. God is closer to us than we can imagine, and yet so many of us do not feel the presence of God in our lives. We pray from time to time, but seldom do we feel like we are truly receiving answers. We attend religious gatherings month after month, but rarely do we feel inspired. Sometimes it seems like God doesn't care or even exist. Consider the answers to the following questions, and then listen, truly listen to your heart. None of us are satisfied with a belief in God; we want to experience God, to meet God.

*Where is God?*

God is everywhere is a profound truth, but it lacks meaning. We cannot get our minds around everywhere. Everywhere has about as much meaning to us as black holes. To locate God we should not talk about places, for indeed God is everywhere. We must talk about experiences. How can we experience God in a personal way that makes us feel close to God, as if God were truly present?

To experience God, the mind must be stilled so that our inner eye, the eye that perceives the mystery of life within every form, can be opened. It is our inner eye that sees God in the movement of the wind, or in a raindrop beading down a crooked path. The pertinent question, then, is not where is God, but how do we open our inner eyes? We do this through a gradual awakening process that leads us ultimately to a state of balance.

As we move toward balance, we experience different levels of awareness. At first, we simply sense that there is a power in the universe that is greater than our own. We see the sky and the ocean and we feel small, and we know deep inside that we are not the authors of the physical world. From this point of inquiry, the mind begins its search for God. To aid our search, we turn to science or religion or whatever else seems to point us in the right direction. Some abandon the search altogether out of sheer

frustration, but most of us carry on, searching, hoping that someday, perhaps in the next world, we will see God. At this level of awareness it can be said we sense that God exists, but we are not certain of it; we still feel like we have not had direct contact with God.

Should we be inspired to dive deeper into the mystery of existence, we begin to feel dissatisfied with man-made images of God. We may even question our traditional religious beliefs and begin to pray or meditate daily, hoping to feel something sublime. At this level, we reach for God with our hearts, not our minds. We sense God more deeply, but, like a mirage, God “disappears” as we advance. Here is where many of us end our search; or worse, we revert to a less advanced level of awareness because, try as we may, we are never able to truly find God. God never shows up. Our inner eye, once on the verge of opening, remains closed for the rest of our time on earth.

*God cannot be seen with the outer eye. It is the inner eye, the eye of discernment, that sees the holiness of creation, its perfection, its bounty and majesty—its Godliness.*

The level of awareness we must reach to see God is one of utter detachment. At this level we are dissatisfied with what the material world has to offer and therefore have become detached from its temporary joys and have turned wholly towards the inner realm of ecstasy. Those who experience this level of awareness have drunk from the cup of misery, dwelt in the land of doubt, and fallen, time and time again, in fields of vain imaginings. Their hearts have been broken, their minds crushed—but somehow, they move on from the level of inquiry into the experience of god consciousness. They become aware of the transcendent presence of God, a presence that truly does guide, does speak, and is very real. It is here in this heightened state—a state I term “balanced awareness”—that our inner eyes

are opened and our minds are stilled. We begin, finally, to see the face of God in the world around us, and we hear the voice of God speaking from within us, leading us to enlightenment. We begin to understand that God cannot be pinned down to any place and that God has no form but the form of life.

Because we are accustomed to relating to people and observing discrete objects, some part of us wants to believe God is a person we can shake hands with. It is not that God is not a person; it is that God is infinitely more. God, to varying degrees, is experienced by all who move within the ocean of existence; animals, plants, and human beings are always submerged in God's presence. Human beings, however, have the distinct ability to be conscious of God's presence and to enjoy an everlasting dialogue with life's Source.

*What spiritual path leads to God?*

Self-evident truths preclude debate. That we exist, for example, is never in question. We can, however, debate about how we came to exist, whether or not it was the result of a cosmic bang that happened by chance or of a Creator's wish to create life as we know it. This debate continues today and will no doubt continue for many years to come. To those who suspect that life is not an accident, that, however limited is our understanding, there is indeed a Creator who has a purpose for creation, I pose an intriguing question: What if all the major, world-wide religions contain, at their core, wisdom that leads us to God?

The path to God has been revealed to the Buddhist and the Christian, the Muslim and the Jew. This path is and has always been the path of love, detachment, kindness, and purity of mind. We can be certain that the path to God is not hatred, wickedness, or anything that does not serve the advancement of humankind. The person who studies the sacred texts of the world's great religions will find similar truths that call on us to treat others as we would have others treat us; lofty truths that stir the soul, illumine the mind, and awaken us to the divine presence

operating within our midst. The walls of division, erected by fear and ignorance, have prevented us from sharing the progressive message of God with each other. Were we to pause and mindfully contemplate the reality of our common existence, we would realize that God has been guiding us all along by the Light of Truth manifested to humankind by divine Messengers. We would recognize the call of these Pure Souls to be one and the same, the melody of their verses to be notes of one song.

We have strayed far from the teachings of the Stainless Souls who revealed God's Truth. We have left the Path of Truth and pitched tents along the path of error. For so long have we been in error that Truth now seems like heresy, wisdom like foolishness. Our hearts have become stony as we walk upon the earth blinded by pride, unwilling to unite, believing that we are somehow doing God's will. How limited is our vision that we cannot see the face of God within all creation, that God's wondrous Truth, revealed by the Centers of the great religions, has become the cause of discord.

The spiritual path to God is not a secret that God deals out to a chosen few; it is an eternal truth revealed to the receptive human soul. Turn to the *Dhammapada* and we hear the Buddha saying, "Better than ruling this world, better than attaining the realm of gods, better than being lord of all the worlds, is one step taken on the path to nirvana." In the *Quran* Muhammad extols, "To God belongs the East and the West; and wherever you turn, there is the face of God. For God is omnipresent, all-knowing." The *Bible* records Christ as saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the most recent Messenger of God, states, "There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are subjects of one God." Do we not

hear the same Luminous Voice of God reverberating in these verses, directing us to the Straight Path of love and unity, reminding us of our purpose, and awakening us to a noble life? Is it not clear that the religions of God are not different paths, but different lights along the same spiritual Path of Truth that lead to a deeper experience of God?

*Who is God?*

The essence of God can never be known completely. God is unknowable, immeasurably more unknowable than the ocean, or the sky, or the universe itself. But that does not mean we cannot have a deeper experience of God, that, however limited are our concepts of God, we cannot perceive shimmers of God's character shining within the mirror of creation.

Let's look in this mirror. The universe contains a mind-boggling array of life. There are galaxies, stars, mountains, lakes, birds, bees, flowers, and on and on. Fundamental to developing a meaningful relationship with God is the awareness of God in all creation. Life must have a single source. This source is God. Questions such as "Where did life come from?" and "How did I come into being?" are questions of a mind searching for life's source.

Scientists continue to debate about the origin of the universe. Some scientists can find no other logical explanation than to accept that a supreme consciousness is the source of creation, while others are willing to accept that life just happened because it could, and to dismiss the elegance of creation as happenstance. Science and religion are attempts to understand more about ultimate reality.

There would be no science or religion without life. Clearly life itself holds more wisdom than science can ever reveal, because it is life—atoms, cells, gravity, water, etc.—that the scientist must study to learn more about how life works. Science is a tool; it can never provide us with all the answers about life. Spiritual truth, like science, also teaches us about life; however, unlike science,

these truths speak of a reality that is real, yet transcends the physical world. Together science and spiritual truth help us to understand the phenomenon we call life.

Even the agnostic scientist cannot deny that life is fantastically designed. Indeed, it is scientists who have probed the depths of the atom and magnified the bacteria, increasing our knowledge of life's many wonders. It is science that has revealed the remarkable precision of nature, its artful symmetry and unimaginable diversity. And through the revealed messages of god-like beings we have felt, echoed in their majestic verses, a spiritual force that is not of this material world.

*Consciousness is the greatest proof of the existence of God.*

Spiritual truth and science tell us much about God. A study of the atom, for example, reveals that God is immeasurably intelligent; such descriptions as all-knowing and omniscient come to mind. It is also clear from observing nature that God's great mind is infinitely artistic. It would not be blasphemous to say that God is the greatest artist in existence. Science gives us a quick glimpse into the mind of God, but only a very quick glimpse. If we are to learn something about God's character we must turn to those beings who, through their life and teachings, manifested a spiritual radiance that could only come from a source far greater than the human intellect. I speak of such persons as Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad and Bahá'u'lláh. Whether we are religious or not, we cannot deny that these individuals were unique beings possessing mysterious powers, and that they lived on a higher plane than the rest of humanity. If these divine Messengers were truly manifestations of Light and Truth, then, to some degree, their lives should reveal attributes of God's character.

An unmatched readiness to assist humanity, a tender heart brimming with compassion, an undaunted purveyor of truth, a

pure and sinless core, are all befitting descriptions of those stainless souls who have directed humanity to the realm of holiness. These Divine Educators, one and all, were, to every honest seeker of truth, the epitome of love and sacrifice. From their lives, we get an extended look into the mind of God; and we see, to put it poetically, that God's mind is an ocean of love.

It is impossible to describe God adequately, but words are all we have: *God is the self-subsisting consciousness that manifests itself (life) in myriad forms throughout eternity, and yet exists forever in a state of absolute balance.* It is from this state of absolute balance that life, intended from the unknowable mind of God, emerges with the capacity to have polar experiences; for example, pain and joy, or fear and love. Of all these experiences, love remains the single force into which all other forces (experiences) can be absorbed to manifest absolute balance—*god consciousness*. Buddhists call this state of absolute balance Nirvana. Christians call it heaven. God consciousness, to have a continuous and absolute awareness of love, is the purpose of life. God is the eternal, uncreated source of life guiding all creation to this perfect end that has no end.

***How can imperfect beings relate to a perfect God?***

This is a reasonable question. Most would expect a complicated answer, but the answer is simple: *perceive life as individual aspects of God that, when balanced, reflect God's perfect image.* We all know perfection when we see or experience it, though it is almost impossible to describe. A perfect flower leaves us speechless. So does a perfect sunset or a perfect snowflake. Still, the question remains, "what is perfection?" Is it not the perception of absolute balance, a moment when the mind ceases to judge or characterize and simply perceives life as a unified whole? To develop a relationship with God, we must perceive perfection all around us. Our minds, through a gradual awakening process, must become attuned to the perfecting experience of balance that enables existence to advance towards

god consciousness. We must begin to live as members of a divine whole and treat ourselves and all life forms as potentialities of perfection. This is not simply a mental exercise, a type of forced mental illusion to get us to see what is not really there. This is a process of retraining the mind to see life itself, not simply its outward form. Life itself is always perfect, because life itself is God.

Life does not always manifest perfection. People suffer and die. Bombs shatter frail bodies. Innocent children starve to death. Fatal accidents occur every day. How then can we reconcile our belief in a perfectly balanced God, a God that is continuously and absolutely aware of love, with the reality of the imperfection we see all around us?

We first have to understand what the ultimate purpose of life is and then come to understand how this purpose is fulfilled. I said earlier that god consciousness is the purpose of life. This can be rephrased simply as follows: the purpose of life is to manifest perfection. Intuitively, we understand what perfection is, though, as I mentioned earlier, it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe. Whenever we perceive perfection we feel a sense of wholeness, the mind is temporarily stilled and balanced by the awareness of something sublime that transcends the five senses. It can be said that in such moments we experience God.

What is more perfect: A man who unknowingly does good deeds or a man who chooses to do good deeds? Choice, within the realm of conscious creation, is a necessary element of perfection. By conscious creation I mean life that is self-aware, creation that chooses based on beliefs, feelings, or goals. In what we call the material world we see perfection everywhere: a flower, a rain drop, an oak tree. Within the plant, animal, and mineral kingdoms, perfection is attained through the balance of forces and chemicals that have properties instituted by God. Human beings, for example, are not causing the earth to spin, and yet it spins with a predictability that allows us to create calendars. The

force spinning the earth, the speed of light, the rate at which an animal's heart beats, the properties of water, the tree roots reaching for water and so on are all controlled by an intelligent force that desires to manifest balance. Animals, plants, and minerals are programmed to behave in a certain way under certain conditions. When conditions are balanced, these life-forms involuntarily manifest perfection. Human beings, on the other hand, must choose the path of perfection. Perfection within the plant, animal, and mineral kingdoms results from a balance of forces and chemicals; perfection within the realm of conscious creation results from the *balance of awareness*. In other words, human beings evolve towards perfection by choosing certain thoughts and actions, which ultimately impact our level of spiritual awareness.

The highest experience of perfection is the continuous and absolute awareness of love. Creation, without the capacity to be self-aware (conscious), could not have this experience. If conscious life could not choose, it could not be conscious because *consciousness* implies *awareness of self* and *awareness of choice*.

### ***Why does God permit suffering?***

Many find it difficult to believe a good and perfect God could have created a world that is so fraught with imperfections, a world rampant with sorrow, drowning in a sea of mishaps and pain. The reality of suffering threatens to sweep us into an abyss of cynicism. The suffering that we witness daily on the television or in our own homes and communities is undeniable. We often fail to realize, however, that suffering is not the natural state of existence. Suffering is a symptom of imbalance that signals a need for change and growth. Perfection is the potential that lies within all of creation. God has created a universe that is governed by physical and spiritual laws. These laws operate without prejudice. If, for example, a person were to leap from a tall building, he would, under the pull of gravity, fall to the ground. The result of this event may lead to his death and would cause his relatives and

close friends to grieve. One might argue that in a world created by a loving God such events would not occur. Universal laws would be in place to prevent anyone from experiencing pain, ever. Angels would swoop down to catch falling babies, and every time an accident was about to occur life would, by some miracle, prevent it. There would be no arguments, no tears, and no sadness of any kind.

But could such a universe permit the operation of free will? Could a world that did not allow for us to experience pain ever allow us to know the summit of joy? Without periods of physical and emotional pain would we ever be forced to draw on our spiritual reserves? Suffering is not without purpose. Suffering is part of the process of growth, which leads to spiritual and physical maturity. A butterfly must struggle to break free of its cocoon before it can fly. Every mother that gives birth suffers the pain of delivery. Without resistance, struggle, and trials, the spiritual qualities latent within every human being would remain dormant. We would, like an athlete who avoids the pain of intense training, never reach the pinnacle of our potential.

