



INTRODUCTION

I HAVE BEEN ON A SPIRITUAL PATH for more than five decades. As is true with many journeys, I found twists and turns rather than a straight road and was unaware of the stunning revelations ahead. As previously described, I received a spiritual instruction to write this book. What I have produced is, rather than a book, a journal of my experience of illumination. The journey of writing has changed my life in dramatic and entirely unexpected ways.

My journey has brought me to a place in