That said it is important that we understand there is a subtle—but important—difference between pain and suffering. As was mentioned in an earlier chapter, suffering at its worst is the complete loss of balance. As long as we exist on earth, we will experience some form of physical and emotional pain: a stubbed toe, a failed relationship, the loss of a loved one, etc. However, these temporary bouts of physical and emotional pain are not the acute forms of suffering that cause us to question the existence of a loving Creator; our beliefs are tested by more pernicious matters: poverty, war, disease, and other such plagues that have engulfed a huge sector of humanity. It is suffering caused by these tragedies that makes us wonder why God doesn't just put an end to the endless chaos on this planet. Acute suffering caused by selfishness, greed, and wickedness that enters the realm of evil is caused by the operation of our will. Despite the possibility for

terrible suffering, endowing human beings with a rational soul that has a free will is a supremely loving act for it allows us to experience the highest state of perfection: *the continuous awareness of love*. Remember, without consciousness, we could not have this experience.

The power of consciousness can be used for great good or great evil; hence the need for divine Messengers to help guide the will of humanity. When we turn to these Messengers and follow their example, aligning our will with the Supreme Will manifested by their beings, we begin to manifest those attributes that increase balance: kindness, friendliness, forgiveness, mindfulness and so on. When we turn away from the true spirit of these Messengers, either willfully or because of ignorance, the soul loses its illumination and becomes the source of suffering.

If life on earth was the whole story, then indeed it would be difficult to build a case for the existence of a loving Creator. However great is our suffering in this stage of life, it is an experience that will pass and give way to eternity. After physical death the soul will continue to exist in the endless domains of God, progressing under the direction of its will and aided by God's all-loving Providence to a deeper awareness of reality.

Six

## Power To Move Mountains

*What lies behind us, and what lies before us  
are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.*

—Author unknown

We find ourselves here in this vast universe and, naturally, we wonder how do we demonstrate the power we so often feel stirring within us? What is power? How might we harness our internal power to realize our full potential? How do we demonstrate the power of our being?

Power is demonstrated in many ways. The judge that hands a death sentence to a convicted killer wields a certain kind of power. The high school principal has power to expel delinquent students. The police officer has the power to arrest. Voters have the power to elect. Parents have a powerful influence over their children. The military has lethal power. These powers are all based upon our roles within society. These roles give each person a certain rank: the higher one's rank, the greater one's power. The rich have greater rank than the poor in our system; therefore, the rich have more power than the poor. Such powers are inherited or given and therefore can be revoked. These powers are *superficial*. Superficial power is essentially the ability to control by force, fear, or reward.

Outside of this earthly realm, the police officer has no power to arrest, the high school principal, no power to expel. There is a type of power that is not limited by the laws of our society, nor is it dependent upon our roles in society. This power is *divine power*: a spiritual force that can change hearts, awaken minds, and transform societies. Divine power is not given or achieved; it is realized. This power, like the power that organizes the universe, predates humankind; it is the soul's radiating energy. Divine power is beyond the influence of money or fame, because it is fueled by spiritual, not material, ambitions. The rich have no more access to divine power than the poor. Divine power is equally available to all.

The transforming effect of divine power has shaped our civilizations. Zoroaster, the Buddha, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and Bahá'u'lláh, to name a few of the divine Messengers, demonstrated supreme divine power throughout

their lives. Their lives altered humanity's course. When divine power moves into a space, it changes it; its effects are evident. The quickening force of divine power has established our religious traditions, cultural expressions, and government codes. Without divine power, we would be unaware of our spiritual potential.

Superficial power has its purpose; without it life as we know it could not continue. If the doctor didn't have the power to prescribe medicine, diseases would go untreated. If the teacher didn't have the respect of the student, she would have no power to impart knowledge. Our system of life would break down without superficial power. Yet, like most things, superficial power has its limitations, and is easily abused. Because superficial power is associated with rank or status in our society, it is easily influenced by the ego. The government official may, for instance, forget that he has been elected to perform a job, and begin to seek fame and fortune. The abuses of superficial power are many.

Divine power can only be exercised when we are guided by an inner conviction to do what benefits humanity. Its demonstration requires us to be motivated by a higher calling. Divine power is not limited by our society's social constructs, or even by the total destruction of the body. This power knows no limits. We sense our divine power during moments of centeredness, moments of balance—moments when we become aware of life's spiritual basis and sense our connection to life's unknowable, organizing power.

Life guides the soul of each individual. Everyone is being steered by life's experiences into a fuller awareness of the sacred self. Most of us are not aware of this guidance, and so we live unconsciously as drifters who feel no connection to the spiritual reality. When we live without a sense of connection to our deeper selves, we feel no inner direction; we are without conviction to do, or be, anything—we are unable to demonstrate our divine power.

The consistent demonstration of divine power is uncommon. History has shown us that few persons demonstrate divine power throughout their lives. The world has many followers, and many leaders wielding superficial power; at any given moment, however, there are only a few human beings who lead through the force of their divine power. It has always been this way. This must change if humanity is ever to reach an age of spiritual maturity. Humankind has been gifted with the capacity to know and commune with the Divine Essence. We have the ability to reflect our highest ideals and, through the power of our will, transform the world into a heavenly garden. But how? How do we overcome the differences that separate us? How can we reconcile our cultural disparities, and our varied skin tones, religious beliefs, economic standing and lifestyles? Do we have sufficient power to heal the wounds of the past and unite as one human family? We will explore the answers to these questions in this chapter. We will focus primarily on our attitudes towards religion and race, as these are undoubtedly the most divisive. Using the Middle Theory's insights, we will also learn how to exercise our individual and collective divine power.

*Enlightenment is the soul becoming aware of its power*

Right now life on earth is far from being peaceful. Religious tension—the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Indian-Pakistani conflict, the Protestant-Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland, the religious disputes of Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus in India, or the bitter religious prejudice in the United States—continues to be a thorn in humanity's side. Underlying every act of aggression is a selfish desire for superficial power. If there is ever going to be a global shift towards peace it will require a new approach to striving for political and religious power, an approach that is no longer based on the law of the jungle, but one that embraces the inherent oneness of humanity.

Like the human body, humanity is composed of many distinct members. Unless the parts of the body work together, it will be incapable of even the simple act of swallowing. If humankind is to move forward into a time when the whole of humanity contributes to the vitality of the human body as a whole, then each member must work together, struggle together, and function as one organism. When this happens, our lands and waterways will be peaceful, our collective divine power awakened. This is self-evident. Throughout the ages, peace advocates and wise men and women have encouraged the world to seek power through the forces of love and partnership.

The unification of humankind has never been as possible as it is now. Overt colonization and wholesale slavery have ended. Now, more than ever before, the earth's citizens can use their energy to create peace instead of to conquer and divide. We now have the scientific expertise and physical means to improve the overall condition of life on this planet. Our will to create peace is a powerful force, but our collective will is not enough; we also need to adopt a new approach to living, one that appeals to the devout of any religion and to non-religious persons alike. We need a practical, simple approach to living that appeals to humanity's intuitive sense of truth and justice.

The Middle Theory offers us a promising approach: each individual, be he religious or not, should adopt a *middle approach* to understanding every philosophical, cultural, and religious teaching. The middle approach requires us to make a commitment to peace, and to do all within our power to promote kindness and understanding between all peoples. When we adopt the middle approach we are making a decision to live judiciously, to focus on those things that are common to all human beings, instead of those things that separate us.

*Any hateful thought or act of aggression diminishes our ability to realize divine power.*

If the world adopts the middle approach we will learn to handle our differences without aggression, we will begin to understand that the supreme power within the universe favors friendship, and, most importantly, we will begin to see the humanity in every person regardless of his or her place of birth, ethnicity, or religious beliefs.

The middle approach is centered on the idea of balance. There is a balance of religious ideas and teachings that can be experienced once we open our hearts to the possibility of religious unity. Balance within the context of religious unity requires us to be willing to suspend our dogmatic ideas about spiritual truth, and to be concerned with amity more than anything else. The open heart is willing to find the common threads that run through the teachings of the great religions; this heart senses that beneath the thin layer of differences is a deep bedrock of common ideals.

The act of trying to convert someone to our way of thinking rests in our desire to connect with others, to feel as if we are a part of those around us. There is little sharing of ideas, doctrines, and experiences between those of different religions; hence we continue to be distrusting of one another, and fundamentally separated. For balance and collective divine power to be demonstrated, the great religions' administrative organs will have to shift their focus from conversion to sharing. This will require more inter-faith dialogue and meetings that allow for a civil exchange of spiritual ideas. With a new commitment to consultation, we will notice that charity, fasting, forgiveness, prayer and many other core teachings are shared by the religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, the Bahá'í Faith...all of the great religions. The sharing of ideas in an atmosphere of respect inevitably leads to a mutual expansion of beliefs, and to an unbiased understanding of our most sacred teachings. The misunderstanding, distrust, and resentment that

now exist between those of different religions can be eased if we adopt the middle approach.

*The great religions articulate a similar wisdom. Though separated by centuries, and founded by persons of different ethnicities, they equally reflect the Eternal Light of God.*

The differences between the great religions need not be stumbling blocks on our path to unity. Are we always in agreement with our friends? No, but do we love our friends, and are we kind to them? Yes. Friendships exist because human beings desire to share with each other. This desire is innate. We are all seeking to connect with each other on some level. Our friends are by no means perfect; sometimes their actions disappoint us, and many times our viewpoints differ from theirs. We may even argue with our friends, but because we value our friendships we handle disagreements in a rational, thoughtful manner. The great religions can become friends. There are differences to be sure, but there are also great common truths that can bring us together.

The middle approach to understanding spiritual wisdom will lead us to focus more on the core teachings of our religions. These core teachings are, I believe, important common threads. If we think carefully, we will realize that there is more that binds us than separates us. All religions teach control over the mind, awareness of the spiritual reality, and generosity as a way to attain inner peace. In every religious tradition we find similar principles that guide us into a deeper awareness of the Divine Essence. It is not surprising that there are some differences in religious doctrines, given the varied social and cultural environments of those who founded the different religions. What is surprising, and I think worthy of note, is that there are significant

commonalities. It seems reasonable to conclude that all of the major religions are attempts to understand the divine focal point from which all life has evolved. If we set aside our exclusive claims to truth, and our irrational ideas about our prophet or founder being the last or the greatest, I think we will see that God's guidance, like our cultures and physical features, has been manifested in many different forms. These forms, though different on the surface, are individual articulations of the same divine principles. The oneness of God's Teachers is expressed eloquently by the visionary Baba Virsa Singh:

All the Prophets have come from the same Light; they all give the same basic messages. None have come to change the older revealed scriptures; they have come to remind people of the earlier Prophets' messages which the people have forgotten. We have made separate religions as walled forts, each claiming one of the Prophets as its own. But the Light of God cannot be confined within any manmade structures. It radiates throughout all of Creation. How can we possess it?

Along with the common thread of spiritual principles, we also see that the great religions share similar goals. These goals can be delineated as follows:

- To empower humankind to live peacefully.
- To help us realize our potential through spiritual awareness.
- To awaken us to the soul's reality, thereby empowering us to express our higher will.
- To help us understand spiritual mysteries.
- To aid our spiritual evolution, and prepare us for the next stage of life.
- To provide an organized system for humanity's advancement.

The archer must first identify his target, hold that awareness and then shoot, if he is to be successful in hitting his mark. Likewise, once we recognize that the great religions have the same goals, our awareness of their oneness will increase, and by striving together we better our chances of reaching these goals. The main goals of our religions are realized in one experience: *unity*. Our spiritual evolution is moving us evermore closer to the “target” of unity. To hit the target of global unity, we must first shift our focus inward. It is the inner world that must first be stabilized. Inner peace must be attained first. Then, each individual must recognize that he or she is a part of a larger existence, and must seek to live in a peaceful friendship with that existence. This will lead to an experience of collective oneness (a fancy way of saying a peaceful coexistence). The teachings of *every* holy messenger are, to any objective mind, a call to *live as one*. Is this not a call to experience unity?

We may observe that presently there does not exist collective oneness. There is still ethnic cleansing in parts of the world. There are suicide attacks, air strikes, covert operations, and myriad forms of disorder. We are powerless against humanity’s ills because we are still divided. Our observations speak for themselves; it is clear that change is needed. But what exactly needs to be changed? We must change those beliefs that are dogmatic and irrational. Irrational beliefs are those that deny self-evident truths, those based in fanaticism and feelings of superiority. For example, the belief that a Black person is inherently inferior to a White person is an irrational belief. Beliefs are too varied and complex for us to consider the multitude of irrational beliefs here, but we may develop guidelines to help us recognize these beliefs, so that we do not entertain them. Those guidelines are as follows:

- Any belief that prohibits independent investigation of the truth is irrational.

- Any belief that leads one to kill another, outside of acting in self-defense, is irrational.
- Any belief that limits your ability to form friendships with loving people of other religions, races, and cultures is irrational.
- Any belief that is based in the idea of an angry God who is anxious to punish the evildoers of the earth is irrational.
- Any belief that denies that all human beings are created equal, that God loves all humankind, and that life is ever-changing is irrational.

Following these guidelines, and others based in principles of love and acceptance, we can move towards collective oneness and know the power of unity.

Efforts are being made to better the social milieu on earth. In some cases, these efforts are helping to alleviate cultural tensions and heal bitter feuds, but sadly, too many of our efforts lack the necessary ingredients to create a true and lasting peace. The problem is that we are using superficial power to create peace, when divine power is needed. The military can only exercise superficial power. Bombs and bullets can do no more than maim and kill. Governments, no matter how powerful or well intentioned, only have superficial power. Quite literally, divine intervention is needed. This intervention will provide unifying spiritual, social, economic, and political transformations once the earth's citizens gain a profound awareness of the common existence and station of the human race. Unity attracts the healing power of the Divine Essence. The greater peace will occur only after we set our hearts towards the creation of unity at every level of life.

*God's desire is for us to put aside our differences and form lasting friendships.*

Global unity requires more than religious leaders to join hands; it requires governments to change some of their political policies. It requires mothers and fathers to teach their children to be caring and kind to all human beings, and it requires those with great superficial power to plant seeds of love, forgiveness, and unity amongst the world's peoples. Global unity requires a collective effort from people in every profession, and all walks of life. We must make a firm commitment to adopt the middle approach to life, abandoning every ideal that impedes the unification of the human race.

*Balance governs; chaos is temporary. Nothing in the universe is misplaced; everything belongs. Unity can be delayed, but not avoided.*

We have established already that a collective demonstration of divine power will require the masses to embrace beliefs that foster unity and friendship. We know that those beliefs will reject any teaching or philosophy that is irrational, and we know that those beliefs are likely to be common to many of our religious traditions. Let's focus for a moment on the individual. Talk of world peace and global unity is all fine and good, but before we can truly embrace the concept of collective divine power, we must first learn how to harness the power of our own being.

There are many ways to harness the soul's power. Some do it through deep meditation, some through prayer and quiet contemplation. The way that will be outlined shortly is by no means a superior way, and it is certainly not exclusively the right way. I will call it the *Balanced Way*.

The *Balanced Way* for harnessing the soul's power:

- Be inquisitive.

- Be receptive to new ways of understanding life.
- Be comfortable with change.
- Be yourself.
- Be still often and listen to your inner voice.

Demonstrating divine power is more about our spiritual awareness than anything else. The Balanced Way, like many other tools for self-empowerment, helps to focus our awareness on our inner guide. When this happens we become self-possessed, conscious of our purpose and motivated by a burning desire to realize our noblest ambitions. We begin to live more spontaneously, and our lives gradually become a true representation of our deepest truths.

The concept of *truth* is an interesting one. We are always trying to determine the truth. In science, we have a simple formula to establish the truth: the truth is that which can be proven through repeated experimentation. Determining the truth is not so straightforward, however, when we are dealing with differing perceptions that cannot be validated in a scientific manner. A person standing atop a tall building may see a tree on the ground and perceive it to be small. Another person standing beneath this same tree may perceive it as big. Whose perception is right? Right and wrong is a pointless argument in matters of perception. We must recognize that we each perceive life differently; as well we should, given our varied experiences. Our beliefs reflect our subjective perceptions about life. Arguing about them is like arguing about the size of the tree.

Earlier we talked about conversion and sharing. Here it is appropriate to mention that sharing our beliefs with others is preferable to arguing about who is right or wrong. To share, we must not only speak, but we must be willing to listen attentively to what others have to say, to respect other's perceptions, and to sometimes agree to disagree. By sharing, instead of arguing, we are more likely to arrive at balanced beliefs that are considerate of

many different points of view. *An attitude of openness is an important part of the middle approach.* Seeing all beliefs as perceptions helps us to be more objective about our own beliefs, and it also helps us to respect the views of others, even when those views oppose our own. Our response after listening to someone's views might be something like this:

Your views are interesting. Given your experiences I can see how you might have those views. My experiences have been different from yours. Here is what my experiences have taught me.

We are not afraid to share our experience of a camping trip. No one judges us harshly because we prefer Coke instead of Pepsi. In an atmosphere of openness, people are able to share their experiences—or perceptions of life—with each other. The problem we encounter with religious beliefs, however, is that often they are not based in personal experience. Many of us have nothing to share about our religious beliefs other than what we have been told by others. Many times we have no personal experience to draw on that would explain our beliefs. Consequently, we often have no rational reason to justify our beliefs, even to ourselves.

We are rational creatures; when beliefs are irrational, we suffer from self-deception. Our beliefs become ideas that we support because they are familiar, rather than because they are personal truths that we have lived and experienced. This can leave us feeling a deep sense of alienation from our sacred self. If we feel disconnected from our sacred self, we are powerless to face life with courage and determination. We become weak-minded, paralyzed by our own sense of disillusionment, and our beliefs become stumbling blocks in our path to self-realization.

Reason is the friend of unity and power. If reason is lost, our beliefs become counterintuitive and dangerous. Reason requires

prudence, careful thought and, sometimes, deep soul searching. The reasonable person is powerful because his thoughts are organized. He avoids forming fixed opinions until he is aware of all the facts; his actions and speech usually appeal to people's intuitive sense of justice. The reasonable person bases his opinions on first-hand experiences. He is passionate about his convictions and empowered by his beliefs, because they have resulted from an objective assessment of his own experiences and not blind allegiance to any philosophy. The reason many persons are not empowered by their beliefs is because they harbor beliefs that are not a coherent part of their experience. In other words, they believe things they know they have no good *reason* to believe.

It is not a matter of what you believe, so much as it is a matter of whether you truly believe it; if you connect with your beliefs at your core, you will have great power. The power of belief can be constructive or destructive. For example, a suicide bomber convinced of the rightness of his mission to help free himself and his people from struggle possesses tremendous destructive, superficial power. This power overrides his fear of death; it sweeps away his concerns for his personal safety, and galvanizes his resolve. Although the bomber's beliefs may be irrational, they are based in his personal experience, and therefore he is empowered by his beliefs. He is able to reach his goals. We can learn something from this.

If our beliefs are based in personal experience we will be powerful. Our powers will be demonstrated in a constructive manner if those beliefs are rational. Constructive power—divine power—seeks to heal, not harm. It helps to reunite us with our innate sense of truth, enabling us to overcome our fears. This power helps us to *construct* a life of love and happiness, and it helps us to seek the common good in every situation.

*A truly powerful person knows that Life is beyond knowing.*

*The object is not to know everything but to reflect one's greater self in each moment.*

How else do we gain power? The common cliché “knowledge is power,” is one worth remembering. Both superficial and divine power is gained through knowledge. Knowledge is what separates the doctor from the patient, and many times it is knowledge that separates the rich from the poor. Those who have great knowledge usually have great power. Knowledge is of two kinds. There is knowledge based in the human experience, like knowledge of the banking system, or knowledge of radioactive waves, and there is knowledge of the soul. Knowledge based in the human experience leads to the demonstration of superficial power. The soul’s knowledge, though channeled through the brain, transcends the human experience. This knowledge would exist even if the Earth did not. We can think of “soul knowledge” as spiritual knowledge emanating from the “Mind of God.” Unlike knowledge based in our human experience, we cannot acquire soul knowledge through study marathons, or experiments in the lab; we must access this knowledge by first being aware that it is there, and then regularly quiet our thoughts to listen to our inner voice. We can share soul knowledge with others, but it cannot be taught the way we teach physics or math. The power of soul knowledge is the power to lead others to realize their own inner truth. When you learn to tap your intuitive wisdom through accessing your soul’s knowledge, you will know great divine power. Your speech will heal broken hearts, and in ways too many to write about, you will bring joy to all those around you. Whenever you share your soul’s knowledge, you are sharing your divine power.

Those who feel no sense of direction in their life lack the power necessary to achieve their goals and realize their potential. This happens when we pretend to believe things we feel no connection to. We may go to university to become a lawyer, knowing inside we have no desire to practice law. We may marry someone, knowing we are not truly in love. When we practice beliefs we are not truly connected to, we suffer the effects of self-deception. This leaves us feeling weak and powerless.

It is the Spirit of God that brings divine power; the power to govern our lives guided by higher principles; power to overcome setbacks and major life crises, and the power to love even those who have mistreated us. Power to be in the physical world, but aware of our loving, sacred self is only possible if our environment changes to a “soul environment.” If not, we will find ourselves leading unbalanced lives— undirected, powerless lives steered by misconceptions about who we are.

Divine power comes through having an awareness of the soul. This power is not given to a chosen few. Divine power is the truth of your being. You are powerful beyond measure, but you may not be aware of this. Like many, you may believe that you can only gain power if you become rich or if you gain status of some kind. This is not the truth; you are powerful beyond measure right now, as you are. You have the power to create with your thoughts, the power to heal with your words, and the power to soothe with your hands. You have the power to change the world. Do you doubt this? Do not. I tell you again, *you are powerful beyond measure*. Martin Luther King was one man. Mother Teresa was one woman. Confucius was one man. Albert Einstein was one man. Mohandas Gandhi was one man. I could go on like this for a long time. The world will never forget these persons, not because they were rich, or because they were kings or

queens, but because they exercised the power of their awareness. These persons were inspired; they were powerful because their actions were motivated by their love for humanity, a love born out of their awareness of humanity's common spiritual basis. They were in essence, great lovers. Emmet Fox, the brilliant twentieth century new thought writer, realized the connection between love and power:

There is no difficulty that enough love will not conquer, no disease that enough love will not heal, no door that enough love will not bridge, no wall that enough love will not throw down, no sin that enough love will not redeem...It makes no difference how deeply seated may be the trouble, how great the mistake, a sufficient realization of love will dissolve it all. If only you could love enough, you could be the happiest and most powerful being in the world.

*To be powerful, we must be inspired  
to love with unflinching resolve.*

Imagine how much more powerful the human race would be if we adopted the middle approach and learned how to demonstrate our collective access to divine power. The world economy would improve significantly because people would be healthier and more productive. Instead of spending billions to fight wars that crush our spirits, we would use our monetary power to fight diseases, to build better schools, civic centers, museums and playgrounds. The world would have no more unsafe territories; we could travel freely and enjoy the many wonders of this amazing planet.

Our lust for superficial power and our prideful feelings of superiority are the great mountains that hinder the unification of humankind. Humanity, inspired by a common purpose to manifest our noblest ideals and guided by the All-loving Power that controls the falling of snowflakes, can move every mountain

that stands in the way of our personal fulfillment and our peaceful coexistence.

Seven

## The Age of Balance

*If we have no peace, it is because  
we have forgotten that we belong to each other.*

—Mother Teresa

In the age of balance, there will be no more wars, for there will be peace in the hearts of humankind. In that peaceful age, humankind will behave as enlightened adults. We will think and act as members of a closely-knit family.

We pray for peace, but few of us really believe we will ever have peace on earth. This, my friend, is because we underestimate the transforming force of the divine power latent within every human being. As destructive as human beings have been throughout history, we have displayed an equal capacity to be generous, courageous, and noble.

Humanity needs to be inspired. It is amazing what one inspired human being can achieve. Imagine for a moment what changes would occur on this planet if more of us were truly inspired to seek balance at every turn. Ponder in your heart the monumental changes that would take place in our homes, schoolyards, cafés, town halls, and offices. Life as we know it would be transformed.

Whenever we think of some global event happening in the future, we usually assume this will be a global catastrophe that will cripple humankind. Given the current global environment, it is easy to understand why we might not have much hope for the future, but I am not yet ready to give up on humankind. I believe that our best days are ahead of us, and that someday we will enter a peaceful age of enlightenment.

In the early days of humankind's existence we were, of necessity, skilled hunters. Our survival depended on our ability to hunt for food and find adequate shelter. We carved out living spaces in the side of hills and mountains, we knitted material together to protect our skin from the elements, and we hunted and killed for sustenance. As we continued to evolve over thousands of years, survival not only involved safeguarding ourselves from the environment and killing for food, it also involved the willful destruction of foreign societies for material gain and dominance. We lost our way. The world quickly became

divided into “us” and “them.” Those of our camp, members of our clan or our tribe were grouped into the acceptable “us” category. All others became a part of the hostile “other” group, a group we perceived as a constant threat to our survival and prosperity.

Some things have changed since those early days. Most of us no longer hunt for dinner. We simply run to the local market. Humankind is also finally beginning to recognize that we are truly connected to the earth and each other. Environmental issues such as global warming, the melting of the polar ice caps, and air pollution are being debated at the highest levels of government. More and more persons are beginning to notice that the earth is “shrinking.” Mass travel, the Internet, and advanced telecommunication systems have created a global society. We have entered the age of the “one fold,” a time when humanity will be challenged to recognize its fundamental oneness, a time when we will come to understand that the purpose of diversity is to express God’s all-encompassing beauty.

Sadly, the mentality of “us” and “them” still prevails in modern times; only the circumstances have changed. Persons of other races, countries, religions, political parties, and socioeconomic backgrounds are still viewed with suspicion and seen as the hostile other. In various ways that range from outright violence to indifference, we seek to secure our survival by suppressing the advancement of the “other.” This immature way of seeking survival has created a world that is divided against itself. We have allowed insignificant differences to divide us. Consequently, we have jeopardized not only our own survival, but also the survival of the earth and all its peoples, animals, and plants.

We cannot go on divided for much longer. Informed persons of all faiths and cultural backgrounds are beginning to recognize this. We are at critical crossroads in our collective evolution. Either we move forward together by accepting and practicing the

teachings of the enlightened teachers who have gone before, teachers who have all directed us to live as one human body, or the whole of humanity will suffer unbearable calamities.

In this chapter we will confront issues that may be a little sensitive for some of you. I ask that you press on with a thoughtful attitude. I hope that many of you will be inspired to make changes that will foster balance in your neighborhoods and homes. Our efforts might seem insignificant, but we must remember that all great waves begin as a ripple.

What are the obstacles to global peace? There are many. Stubborn prejudices, dated religious disputes, greed, poverty, indifference, and ignorance are but a few. In this chapter we will look at some of these major obstacles. The language, at times, will be sharp because there is simply no subtle way to talk about such things as war and poverty. The horrible conditions many of our fellow human beings are forced to live in deserve, at the very least, our honest assessment.

### *War*

Why do we go to war? Is it because we want to defend our freedoms or perhaps because we feel an obligation to protect the innocent? The brave fighter may feel he is doing something noble—protecting his country, defending his nation, securing his freedoms—but the simple truth is war, by definition, involves the deliberate killing of other, often innocent, human beings. Some argue that we must pass through a stage of fierce fighting to weed out the bad guys before we can ever have global peace. In other words, war is a necessary evil. Without the option of war, it is eloquently argued, we have no way to stop the tyrant. We would become sitting ducks waiting for the next mad man to drop a bomb on us.

*War may seem like a necessary evil, but were we to observe history through objective lenses, we would find that wars have not been fought to bring about universal peace, but to protect insular interests, conquer nations, maintain dominance, and prove*

*allegiances. All wars testify to humankind's misdirection, to our non-acceptance of life's mutual source and to our need for individual and collective balance.*

Isn't it interesting that we always go to war with the "other"? It is always the "other" who must be killed, destroyed, removed from power. Seldom do we see our own sins. We fight against the enemy, who is always portrayed as an inhumane outsider. We blow up innocent children so that our own children can sleep soundly at night. We destroy the lives of countless other human beings to ensure our own survival.

Wars are not motivated by love, but by fear and greed. It will never be noble to indiscriminately kill other human beings. And, something we would do well to remember, there is no "other". We inhabit one planet. We are members of one human race. We have been created by the same omnipotent power. When we go to war, we fight against our spiritual siblings, we kill innocent members of our global family and we hinder humanity's progress. Our enemy is not the "other"; our enemy is, and has always been, fear and ignorance.

It is immature to believe we can solve humanity's problems by killing enough bad people, when it is clear that killing only fuels aggression and hatred. Humanity's ills can only be healed through a spiritual transformation brought about by divine forces. Love will forever be the only cure for hatred. The fundamental imbalance that exists today cannot be corrected by dropping bombs and launching missiles, but only by a collective awareness of humanity's spiritual oneness.

*Come together people of the Earth! Drop your weapons, and forsake your anger. Your hatred has not served you; it has weakened you and it has divided you into many pieces. The power to destroy is of the body, the power to unite, to love, to create peace, is of God.*

Difficult issues must be faced. Just as it is inhumane to kill deliberately, it is also inhumane to be indifferent to another's suffering. There are certainly times when it is reasonable to use

force to prevent the spread of violence. For example, a police officer confronting a serial killer may have to use deadly force. A father confronting a deranged burglar in his home is within his right to protect his family, even if that means killing the assailant. We have an obligation to protect the innocent. But as we try to prevent the spread of violence, we must be careful not to instigate more violence. Our motives must be pure. When force is used to put out the fire of violence, our only motivation should be to protect the innocent. If we have *any* other motivation when we use force, our actions will cause further instability by adding to the culture of violence.

If war is out, how do we deal with dangerous dictators? How do we protect our own interests? First we must understand that war cannot ever bring about lasting peace and offers us no real protection. The dictator we depose today through violent means will arise again with a new name, in a different time and place, unless the global spiritual climate changes. Violent means to bring about peace is a fundamentally flawed approach, because it does not address the root causes of instability. There is hunger in the world, not because there is not enough food, but because there is a lack of sharing. There are persons blowing up buildings, not simply because they are crazy, but because they feel ignored by the rest of the world. There are children throwing stones at armored tanks, not because they are inherently violent, but because they are desperate. There are men and women fighting in wars, not because they are bloodthirsty, but because they have been taught to see the other as a threat to their survival.

The violent leader who persists in killing innocent civilians and depriving his citizenry of basic necessities is not the other; he is a human being like the rest of us who happens to be depraved. Whenever such wayward dictators arise among us, world leaders working through an international peace-keeping organization like the United Nations should convene to vote on possible ways to stop the killing. Unfortunately, when heads of state convene

they usually come to the table with insular concerns. One leader wants to protect his country's investments. Another wants to ensure his country's continued access to oil, and another, who is up for election that same year, wants to look good in the eyes of his countrymen. It is because of such insular motivations that we seldom arrive at real solutions when world leaders consult.

The interest of humanity must be seen as one interest. Whatever course of action we take after sincere deliberations, it should be one that will protect, first and foremost, those innocent persons harassed by a depraved dictator. The goal of all consultation between world leaders should be to protect the citizens of Earth, not to protect citizens of this or that country. Only when we take this universal approach to world affairs will we arrive at balanced solutions that uplift the whole of humanity.

In the age of balance, humanity will have a centralized government. The United Nations, formed shortly after the catastrophic Second World War, is the prototype for the future World Government that will consist of leaders from every region of the earth. This World Government will vote on all issues pertaining to the peace and stability of the global community. Today the United Nations performs a similar function; however, the efforts of this international peace-keeping organization are compromised by its unbalanced structure. The current structure favors the powerful nations. Of the 191 Member States comprising the General Assembly, only five—the People's Republic of China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and The United States—are permanent Member States of the United Nations Security Council. These five permanent Member States have exclusive veto powers and are also the only nations permitted to manufacture nuclear weapons under the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) (nuclear powers such as India and Pakistan never signed the treaty). The structural inequity within the United Nations is an imbalance

that must be corrected in order to increase the effectiveness of this organization.

In the future World Government, all sovereign countries willing to abide by a ratified Charter will participate equally in the voting process. The rulings of the future World Government will result from a transparent, democratic voting process; these rulings will be legally binding upon all nations. Further, in the future age of balance, all nuclear weapons will be destroyed; it will be clear that such weapons have no place in a world seeking to create a culture of peace. Individual countries will continue to have local policing forces to maintain order within specified borders, similar to the policing forces now present. The world will have one centralized army comprised of men and women from every region. This international peace-keeping army will be used primarily for humanitarian missions such as feeding the poor, building dams and bridges, administering medicines, planting trees, and so on. Should intense violence erupt in some part of the world, the World Government will determine the right course of action. In those rare cases when some form of force is needed to stem the flow of innocent blood, we will choose methods that clearly demonstrate our commitment to protect every innocent member of the human family from unnecessary suffering. We will, most importantly, move against violence as a united force for peace, motivated by a common interest.

### *Racism*

The idea that one human being is superior to another simply on account of his skin color, hair texture, eye color, and other such superficial traits is a disease that continues to plague the body of humanity. In the last century, there has been some promising progress. Today slavery is outlawed in much of the world. Democratic constitutions the world over now affirm the inherent equality of all human beings. Barrack Hussein Obama is now President of the United States. But have our subconscious

impressions about race changed? Do we really believe all human beings are equal, regardless of the color of their skin?

Tensions between culturally and racially distinct groups of human beings have existed from the beginning of recorded history. Ancient Greeks discriminated against the “barbarians” on the basis of cultural traits. Likewise, the Jews of Jesus’ day discriminated against the Samaritans. However, modern racism—racism based primarily on a person’s physiognomy and skin color—is a fairly recent development, beginning in earnest at the start of the nineteenth century. In his book, *Images of Race*, M. Biddis recounts that “before the 1800s race was used generally as a rough synonym for lineage. But over the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century race (and its equivalence in a number of European languages) assumed an additional sense that seemed initially tighter and more scientific”. He goes on to say that this new usage “...was evident, at its simplest, in the growing conviction that there was a finite number of basic human types, each embodying a package of fixed physical and mental traits whose permanence could only be eroded by mixture with other stocks.” Modern racism is propagated, sustained, and institutionalized by an irrational fear about the contamination of a supposedly pure, superior race. For the European colonizers, persons of pale complexion—white persons—were superior to all other races. The concept of race as a way of color-coding human beings to determine their inherent worth, intelligence, and attractiveness took hold throughout Europe and the New World. These dangerous concepts are without any scientific merit. Though baseless, the modern concept of race continues to find its way into the conscious and subconscious thoughts of many of us.

Modern racism can be so subtle as to not be recognized as racism. In the United States, for example, persons having both a white and a black parent are considered black, mulatto, mixed or whatever; under no circumstances can such persons be

considered white. To be considered white in America one must be white through and through. The definition of race in the United States, and throughout much of the Western world, uses one standard for the white race and another, less exclusive standard, for non-white races. It is interesting, for example, that Halle Berry, the talented American actress, will go down in history as the first African American woman (i.e. a black woman) to win an Oscar. It seemed to matter very little to the American public or the American media that Halle Berry's mother is white—and was there the night Halle accepted her award, applauding as only a mother could. In America, the white heritage of Halle Berry and countless other “mixed” Americans is conveniently ignored, perpetuating the idea that a person is either *pure* white or something other. Is it not racist to use one standard to define a particular race, and other, less exclusive standards, for all other races?

Today the whole concept of race is being turned on its head. Determining the race of the blond hair, blue-eyed woman—she is white of course—or the race of the black-skinned man with dreadlocks—he is clearly black—is easy. Nowadays we must increasingly determine the race of the fair-skinned child who has a half Chinese half Korean mother and a half white half black Caribbean father. We must concoct new words to describe the light skinned face with kinky hair, or the brown face with bright blue eyes. Race, we will soon see, is a figment of our imagination, a divisive instrument of separation that has no scientific basis and is without any social benefit to humanity. We imagine that human beings can be neatly classified by something as trivial as skin color, but in our age of “mixed races” we will come to realize that the *human race* is the only race of human beings God ever created, and that diversity is the seed of creation.

To diminish the forces of imbalance unleashed by the plague of racism that has so ravished our world, our ideas about race must change and we must hold fast to the wisdom embodied in

the wise words of spiritually enlightened human beings who called on us to live as one body. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the beloved son of Bahá’u’lláh, the prophet founder of the Bahá’í Faith, spoke often about the oneness of the human race: “God, The Almighty, has created all mankind from the dust of the earth. He has fashioned them all from the same elements; they are descended from the same race and live upon the same globe, He has created them to dwell beneath the one heaven. As members of the human family and His children He has endowed them with equal susceptibilities. He maintains, protects, and is kind to all; He has made no distinction in mercies and grace among his children.”

In the coming age of balance, we will no longer be defined by race based on skin color, but by the colorless, odorless and formless spiritual qualities inherent within every human being. We will finally realize that human beings of all complexions are members of one human race. Racism in all its ugly forms will end.

#### *Inequality of the Sexes*

Men and women are not the same. We have different sexual organs, different physical capacities and different ways of perceiving the world. Despite the differences that we can so easily identify, men and women are fundamentally equal.

Throughout our world women are not treated as a man’s equal. Women are often marginalized in the workplace, objectified in the media, branded as temptresses that lead men astray, jailed inside the home as domestic slaves, and kept out of leadership positions. In some repressive societies, women and girls are denied an education, raped without legal recourse, forced to work in horrendous conditions, and, in the severest of situations, executed for such offenses as having children out of wedlock. It is easy to forget that it was not until the early to mid 1900s that women won the right to vote—a most basic civil right in a democratic society— in many of the developed nations of the world.

Why are women generally not perceived as men's equals? Surely it is not simply because men are physically stronger than women. It is a combination of things. Physical prowess may play a role, but our ideas about women and men have been shaped by much more than the evidence that indicates men are physically stronger than women. To understand why women have historically been perceived as a man's inferior helpmate, we must, I believe, consider the influence of religious doctrines on our view of the sexes.

Our social roles have been heavily influenced by the ideas expressed in the sacred texts of some of our religious traditions. Many times, these ideas are not fair to women. For example, Paul, the great Christian evangelist, writes in one of his many letters, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:11-14 KJV). Here we have one of the most respected figures of Christianity expressing views that are clearly inappropriate for any society seeking equality between men and women. First, the passage suggests that a woman should not have an opinion that differs from her husband's. The woman's personal ideas and unique perspectives are irrelevant. Her entire existence is in relation to the male; she is simply called upon to submit her will to the man—to give up her power. Finally, the passage assigns blame to the woman for her transgression in the Garden of Eden. One can imagine that Paul may have believed women deserved to be punished for betraying humanity in the Garden. The women's lowly state may therefore have been seen as the warranted consequence of Eve's deceit. Paul writes in other letters, "And if they [women] will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in church." (1 Cor. 14: 34 – 35 KJV). Women are effectively cut out of religious ceremonies, pushing them further

into the land of irrelevance. Ideas such as these, whether they are found in the Bible, the Qur'an, or on the wall of a building in New York City, must be understood within a certain context. A man such as Paul who grows up in a patriarchal society where women are seldom seen in positions of respect and authority is not likely to develop a well-balanced view of women.

In the age of balance it will be affirmed in the hearts and minds of an enlightened people that, though different from men biologically and psychologically, women are not inferior to men in any sense. Men and women may be better fitted to certain tasks, for physical or psychological reasons, but the spiritual energies of the male and female are equally important to the creation of peace in our world. Not only is the feminine energy important to the creation of peace, it is also important to the economic and educational strength of our nations. From Joan of Arc, Margaret Thatcher, Mother Teresa, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Hillary Clinton, Marianne Williamson, Serena Williams, and many, many other women of our time, we know that women can be great leaders, great healers, great educators, great athletes and great decision makers. To usher in the age of balance we will have to unlearn some of the misguided ideas of our traditions. The obvious truths of our present-day experiences must guide our perceptions about women, helping us to realize that women play a vital role in humanity's progress.

In past times, physical strength was valued above anything else, because hunting was the basic means of survival. Now, however, the survival and progress of humanity depends less on physical strength, and more on our ability to raise balanced children, foster bonds of friendship, act with kindness...our ability to address the needs of all peoples, be they male or female. The traditional feminine qualities of compassion and emphasis on the relational are as much needed as the traditional male qualities of independence and emphasis on achievement for us to experience global balance. Psychological research suggests that

most well-adjusted persons are androgynous; that is, they exhibit a balanced mix of feminine and masculine qualities. If we personify the world, it is easy to see that a well-adjusted, peaceful world must have a balanced mix of the feminine and masculine energy. This can only happen if we come to realize that women and men are partners of equal status with unique qualities.

### *Ignorance*

The Harvard graduate can be ignorant. Ignorance is not merely a lack of knowledge about the basic sciences, math, history, literature and so on. Ignorance is truly a lack of appreciation of life's sacredness, a spiritual blindness that causes us to continuously miss grand opportunities to evolve into more compassionate, life-affirming human beings. Ignorance is caused by our unwillingness to explore new ideas, to think for ourselves, to embrace life honestly, free of the encumbrances of racial, political and cultural prejudices.

Ignorance is like a veil wrapped around the human mind, a veil that prevents the mind from breaking free of the shackles of materialism. Through this veil, we see only a material world, with material beings. We see a material sky and material plants and animals. The veil of ignorance keeps us disconnected from life's deeper reality. It is ignorance that causes a man to forsake his family in search of material wealth. Ignorance blinds the drug dealer. Ignorance ultimately diminishes the glow of life's spiritual qualities.

In our age of materialism, we see people working harder to get more stuff. We hear of celebrities buying million-dollar dresses and we read about unhappy billionaires. Ours is a world of get more, buy more, and spend more. As we spend our short time on earth hoarding material things, we grow ever more competitive. Instead of educating ourselves to better humanity, we educate ourselves to gain a competitive edge. The hand of humanity is competing against the foot. The eye of humanity believes it is better than the nose.

It is time for us to rend the veil of ignorance and perceive our lofty station. We are eternal beings who are here on earth for a brief period. How sad it is for human beings to spend sixty or seventy years searching for happiness in bottles, cars, and stone houses. How very sad for human beings to murder for money. In the end, nothing matters but love. The enlightened ones of the ages were enlightened because they understood that love is the only way to remove the veil of ignorance. If we remove this veil, we would see a spiritual world that encompasses the physical, a world that is animated by a gracious spiritual reality. Instead of seeking constantly to get more, we would gladly seek to give more, to be of greater service to our fellow human beings, to spend our brief time on earth doing things that will make a lasting difference.

In the age of balance, the schools and universities in all lands will not only educate the minds of students but also their hearts. There will be a greater focus on teaching principles of equality, self-sacrifice, humility, and kindness. At all times, students will be aware that the purpose of education is to prepare one to be of service to humanity. Whether that service is offered in the role of doctor or carpenter will not matter. Instead of praising the wealthy simply because they are wealthy, the society will uplift those who serve humanity, whether they are materially wealthy or not.

The age of balance will be a time when human beings favor spiritual qualities over material wealth. No longer will we compete against each other for material things. No longer will we fight in wars to push shortsighted agendas. No longer will we be blinded by ignorance. We will see, truly see.

### *Poverty*

The face of poverty is one that is searching for answers in a disinterested world. This planet offers us everything we need to thrive, and yet millions of human beings cannot find clean water to drink or bread to eat. Millions of children will go to sleep with

empty stomachs tonight; many of them will not awake tomorrow. We can quite easily complicate the issue of poverty by talking about independent economic forces, corrupt governments that deprive their citizens of basic necessities, societies that lack the will to modernize, and other such excuses used to make sense of the extreme economic imbalance that exist in the world. The fundamental reason there is so much poverty in the world is simply because we have, as Mother Teresa pointed out, “forgotten that we belong to each other.” Only in a world of strangers who feel no obligation to each other could poverty be so widespread.

Poverty is a symptom of humanity’s social imbalance. We have been socialized to take care of our own and to find ways to elevate our social status. We have not been socialized to view every human being as part of our family; as a result, we have created a world of strangers where the rich are constantly searching for ways to get richer, and the poor are viewed as dispensable casualties of free markets. Because we feel no connection to each other, we feel no need, indeed no desire, to share what we have with those who are poor. I quote once again from ‘Abdu’l-Bahà: “... the Teachings of Bahà’u’llàh advocate voluntary sharing, and this is greater than the equalization of wealth. For equalization must be imposed from without, while sharing is a matter of free choice. Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand, voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one’s substance, leadeth to society’s comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honor upon humankind.” I could not agree more.

How do we end poverty? Perhaps a better question, one that gets at the root cause of poverty, is how do we cultivate the desire to share with each other? We must first see ourselves in every human being that is suffering. The materially impoverished are, like every human being, in need of water when thirsty, food when hungry and shelter when cold. These basic human needs are common to us all. Every day spend a few minutes imagining what it would be like to not have your basic needs met; try to identify with—not only feel sorry for—those who are poor. Every time you see a person in need, imagine him or her to be your mother, father, or dear friend. Imagine that all who are poor are your brothers and sisters, and then ask yourself, what can I do to help? The end to poverty will not result from legislation, but from humankind awakening to the responsibility we each have to each other.

In the age of balance, poverty will be so rare that whenever we hear of a person dying of hunger it will come as a shock. There will still be those who are wealthy and those who are not so wealthy; however, the vast majority of human beings will live in peaceful, clean environments and will have the opportunity to meet their basic needs. Because human beings will at last understand their spiritual connection to each other, and will value human life far above material wealth, we will gladly share our talents and resources with each other and find ways to educate, nourish, and protect the world's peoples. In so doing, we will ensure our own happiness and we will create spiritual treasures that will remain with us after we move on from this earthly plane.

#### *Religious disunity*

This issue was discussed at length in the previous chapter (and will be picked up again later); therefore I will only touch on this topic here. For global peace to be established, the religious powers in the world must recognize that God has manifested in more than one holy temple. All of the Divine Educators have

come bearing a universal message of peace. Jesus' message was for all of humankind, as was the message of Muhammad, Buddha, and the other Divine Educators. Our religious traditions need not agree on every topic for there to be religious unity, but people of faith, of whatever tradition, must at least recognize that truth is a light that cannot be contained in any one vessel. By following the core teachings—not the dogma of tradition— of our religion's Founder with pure hearts, we will arrive at the same place of unconditional love. We will finally be united in our desire to manifest truth.

*There are many paths to an awareness of God,  
but only one way— the way of love.*

The following are some of the perceptions about religion that must change for the world to become the paradise of friends we all so desperately desire:

- Only one religion is of God.
- God favors one group of people over another.
- We should only associate with those of our religion.
- We must choose the right religion to get to heaven.
- Our prophet is the final or the greatest one.

All of these perceptions have an element of exclusivity. That means that these perceptions must necessarily lead to some form of prejudice, feelings of superiority, and separation. We cannot achieve global peace divided; we must come together as friends, and teach each other the lessons that can only be taught through human contact and honest sharing.

The age of balance is not a fanciful idea, with people floating about in white dresses with gleaming halos above their heads. I am envisioning a period of pervasive peace on earth that can

occur once we remove the obstacles that are preventing us from fulfilling our noblest aspirations. In my heart, I know that peace on earth will someday be a reality. There is goodness in the heart of every person. The light of God can never be completely extinguished from the human soul.

I am encouraged by what I see in some of the communities around the world. People living in these communities feel a sense of camaraderie with each other; their children play together, their families know each other, and whenever someone needs assistance, the community finds a way to assist. This is happening right now, in communities on every continent. Persons in these communities may be of different religions and hold dissimilar beliefs about any number of topics, but basic principles of respect and kindness are followed.

In the age of balance there will still be challenges and difficulties. However, in a balanced world, war will cease because there will be no more weapons of warfare —more importantly, war will be viewed globally as an unacceptable way to resolve political and cultural tensions—that can wipe out an entire community at the press of a button; starvation will be an uncommon occurrence; diseases will not be allowed to run rampant; our neighborhoods will be fundamentally peaceful, and the central wisdom of all the great religions will be respected and followed.

The task of creating a culture of peace on earth is a monumental one. Peace on earth is at once our greatest hope and our most difficult task. We must remember that we are not alone in this task. Life favors balance. God is helping us, even now, to come together and put aside our differences. We are fine-tuning our scientific understanding and finding innovative ways to communicate. We are now connected through visual and acoustic media. The tools are in place for us to live as one. We even have the prototype for peace in some of our communities. The age of balance is on the horizon. To usher in this divine age

we must challenge our perceptions about life; challenge the old ideas that no longer serve us, and live more actively in our communities. We can live out our days here, free from the wars that fertilize the seeds of hatred among us, free from the wide-scale poverty that claims the lives of so many of our children, and free from conditions in society that breed violence and criminal activity. We can truly have balance on earth.

Eight

## Balancing Act

*Use, do not abuse; neither abstinence nor excess ever renders  
man happy.*

—Voltaire

At this juncture we will explore the art of cultivating balance in our lives. Balance is a process, and, as such, progresses through various prescribed stages. The six-year-old child must necessarily have moved through the stage of infancy. He must creep before he can walk and babble before he can talk. Spiritual development is no different. We will speak about the stages of balance as though they were acts in a play. Each act will reveal a defining stage along our eternal journey to perfect balance.

**ACT I:  
*GETTING TO KNOW SELF***

The path to balance begins with a period of deep contemplation about the meaning of life. For many, this introspective attitude happens late in life, usually well into adulthood or sometimes after children are thrown into the mix, giving life a more meaningful context. For many others, however, an introspective stance never takes hold; the path to balance is never begun.

Those who begin to reflect honestly on the meaning of their lives automatically raise their level of awareness. Such reflection is never in vain. Life always answers the sincere cry. As our attention is drawn inward, away from the fragmented world around us, our inner vision becomes clearer; we begin to see our thoughts and feel our emotions. Life begins to speak to us, to guide us.

Though we may enjoy moments of inner stillness, at this stage our lives are far from balanced. We are essentially unsettled, searching for answers, reacting to circumstances and grappling with deep fears. But the search itself, though often frustrating, elevates our awareness and starts us in the right direction. Only a flicker of light—a simple truth that speaks to us, an encouraging word that inspires us—is needed to guide us further along the path of balance.

**INTERLUDE:**  
***THE HUMAN CONDITION EXPLORED***

Human beings have an innate capacity for self-awareness. This capacity distinguishes us from all other animals, because not only do we manifest a distinct form of life, but we also have the capacity to contemplate the meaning of what we do—the meaning behind our very existence. Many of us intuitively sense that our consciousness will outlast our physical frame. If life continues after physical death, then in what form will we exist? Who will we be after we die? Our appetite for knowledge about the spiritual realm is insatiable. Like a child shuffling between divorced parents, unsure of where to place his allegiance, we also move through life uncertain of what reality to lay claim to—the here, or the hereafter.

We are here now, but not for long. Should life on Earth be our focus? Or should we fix our thoughts on some future existence? The questions never end. With each new answer, a new question arises. The answers we seek regarding the spiritual world can only be found when we turn to the Manifestations of Truth and allow their spiritual radiance to illumine our inner being. When our spiritual insight is stimulated through exposure to divine wisdom, we receive penetrating answers that satisfy our deepest questions.

Human beings are the only creatures on Earth who worry about what the future holds, or who have long-term goals, or who seek to find deep meaning in life. Our misunderstanding, or in some cases ignorance, about the self has created within us a *conflicted state* of awareness. On the one hand, a part of us desires to live like the animals; natural and free—free from fear about the future, fear about our health, fear about losing a loved one, fear of the unknown, and, ultimately, fear of the possibility of our non-existence. On the other hand, our knowledge about aspects of our environment, social conditions, and biology causes some measure of concern and apprehension. The more we know, the

more we realize that there is much we do not know; hence our apprehension about what the future holds. For instance, cats don't worry about catching a cold during flu season because they have no concept of viruses. Similarly, animals don't fear death, or agonize about the end of the world because they cannot comprehend these ideas, as we can. Sooner or later, our fears cause us to become unbalanced on some level.

### ***THE BEGINNING OF IMBALANCE***

Our uncertainty about the meaning and progression of life often forces us to do one of two things: bury ourselves in religious or philosophical beliefs that give us a sense of meaning, without having to think about those beliefs objectively and rationally, or, pretend that there is no meaning to life beyond the meaning we assign to the human experience. Unfortunately, both alternatives lead to a state of imbalance. *The Middle Theory's* goal—the reason it exists—is to help correct this imbalance in the human experience by giving us a life affirming third alternative: *Life is an eternal experience that gives us countless opportunities to manifest perfect balance.* Life is an opportunity. All possibilities are on the table. When we choose balance, we choose a meaningful life of wholeness and joy.

### **ACT II:**

### ***THE SELF AWAKENS***

A period of questioning and inner search lead to that magical moment when the mind is stilled and the soul speaks—the self awakens. We begin to hear life for the first time, to see its form, its majesty. This experience is always marked by intense joy, a feeling of being able to truly see, a sudden awareness of the eternal self. This sudden awareness can be shocking or even a little frightening. The person we were begins to seem like a figment of our imagination. Many of the things we once did for “fun” appear insignificant and the inner conflict that neutralized our noble impulses is suddenly replaced by a conviction to

achieve our highest aspirations. The fickle mind becomes a focused force, guided by noble desires.

The awakening is a spiritual experience. It matters not what religion we belong to. When the mind becomes aware of the soul, we are transformed whether we are in a chapel or in a bar. This spiritual transformation usually occurs during a period of emotional trauma. Intense emotional pain, hitting rock bottom as they say, is often the only thing that will make us turn inward. This is not an automatic response to pain; it occurs when the mind, stilled by spiritual truth, is ready to move beyond pain and to embrace the eternal. After the eternal self awakens, we begin to manifest the fruits of balance (see Chapter 9).

*Only the seeker discovers the soul;  
only the broken heart returns home.*

Once awakened, we are faced with new challenges. No longer paralyzed by inner conflict, we must now learn to follow our noblest impulses instead of our passing whims. This can be a great challenge and demands that we incorporate prayer and meditation into our daily lives to keep our minds unclouded. The awakened person advances to deeper states of balance by continuously training his mind to remain in a quiet, alert state. This takes effort and discipline. If we do not develop a lifestyle that fosters balance, the eternal self will become dormant. Our spiritual zeal will gradually diminish and the mind will lose its stillness.

**INTERLUDE:**  
***COMMUNION WITH GOD, THE "AWAKENING"***  
***EXPLORED***

Usually it is through religious teaching that we learn about spirituality, the soul, and God. Most of us know persons who have been active members of religious organizations for years, but who are still spiritually asleep, and so it is clear that religious instruction alone is not all that is needed for an awakening experience to occur. Something, something beyond spoken

language to describe, has to happen to jolt a person into a spiritually alert state. Imagine trying to wake a friend who is in a deep sleep. You would probably shake him gently at first. If this failed, you would shake him harder, and probably shout his name as well. Life acts in a similar way. It “shakes” us in innumerable ways, until one day we *awake*. We will all *awake* eventually, if not on earth, then in a different state of being. The question is not *if* we will awake, but *when*? God continues to send divine Messengers as the “shakers” of humanity’s heart. The “soul” purpose of every divine Messenger is to cause humankind to experience a new birth, a spiritual awakening. The job of all the great Revealers has been to enlighten us with *life-giving spiritual truth*, which, if embraced, helps us to manifest the attributes of an awakened being.

Once awakened, we have the motivation and the guidance to navigate toward our center. The most important tools that we need as we navigate towards our center are *communion with God* and *periodic solitude*. Through ongoing spiritual union with God, we gain a deep awareness of our soul’s reality, and in moments of solitude, that awareness is crystallized. No one knows everything about our souls except God, and no one, not even our spouse or best friend, loves the eternal self, as God does. This love saturates our being, giving us a new “revelation” of our *self*, a new self-image—a new *self-awareness*. As our communion with God continues and develops, we begin to understand deep, esoteric truths about life. We discover the meaning behind the meaning of many things we heard many times before. Our spiritual eyes are opened. We begin to see new meaning in everyday things; we become sensitive to the spiritual climate and we simply begin to *know* things.

### ACT III:

***DEVELOPING A MEDITATIVE, PRAYERFUL  
LIFESTYLE***

After the eternal self awakens we experience a spiritual high that, if not followed by a meditative lifestyle, dwindles as the inevitable stresses of life take hold. Only regular meditation—stilling the mind to stir the soul—can empower us to continuously tap our inner resources.

Meditation is a way of clearing away the inner conflicts that cloud our spiritual awareness. The field of the mind must be cleared often if we are to advance to deeper states of balance. As our balance increases, times of reflection become a must. The eternal self, no longer obscured by mental confusion, begins to speak clearly. The urge to connect with the inner world of spirit grows strong. Compelled by a need that nudges at the core of our beings, we begin to seek out moments of solitude. In these moments, the eternal self emerges in our consciousness with words of guidance.

*Meditation restores spiritual balance to our whole being  
by causing us to be more aware of our spiritual energy.*

The challenge at this stage is to meditate often. Life has a way of pulling us away from what is truly important to do what seems necessary. It may be necessary to get up early to go to work or to rush home every day to prepare dinner. There is always something that needs to be done—or so it seems anyway. But, if we desire to nurture the seed of balance planted in Act two, we must water this seed with positive energy cultivated during times of prayer and meditation.

After you get into a habit of meditating it will seem as natural and necessary to you as a morning bath. It will become your personal dynamo, your period of solace and repose when you temporarily let go of the stresses of your everyday life. Meditation puts you in touch with yourself and heightens your spiritual

sensitivity. This sensitivity keeps you attuned to your emotional and spiritual condition, and causes you to seek out things that strengthen your spiritual awareness and foster balance. Before long, you become *soul-driven*. Your attraction to unseemly activities, ideas, and philosophies gradually diminishes, and your thirst for spiritual truth increases. You begin to soar above religious dogma, and move beyond any creed, spiritual or otherwise, that limits your flexibility to explore your inner wisdom. Over time, as you move closer to your center, you will begin to live life from a place of intention and directedness. In so doing, you will experience deep happiness.

*We can only be happy if our  
lives express who we truly are.*

**ACT IV (final act):  
THE SELF EXPRESSED**

The awakening experience is like coming out of a coma. You suddenly realize you are alive. But were the patient who emerges from a coma to stay in bed, fascinated by being alive, further progress would not occur. Similarly, after the eternal self awakens, its inherent powers must be expressed through the force of the will; otherwise the awakening experience has no real benefit to us or humanity.

It is in the final Act that we manifest the fruits of balance more consistently. The fire of faith and vision burning within us has spread to the very core of our beings. We are now ablaze with the divine light that guides our thoughts and actions. Our fixation with material pleasures is no longer the driving force in our lives. The eternal self is now on a mission to reflect the attributes of God.

The challenge at this stage is to maintain an intense spiritual focus while tending to everyday needs. The temptation in this Act is to permanently retreat into the inner world of spirit where

we find true joy and bliss untold. Such a retreat is good and beneficial so long as it does not cause us to detach entirely from the material world. The material world is not bad and we must learn to embrace the spiritual and physical with equal vigor. The self, now freed from the shackles of the ego, must learn to fly using tangible wings on the spiritual wind of truth.

Below is summary of each Balancing Act, written in the imperative voice.

### **Act I**

Explore yourself, think about life; don't just go through the motions. Discover your unique identity and realize that you are more than flesh and bone. You are a spiritual being.

### **Act II**

Awaken to your divine identity by seeking truth with a sincere and open heart. The moment of your awakening may come when you least expect it.

### **Act III**

Develop a lifestyle that incorporates meditation, prayer, and periodic solitude. In these moments, commune with God; ask questions, give thanks, ask for strength and for understanding. God will respond—listen with your heart.

### **Act IV**

Follow your spiritual intuition, and have faith.

### **Balancing Exercise**

Here is an interesting exercise to help you begin the process of introspection. I encourage you to take the time to write your

answers on a piece of paper, and keep it in a safe place for future reference. There are no right or wrong answers; it is only important that you answer the questions honestly, even if it is difficult.

1. Who are you?
2. What is your source (something that you derive strength from)?
3. What is your purpose for living? — Do you think you have a purpose?
4. What are your goals in life? — What motivates you?
5. Do you love yourself? — If so, why? If not, why not?
6. To what extent do you believe thoughts affect reality?
7. Do you believe there is a God? Why or Why not?

Do this exercise; it will reveal something new to you about your sense of who you are. Remember, the only rule is that you are honest in your responses. I recommend sharing your responses with close friends and relatives if you feel a need to discuss your feelings, but it is most important that your answers speak to you about yourself.

Nine

## Fruits of A Balanced Life

*The purpose of our lives is to be happy.*  
—Dalai Lama

How do we know if we are balanced? The only way for us to know if we have attained balance is to observe the “fruits” that consistently manifest in our lives. When we characterize someone as friendly, or pessimistic, we are making a judgment about him or her based on our limited observation of aspects of his or her character. We make judgments about people all the time. Sometimes, if we know a person well, our judgments about him or her are correct, and at other times, for any number of reasons, we misjudge people. We consistently misjudge ourselves as well, because we are often more concerned with projecting a certain image than with being authentic. As a result, we frequently miss opportunities to exercise our talents, or we misdiagnose emotional ailments and never get to the root-cause of recurring problems. In this chapter we will identify the fruits of a balanced life. Once we identify these fruits, we can live with a greater sense of awareness and discern our level of balance.

Before we tackle the opening question to this chapter, let me briefly address what it means to be a balanced human being. Balanced persons make mistakes like everyone else. Although they are usually in a peaceful state of mind, on occasion they experience periods of inner turmoil and perplexing emotions. They do not always exhibit the attributes of balance. If, for example, we observe that someone is a happy person, we understand that this person is not *always* happy, but rather that they are a generally happy person. A happy person is someone whose life radiates an uplifting energy, someone whose dominant persona is carefree, positive, and pleasant—a person whose life seems to flow on an undercurrent of joy. Similarly, a balanced person is someone who embodies attributes such as love, inner-peace, and wisdom, but not necessarily in every moment. Persons having a lucid awareness of the soul’s existence are driven by a desire to attain greater oneness with God; however, their lives will not *always* reflect this lofty aspiration. So, from this point onward, the phrase “balanced person” should be understood to

mean someone whose life is characterized by words, thoughts, and deeds that are in harmony with the will of God—a person who consistently manifests the attributes of love, kindness, forgiveness, and happiness.

We all suffer from imbalances. We make mistakes. Our judgments are not always what they should be, and we experience all sorts of emotional and physical ailments that disturb our sense of happiness and security. We are this way because we are growing, and with growth comes growing pains. The child learning to ride a new bike falls many times before he is able to ride without training wheels or help from others. With each fall the child learns a valuable lesson. Eventually the child learns to ride with confidence. This is how it is with us. Life is a process of becoming more of who we truly are. This process involves searching and falling—and getting back up again.

Our stage along the journey of spiritual development is manifested in our choices. When we are kind to others, and when we give our best to life, we are living with confidence. When we make choices that are hurtful to others and that undermine our ability to love, we have fallen, and we need to get up. Balanced persons live life with confidence. These persons have fallen many times but have learned their spiritual lessons well.

Those who have attained a great degree of balance—those we can consider to be balanced human beings—are noticeably different from those who haven't. They stand out, like the bride and groom at a wedding, and their lives produce fruit that can be witnessed and enjoyed by all those who encounter their path.

### *Happiness*

Happiness is the clearest sign of balance. The balanced person's life is characterized by a state of inner peace and contentment. When visited by painful events, the balanced individual goes within and draws on a reservoir of strength. The

balanced human being knows happiness, a deep abiding happiness that withstands even unexpected difficulties.

Balanced persons are resilient. When visited by feelings of sadness, fear, loneliness, and things of this nature, they turn inward to find their core, which quickly restores their sense of balance and inner calm.

A quick test of balance is to ask oneself, “Am I happy?”

### ***Self Expression***

Balanced persons are authentic. They are comfortable in their own skin. This translates to a quiet self-assuredness and a strong will. Theirs is a will to express their deepest convictions and greatest hopes.

Balanced persons tend to be open-minded and genuinely interested in the thoughts of others, yet their deep sense of self allows them to be steadfast in following their personal convictions. They have a strong desire to be true to self.

An unmistakable sign of balance is a sense of rhythm and synchronicity in one’s life; a feeling of restful wakefulness, an awareness of each thought and action, a sense of freedom to express one’s authentic self. This awareness allows balanced persons to see life as a whole; thus, they are always aware of the consequences of their actions. Actions that have negative consequences—consequences that are damaging to them or another—are seldom taken.

The balanced person desires to live in harmony with others, and they see life as an opportunity to create harmony through acts of kindness. Indeed, the balanced person’s utmost desire is to create harmony by giving his best to life.

### ***Sensitivity***

Balanced persons are intuitive; they have compassionate hearts, and they are sensitive to emotional and spiritual changes in others. This increased sensitivity allows them to discern guarded emotions and to connect with people on a personal level. Their ability to “connect” with others is endearing; friends and

family will often turn to these individuals in times of emotional need.

*Divine Inspiration*

The state of inner calm attained by the balanced individual inevitably leads to moments of clarity when the knowledge of the soul is channeled through the mental activity of the brain, and moments when personal thoughts become flooded with divine wisdom.

The balanced person hears “divine whispers” almost on a daily basis. These individuals are tuned into a heavenly station that speaks of peace and harmony. They feel lead by some invisible force. They are inspired. This inspiration may manifest in the form of song, art, dance, or in the writing of a book—whatever the form, it will be marked by its ability to cause a spiritual rejuvenation in others.

Balanced persons often say inspiring things that bring healing to others. These people are in touch with their deeper wisdom; therefore, their ideas and viewpoints are often well-formed and salient.

The balanced person’s sense of oneness with life is strong, and this is manifested in their ability to inspire others through random acts of kindness, and through words rich with spiritual truth. Their inspired state of being is infectious; it touches those who are hurting, heals those who are sick, and brings hope to the hopeless.

### *Flexibility*

Balanced persons blossom into flexible individuals, who adjust well to changing circumstances. These persons are open-minded about life, possessed of an adventurous spirit, and fond of trying new things (as long as the new thing doesn't disturb their sense of balance).

The balanced human being has learned how to “go with the flow.” These persons deal with change by embracing it. They live in the moment, their hearts are free of the burden of fixed expectations; thus they are able to deal with changing circumstances. They see setbacks as opportunities for improvement, crises as a time to increase spiritual awareness, and disappointments as lessons in patience. They are flowing with life and not against it.

Being balanced causes you to be more aware of the rainbow of reality. You begin to learn from each new experience, and instead of being alive, *you live*. Life becomes an expression of color and form, a kaleidoscope of experiences. The differences in skin color, culture, music, language, religion, and philosophies are perceived as sacred expressions of life, not as causes for discord. Everything and everyone created by God is beautiful is a profound truth that takes root in the balanced heart.

### *Peace in Solitude*

A distinct sign of balance is an enjoyment of quiet time. Time spent doing very little, away from everyone else. Times when you can just be, breathe slowly, and sit and listen to your own thoughts. When you are balanced, there is a sense of always being in the company of *life*. Life becomes your constant companion; every sound—be it a bird chirping or the rumble of the sea—adds to your sense of being alive. To the balanced person, the word “alone” is interpreted as meaning *sacred time*—time to pray,

reflect, relax, and to think about the course of one's life. In this balanced state, you are too busy discovering *what life is* and *who you are* in connection to life, to feel lonely or bored when you are by yourself. Balanced persons, though fond of other's company, treasure those quiet moments when they can be alone to meditate and reflect.

Many unbalanced persons try to escape their feeling of incompleteness by developing a hectic lifestyle that keeps them on the go and that numbs their feeling of loneliness. Their lives dwindle into a series of mind-numbing events that allow the self to cleverly hide out. Those who are extremely unbalanced cannot cope with solitude, not even for a short while, because it forces them to come face-to-face with a self they do not know, nor like. Consequently, the lives of unbalanced individuals are often characterized by obsessions that mask a deep need for inner solace. In contrast, a composed lifestyle will mark the lives of balanced individuals.

When you are balanced, you feel life, you smell it, and you taste it, as if it were a strawberry dipped in caramel. Life becomes dynamic; a living, moving reality that is all around you and that is constantly flowing through you. You realize that you are *never* truly alone because life is always present. As balance increases, this fruit becomes sweeter and sweeter. One's fear of loneliness gradually subsides, leading to an enriching sense of inner comfort.

### *Fearlessness*

It is rare for human beings to manifest the fruit of fearlessness, even for those who manifest all the other fruits of a balanced life, because it requires one to relinquish all attachments to the external. The fearless ones identify with nothing other than the *process of life*. Their lives are a continuous wave of experiences that are witnessed, enjoyed, and internalized. Nothing stops the wave. There is no fight to resist its flow, no attempt to disturb its pull. These individuals know that there is no end to the current; hence there is no need to hold on to anything for fear of being swept away.

We are fearful because we are uncertain of our continued existence. If we knew, with absolute assurance, that life was a continuous progression of existence, that we cannot ever cease to exist, and that complete destruction of our bodies simply changes our state of being, then we would lose many of our fears. Balanced persons manifesting the fruit of fearlessness have come to this realization. These persons have attained a degree of balance that allows them to see with spiritual eyes and hear with spiritual ears. They are certain of God's existence, for they usually have had inexplicable spiritual experiences; these experiences in many cases remove their fear of death, and place within them a firm belief in the eternal nature of the soul.

Those who are fearless have become detached from all things because they know that everything changes eventually. Because they are detached from externalities, they love freely, and completely. They take nothing for granted. They express love from a place of being, and they experience, in each moment, the wonder of life.

To be completely void of fear requires one to be utterly immersed in the knowledge of the soul. For this reason, the fruit of fearlessness is usually the last fruit to manifest in a balanced life.

## Ten

### Fear

*Even death is not to be feared by the one who has lived well.  
—The Buddha*

Fear is a great valley that separates us from perfect balance. How do we cross over this valley? Better yet, how do we walk through it?

Fear cannot be ignored; it must be transcended. When fear is present, we know it. Our hearts feel it, our pores tighten, our pulse quickens; the muscles tense—fear takes control. But we can be fearless. We can move beyond fear.

When confronted by an angry dog, we are told to remain calm, to move slowly, and to refrain from running away. The dog can sense our fear. It can smell fear in the air. If we turn and run, or if our eyes are fearful, the dog knows we are afraid, and it attacks. Life is similar to the dog. When we are fearful, life knows. People know. If we fear death, death knows. If we fear failure, failure knows. Whatever we fear knows we fear it; and it will eventually attack. Therefore, fear not.

To be fearless is not to be beyond the feeling of fear, but to be beyond the control of fear. The woman that is afraid to speak but speaks anyway is being fearless. The man that is afraid to die but learns to accept death as his greatest comfort is fearless. To look fear in the eye and feel it, and to move past it, is to be fearless. How do we do this? We *accept* and *know*. We accept that life is sometimes harsh, that painful things happen, and that sometimes

the nights are long. And we know that we are beyond the physical, that we are souls, that life is never lost, it is only experienced. This is how we walk through the valley of fear.

Fear can become our state of being. When this happens, we are not only fearful of a particular thing, say snakes, for example, but we are fearful of life. We are afraid to live, to be. Our lives become so over-run by fear that our every thought is fearful; our movements are fearful—we manifest fear. This is a terrible state to be in. This crippling state prevents us from loving, and it paralyzes our spiritual growth.

Fear controls much of what we do or do not do. For instance, many of us fear feeling unimportant, which drives us to do whatever it takes to move up the importance ladder. For some, importance is achieved through financial success, a large home, or even children. While these things are not bad in and of themselves, the motivation to achieve anything should never be based in fear. Anything done out of fear will not bring lasting fulfillment.

How do we deal with threats to our personal safety? How do we control fear when it's dark, and we are alone, and someone is at the door trying to break in? Again, we simply accept and know. We accept that someone is at the door, we move to safety if we can, call the police maybe; we do whatever we can to be safe. The fear we feel in such instances is natural and normal, but even in situations where our lives are on the line, we can transcend fear. We react, we try to survive, but fear does not control us. The feeling of fear does not paralyze us, because ultimately, we know that our lives cannot be lost. This clearly is not easy. To be fearless we must overcome our fear of loss, every loss, and this requires deep inner awareness. The most pervasive kind of fear is the fear of loss. We are afraid of dying because we don't want to lose our lives. We fear being honest because we don't want to lose favor with others. We fear living life because we don't want to lose ourselves. We fear exploring different religious teachings

because we are afraid of losing our souls. At some level, all fear is based in a concept of loss. We can only exist as fearless human beings after we become acutely aware of the soul's eternal existence. Until this happens, we will be spiritually hindered by the fear of losing something dear to us.

The soul must be perceived; it cannot be seen with the physical eye, or handled with physical hands. Perhaps that is why it is so easy for us to forget that we are souls and to identify only with the physical. We have to take care of our bodies, wash them regularly, provide them with nourishment several times a day, and do all sorts of other things to them so that we can remain functional. And so, it seems only natural that we would want to protect what we have become so intimate with, indeed, the only "us" we have ever seen. How can we be fearless when all it takes is a simple accident for us to be killed? How are we supposed to release ourselves from the fear of loss when it seems like we can lose everything we love in an instant? Again, to be fearless does not mean we do not feel fear at times. If a loved one dies, there will be pain; the heart will ache. If a robber pulls out a gun, and screams, "Get down or I'll shoot!" the heart may race, but even in that moment of fright, or during the pain of loss, we can move past fear. It can be done. It is not easy to do, but it can be done. We must accept and know. This is the remedy for all fears.

In this earthly realm, we exist as body, mind, and soul. We are having an experience of who we are based on these three realities. Bullets and knives may not harm the soul, but they can destroy the body. And we use our bodies every day. So, how do we let go of our attachment to the body? How can we simply accept and know? Really, how do we forget that we are physical creatures who bleed if cut, starve if deprived of food, who suffer and eventually die? We do not forget anything. We feel. We see the body: the hands, the feet, the eyes, and the skin. We have a human experience, and then, we choose to move beyond the body. We can, through meditation, prayer, and love, transcend

the framework of the body. We can sense our true substance, our souls. We must become quiet, move our thoughts to a place within, and gradually we will see that the valley of fear is a field shrouded in darkness, and though cold and gloomy, it is only a field. We can walk through the field, guided by the light of our being, and we can reach our state of balance, a state where fear no longer controls us. In short, to move past the fears associated with the body, we must have a personal experience of existing beyond the body.

Though it is extremely rare, many outstanding spiritual figures throughout the ages have manifested the fruit of fearlessness. The Fearless Ones share a common path—their lives are an expression of their souls' desires. They dwell in a spiritual kingdom of love. They represent the Kingdom of God on earth because they manifest the unfathomable love of God. These fearless beings have learned and have sought to teach the rest of humankind that love is a creative energy that helps to mold our reality into a peaceable place. Fear is a creative energy that acts in opposition to love, by “short-circuiting” our ability to trust—ourselves, others, and God.

Do nothing out of fear. Do not marry because you fear being alone; marry because romantic love has lifted you to new heights. Do not fear ignorance, but love and acquire knowledge. Do not fear getting fired; instead, make a living out of doing something you love. Do not fear getting sick; work at being healthy. Have no fear of evil; love righteousness. Do not fear death, but simply love life. Have no fear of anything (the injunction to fear God found in many Holy Writings is one based in a deep sense of awe rather than a fear of loss). Fear and love are powerful forces. The important difference is that love creates what your soul desires passionately, and fear manifests what you are fearful of most. Be mindful of this.

## Eleven

# The Domino Effect

*We are born in relation,*

*We live in relation,*

*We die in relation.*

*There is literally no such place as simply 'inside myself.'*

*Nor is any person, creed, ideology, or movement entirely 'outside myself.'*

—Carter Heyward

We are connecting at this very moment. You are reading a book written by someone you may never meet, may never see or even talk to, and yet you can hear my “voice” as it mixes with your thoughts and finds its way into your inner most places. Amazing isn’t it, that we are able to meet without meeting, talk without talking and touch without touching. Our souls can somehow find their way to each other, can cross eternal divides, and connect in a mystical oneness.

We are one. Not two or three—one. You may doubt this, as right you should, given that you are there and I am here and all around you are things that are clearly not you. I do not mean we are one and the same; I mean we are connected, part of an intelligent whole, eternally linked by unseen forces.

Creation is stretched before us each day revealing the signs of oneness. These innumerable signs are revealed in the trees with multiple branches stretching out from one trunk that reaches into the earth. They are revealed in the great ocean that teems with an array of life, and yet remains one continuous ocean. Again and again oneness is revealed as we look towards the vast sky that, though filled with clouds of all shapes and sizes, is one great sky. Oneness is more than a mystical concept pondered by the spiritually astute; oneness is real; oneness is the essence of existence; all life has emerged from a single reality. Life therefore is eternally connected through cause and effect.

This profound truth continues to escape us. We ignore the reality of oneness by our actions. We assault our minds, forgetting that this will wound our bodies. We abuse the earth, forgetting that this will affect the air we breathe and the water we drink and therefore the very organs we use to live. We bicker, gossip, lie, steal, curse, and entertain wretched ideas that taint our souls without realizing that we are affecting the very culture of humanity.

As we near the end of our journey together, let us ponder the reality of oneness; let us think deeply about the profound impact

the awareness of oneness would have within us and within our world. We want to be happy and healthy. Yes, we want to live in a world where bombs do not drop from the sky and skyscrapers do not implode under the impact of flying objects. We want our children to live in a world of opportunity, one where girls and boys are nurtured to become noble citizens of Earth. We want these things. The peaceful world we envision will not materialize unless and until we honor the reality of oneness by our thoughts and actions. Starting now, let's dedicate ourselves to becoming more aware of *the oneness of mind, body and soul* and *the oneness of being*. These are the great "pillars" of oneness that will support our ideas of peace and our intentions for health and prosperity.

*The mystery of oneness is that as the part merges with the whole, the part itself becomes whole.*

### ***Oneness of mind, body and soul***

Science has confirmed the belief traditional healers have held for many years: our physical health is a function of our spiritual health. Medical programs in top colleges throughout the world now include courses on the role of spirituality and meditation in promoting healing. True healing, we now know, is not simply a biological process, but primarily a process that involves forces of the mind, forces which originate in a spiritual field that is not fully understood. Though our understanding of the spiritual realm is incomplete, more and more persons are coming to realize that true health is not determined by physical fitness alone, but also by our sense of wholeness.

Dr. Weil, a graduate of Harvard Medical School and a leading voice in the field of alternative medicine, is one of many Western doctors who have written about the role the mind plays in causing and healing physical ailments. Dr. Weil writes:

"A crippling limitation of conventional medicine and medical theory has been the Cartesian idea that mind and body are

separate and don't interact. It has left us unable to make sense of hypnosis ... and of placebo responses, which are consistently relegated to the category of things that are unimportant and messy. It has also made us unable to see that an enormous number of diseases that we deal with really have as their root causes the services of the mental realm.”

*Every imbalance in our lives involves  
a disturbance in the mind-body link.*

Let's focus for a moment on the malady of alcoholism to see more clearly how the mind (conduit for the soul) and the body are intimately linked through cause and effect. One does not drink excessive amounts of alcohol to support proper nutrition, or to aid, in any way, the biological processes of the body. We can confidently conclude that alcoholism *does not* result from a natural desire to sustain life. To uncover the reasons why a person becomes an alcoholic, we must probe beyond physical causes and focus on the person's emotional state. Is the person depressed? Is he or she suffering from low self-esteem? These are the types of questions we must seek answers for. The answers to questions dealing with a person's emotional condition can only be found through an analysis of his psychological history. One's psyche transcends biological processes and consists of intangible, spiritual energies that cannot be deciphered by simply observing the body. Aspects of our being, such as our thoughts, auras, memories, and emotions are non-physical and exist within the spiritual field. Alcoholism is, therefore, not a disease that originates in the body, but a disorder of the mind caused by systemic emotional and spiritual imbalances. Using similar reasoning, we can trace the cause of many physical ailments, particularly reoccurring ones, back to the effects of spiritual and emotional imbalances.

Many illnesses of the body do not originate in the body; they begin in the spiritual chamber of the mind. This is not to say that if the body is sick, we are necessarily spiritually adrift, but I do mean to say that in many cases physical ailments are rooted in an unsettled mental environment.

Our discussion does not rule out the occurrence of physical ailments that are unrelated to our inner condition. Nor does it fail to acknowledge that some physical disorders have genetic origins; however, most bodily dysfunctions result from disruptions in the spiritual link between mind and body. Even in cases of genetic disorders and life threatening injuries, science has confirmed that a balanced mind promotes healing. This healing does not always result in better physical health—although it often does—but it always results in a more radiant, whole being—the mark of true health. We need only think of Mattie Stepanek, the gifted writer and poet who died at the age of thirteen after years of battling a fatal disease, to realize that wholeness can be realized even by the sick and dying.

Disruptions in the mind-body link are caused by mental stress brought on by insufficient spiritual nourishment. The mind, starved of spiritual insights and quiet, stress-free periods, becomes parched like desert land. Cracks develop in our psyche and we strive to fill these cracks with more and more information of whatever kind. Yet, as every person who has experienced a deep sense of wholeness knows, only the nourishment of spiritual food can satisfy an agitated mind. If we do not quiet the mind regularly to ingest positive, life-affirming truths, the mind will grow ever more unsettled, which will upset the cadence of our bodily functions.

*Guard your thoughts.*

*Think only on those things that you desire in earnest.*

To be healthy, we should shift our focus from what we need to *do* to be healthy to who we must *become*. Too often we treat our physical health as if it were something external to us that can be perfected by popping enough pills, consuming enough low-calorie drinks, or eating enough cholesterol free foods. This “Cartesian” approach to physical health, as Dr. Weil aptly puts it, is limiting because it encourages a fragmented approach to wellness. It tricks us into thinking we can be healthy— whole— by simply attending to our physiological needs. This is tantamount to cutting off the roots of a plant and watering it with the purest water. Clearly, a plant has other needs. It needs sunshine and it needs to be rooted in adequate soil. If we ignore the plant’s need for sunshine it will eventually wither away and die. Likewise, if the plant is planted in shallow soil, it will dry up. The plant’s need for water cannot be separated from its need for sunshine and soil. These needs, though specific and distinct, serve one purpose: the health of the plant. We see then, that our health is not served simply by attending to the needs of the body. Certainly the body may survive for a period if it receives sufficient nourishment and adequate exercise, but survival does not constitute health. *We are not healthy until we are happy*. To be happy, the human mind must be illumined by the light of spiritual truth. Our entire beings—body, mind, and soul—must be rooted to the spiritual source that brought us into being.

When we visit the doctor, he or she checks our vitals to determine our health. Our blood is checked for disease. Our eyes, ears and internal organs, through a variety of scientific measures, are evaluated to rule out any presence of infection or dysfunction. If we are found to be free of disease, and our vital signs are within normal ranges we are declared to be healthy. But is a person truly healthy when his body is working normally but his mind is unsettled and burdened?

The human being cannot be separated from his spiritual reality. Though this reality cannot be heard with a stethoscope or

examined under a microscope, it is real and vital to our existence. Surgery cannot remove cancerous thoughts, and pills, no matter how powerful, cannot change the momentum of the will. True health begins with a balanced mind that is molded by the higher will of the soul.

What is the higher will of the soul? It is the will to advance to higher states of consciousness, to manifest balance and attain oneness with the Supreme Will. The more we surrender our small will—a will dominated by the desire to survive and achieve—to the Supreme Will, the more we feel whole and complete. We become *servants of wholeness*.

If our days are filled with stressful thoughts about how to get ahead or how to meet deadlines, or how to make more money, or thoughts about anything that disrupts our sense of well-being, we are serving our small will and doing a great disservice to ourselves. On the other hand, if we arise each morning and mentally prepare ourselves to respond to life with kindness, to make healthy choices that will strengthen our bodies, to perform our duties to the best of our ability, to dismiss any thought that is contrary to our sense of justice and to be present in each moment, we will invite wholeness into our lives and serve not only our physical well-being, but the spiritual and emotional well-being of ourselves and others.

Only when we are serving wholeness does life feel meaningful. As servants of wholeness we should not only respect our bodies, but also our beings. You and I are more than flesh and bone. We are more than blood vessels and organs. There is an animating, rational soul that gives life to what we see in the mirror. This soul has needs just as the body does. It needs to be nourished and strengthened and, primarily, it needs to be acknowledged.

Imagine how you would feel if no one ever acknowledged your existence. When walking down the street, strangers pass by you without ever saying hello or without ever making eye contact. As you move around day after day, life simply turns its

back on you and pretends you are not there. You would no doubt feel insignificant and incomplete. This is exactly what many of us have done to our souls. We live with little awareness of our deeper reality. We struggle to find happiness, to be healthy, while denying the reality of our essential self.

It is not surprising then that many of us feel incomplete, as though something is missing from our lives. It is also not surprising that our search for happiness continues in circles with no end in sight. We have by our actions, by our speech, and by the thoughts we entertain all day long, denied the reality of the soul and have thus divided mind from body, and body from soul.

*The body is the soul's ally, not the soul's foe.*

The meaning we seek, the happiness that draws us all to some end, is available right now if we ponder deeply the reality of the soul and determine to live with a profound awareness of the soul's noble purpose. The soul was created to promote unity within the material world, to act as a moral compass to help us navigate, individually and collectively, to perfect balance. Our lives feel deeply meaningful when we serve the cause of balance. When our hearts are free of malice and envy, our minds attuned to what is good and just, we are lifted—body, mind, and soul—to a state of wholeness.

What mental exercise can I do right now, you may wonder, to invite wholeness into my life? Begin by taking a deep breath and becoming more aware of your presence. Notice that you are noticing your thoughts. Feel the solidness of the ground beneath you. Sense your breath flowing in and out of your body. Then gently, quietly, say, "I am whole. I am body, mind, and soul. I am one with my being." Say this to yourself often, at work, at play—wherever. This is a quick and simple way to bring yourself to the moment and to acknowledge the oneness of your being. The effects of this quick meditation are profound.

But simple meditation alone will not take us to the highest state of wholeness. We must purpose in our hearts to constantly

nourish our mind with spiritual food. This food— holy writings, uplifting music, images of natural beauty, etc.— is packed with inspiring spiritual energy. We should remember that what goes into our mind is more important to our health than what goes into our body; only when the mind is starved of spiritual food must we constantly force ourselves to do what promotes good health.

The mind, body, and soul are not the same energies. The body is physical; it has mass and cannot live independent of the soul. The soul is a spiritual reality that can exist independent of the body. The mind is a “clearing house” for the soul’s influence; it is a spiritual medium that acts as a conduit for the soul. The body, mind, and soul can be differentiated in many ways; this is of little significance. What is important is for us to recognize that, so long as we exist as human beings, we cannot separate these energies. What goes into our mind affects how we use our body. What happens to our body strengthens or diminishes the focus of our mind and therefore the influence of the soul’s energy in our lives. The Path of Balance to which this book is guiding us leads to a state of awareness where the struggle between the mind, body, and soul ceases. These three energies begin to function as a unit, empowering us to reject whatever may cause harm to others, the environment, and our being.

*Human beings are inherently beings of  
Honor, Unlimited Mind Power And Nobility*

### ***The Oneness of Being***

We were born of a single, self-subsisting Reality. The world does not have two creators.

Why does this matter? It matters because it means that all life, spiritual and physical, are parts of a whole, and that each of us, no matter how insignificant we may seem, affect the reality of existence. It not only matters what presidents and kings choose;

in every moment of every day the thoughts and actions of each of us influence the condition of life on earth. We, along with the animals, the earth itself, plants, and every other life-form are connected through cause and effect in a grand scheme called life. It matters that I am writing these words, and it matters that you are reading them. Everything in life matters. Our discussion in this final section will, however, not be about animals and plants; it will be about us, about what we perceive and what choices we make based on our perceptions.

Few of us arise each morning perceiving that we are connected to the other human beings in the world. The reality of oneness is as foreign to our thoughts as steak is to a vegetarian diet. And yet we easily understand that we are connected to our relatives and to our friends and others within our network of associates. We realize that were one of our relatives to meet with a tragic accident, we would be deeply affected. It's not that we have not experienced deep connections to other human beings; it's that we perceive a very select few to be vital to our existence.

In this age we have opportunities, unimaginable only a few decades ago, to connect with persons from all over the world. E-mail, cell phones, and other modern technologies have brought us closer together and created a world that is truly connected. The technological progress we are witnessing, progress that has allowed the entire world to experience the tragedies and successes of humanity in real time, is not without purpose: the reality of oneness is slowly manifesting on earth. The world is gradually beginning to function—if not consciously, unconsciously—as a single organism.

Consider the following scenario:

A man awakes at 6:00 a.m. and starts his morning routine to prepare for work. He has a shower, feeds the fish, grabs a bite to eat, and finally gets dressed for work. It's now 7:15 a.m., and as he enters his car to

head off to his office, he realizes that he has forgotten his briefcase on the kitchen counter. The man spends about two minutes retrieving his briefcase, and then returns to the car. As he hastily reverses out of the garage, he inadvertently knocks over and severely injures a cyclist passing by at that very moment.

This simple illustration highlights a very important point: *The physical world, and all that occurs in it, is the result of the compounded effect of our individual decisions.* In our illustration, we see two individuals involved in what appears to be a random accident. In reality, however, the event, though unplanned, resulted from the choices made by the businessman and cyclist since birth. Not only does the accident involve the conscious and unconscious decisions of these two individuals, but also everything that has affected their thinking. Theoretically, for example, had the cyclist decided to live in a different country, he would not be involved in the accident with that particular businessman on that day. The accident was not a random event—in the sense of something happening without a logical cause—but an occurrence caused by a continuum of innumerable effects and influences.

We are existing and creating together. I could not be here writing these words were it not for the influence of countless other persons. You would not be reading this book were it not for the decisions and actions of many others (for starters, we would not exist were it not for the sexual act of our parents); some you know, many you have never met—and never will. We are all caught in an endless web of existence, and there is not so much as a thought that escapes our minds that does not cause this web to stir. We often imagine that there is a world out there, apart from us, separate, and unrelated to our inner world, but in reality the entire universe feels the vibration of every thought and

reacts to the actions of a single atom. The domino effect describes quite accurately the inherent interdependence of life.

The point I wish to make as clearly as I can is that although we may perceive reality in vastly different ways, the Ultimate Reality fueling the consciousness that enables us to perceive anything at all pervades existence and is indivisible. Like children born of the same parents, we are the products, the off-springs if you would, of an infinite field of intelligence that we commonly refer to as God. We are, quite literally, spiritual siblings. The energy that I use to create mental images (thoughts) or to formulate ideas or move my hand is the same energy used by every soul. Consciousness is a ubiquitous field of energy that allows us to perceive reality and to create. The frequency of this energy is such that as the mind becomes more focused and balanced, we perceive Ultimate Reality (like a radio that is finely tuned to the correct frequency) with greater depth and clarity.

These ideas lead me to an important point: for us to experience collective wholeness—economic stability, political cohesiveness, religious and racial unity—our minds must be balanced to a degree that enables us to perceive the spiritual ties—ties emanating from a single Source like rivers branching from a mighty ocean— that connect the souls of all human beings. It is not enough feel a connection to friends and family, though such bonds are important and vital. The tunneled perception that we suffer from continues to give rise to unimaginable atrocities and inequities within the human population that have stunted our collective advancement.

It is doubtless that we have made great strides forward over the last few centuries. We have, for example, brought an end to wholesale slavery in many parts of the world. Even though we have made great leaps forward, particularly in the realm of science, it is evident that our collective health continues to be undermined by our perceptions about God and religion.

The greatest barriers to peace and sustainable prosperity on this planet are our irrational religious beliefs. The spiritual revelations that gave birth to the great religions are, in their purest form, good and beneficial to humanity; however, it is becoming increasingly obvious to many rational human beings that much of what we believe about God is the cause of the ongoing slaughter we are currently witnessing throughout the world. To question religious doctrine is not questioning God, as some might argue; it is questioning our interpretations of some of what has been recorded in our holy books. Indeed, if we do not question those beliefs that are divisive and destructive, if we continue to turn off the light of reason as we practice our beliefs, the suffering and fighting will continue.

Our perceptions about God and each other should be balanced by reason; otherwise we will fall under the spell of rightness and remain unaffected by the spirit of spiritual progress. We readily understand that life evolves along a positive slope of progress. In the field of science, for example, we realize that Einstein expanded upon the ideas of Newton. No one finds it necessary or rational to pit Newton against Einstein, to call one an imposter and the other the true messenger of science. Similarly, we understand that both our grade two teacher and our college professor taught us great lessons, though in very different ways because of our level of development. Enter the field of religion, however, and the rules change. Here we cling to ideas whether they are reasonable or not. We imagine that God, for some mysterious reason, delved out a bit of spiritual knowledge to a select few, never to be heard from again. We, under the banner of “the chosen ones” or the “people of God”, do away with reason altogether—thus dulling our perceptions of our common spiritual heritage and creating makeshift gods that beckon us to engage in unreasonable acts.

Is it reasonable to believe an all-loving creator will burn people ad infinitum because they rejected His son? Is it

reasonable to believe girls should not be educated or that we should kill in the name of God? Thomas Jefferson once said, "Question with boldness even the existence of God; because, if there is one, he must more approve the homage of reason than that of blind-folded fear." All ideas, be they found in a romantic novel or a holy book, should be held up to the light of reason.

Is it not reasonable to believe that spiritual knowledge, like scientific knowledge, is progressive? 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded eloquently to such questions. I quote him at some length:

"The divine prophets have revealed and founded religion. They have laid down certain laws and heavenly principles for the guidance of mankind. They have taught and promulgated the knowledge of God, established praiseworthy ethical ideals and inculcated the highest standards of virtue in the human world. Gradually these heavenly teachings and foundations of reality have been beclouded by human interpretations and dogmatic imitations of ancestral beliefs. The essential realities which the prophets labored so hard to establish in human hearts and minds while undergoing ordeals and suffering tortures of persecution, have now well nigh vanished. Some of these heavenly messengers have been killed, some imprisoned; all of them despised and rejected while proclaiming the reality of divinity. Soon after their departure from this world, the essential truth of their teachings was lost sight of and dogmatic imitations adhered to.

Inasmuch as human interpretations and blind imitations differ widely, religious strife and disagreement have arisen among mankind, the light of true religion has been extinguished and the unity of

the world of humanity destroyed. The prophets of God voiced the spirit of unity and agreement. They have been the founders of divine reality. Therefore if the nations of the world forsake imitations and investigate the reality underlying the revealed Word of God they will agree and become reconciled. For reality is one and not multiple.

The nations and religions are steeped in blind and bigoted imitations. A man is a Jew because his father was a Jew. The Mohammedan follows implicitly the footsteps of his ancestors in belief and observance. The Buddhist is true to his heredity as a Buddhist. That is to say they profess religious belief blindly and without investigation, making unity and agreement impossible. It is evident therefore that this condition will not be remedied without a reformation in the world of religion. In other words, the fundamental reality of the divine religions must be renewed, reformed, revoiced to mankind.”

The reformation that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of is, I believe, one of perception. The world, if it is to heal the manifold wounds caused by irrational beliefs about God, must now perceive, firstly, the all-pervasive spirit of God that is at work in the lives of every human being. It is this Great Spirit that has given life to us all, has imbued us with the gift of reason, and has revealed the signs of oneness in creation.

*See My oneness, behold My singleness and, using the power of reason, draw nigh to those evident truths that balance to the soul of humanity*

Bahá'u'lláh declared that “the well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.” The unity of which He speaks is much more than an intellectual acceptance of our cultures and faiths, a superficial tolerance that masks fundamental grievances, but an all-encompassing unity born of a fundamental shift in the way we perceive reality. This unity, a unity that will heal every ill within our societies, will manifest fully when we, either voluntarily or in response to tragic events, perceive the oneness of humanity and the oneness of the central truths of the great religions.

The waters that divide our lands cannot separate the spiritual bonds that knit our lives together. The seeds of error that have corrupted our great religions will not extinguish the light of unity that burns in the deepest part of the human soul. The cultural and ethnic verities that have for too long cause immature minds to divide the body of humanity will eventually give way to the forces of reason.

These forces are at work everyday in our lives, helping us to navigate the sometimes stormy seas of life. We could not, for example, arrive at work each day in one piece were we not able to make reasonable decisions about our safety. Without the force of reason mankind would hopelessly stumble through life towards catastrophe after catastrophe. Some may argue that this is indeed exactly what our collective experience of life is like. If there is any truth to this argument, it is not because the average human being cannot reason; it is because our perceptions have been mangled.

If *reason* does not join hands with *right perception*, the forces of reason—forces powerful enough to lift humankind to heavenly realms—will atrophy, leaving us susceptible to the divisive influences of superstition, tradition, and beliefs based in fear and egotism.

Were we to collectively perceive the spiritual bonds shared by the whole of humanity, to recognize that life has emerged from a single source, from one Compassionate Being, we would change

the way we live. We would not fight over religion, for we would realize that the great religions, at their core, echo the same divine principles. We would begin to perceive life as a whole instead of as fragmented pieces competing against each other. Our minds would become illumined by thoughts of unity and peace.

Our short time on earth can be filled with much more laughter than tears. Our cities and towns can function gracefully, providing healthy environments for each of us to flourish. Our homes can be nurturing and loving and our romantic unions, enriching. Our celebration of the divine can become the “orb of faith” around which humanity circles, hands clasped in a spirit of togetherness.

The Path of Balance has been laid before us. We have been touched by the Middle Theory’s insights and shown the way forward, the way to a better, happier existence.

## About The Author

Deshon Fox is a visionary whose life's mission is to share the insights that have transformed his life with the world. Following a mysterious spiritual experience in University in 2000, he was inspired to write *The Middle Theory*; a book he began writing in 2001. Since publishing *The Middle Theory* in 2009, Deshon has continued to give lectures, talks, satsangs and workshops to teach audiences around the world how to integrate the powerful insights shared in *The Middle Theory* into their daily lives.

Deshon enjoys connecting with readers. His workshops are intimate and engaging. He has an uncanny ability to connect with the listener to determine exactly what needs to be said. He is a deep listener. Those who have met Deshon often comment that he has a quiet alertness that is comforting and disarming.

Deshon grew up in the Bahamas. He completed tertiary studies at Florida International University in Miami, Florida where he obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering and at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Minnesota where he obtained a Master's Degree in Civil Engineering.

As a businessman, Deshon enjoys great success as the owner and principal of Optimum Designs Ltd., an engineering consultancy firm, and as the CEO of Inspire Academy Ltd., an international K-12 private school based in the Bahamas. Deshon lives in the Bahamas with his wife and four young children.

Visit [www.themiddletheory.com](http://www.themiddletheory.com) to learn more about the author and his teaching schedule and to gain access to powerful free material to help you on your journey to a happier, more balanced life.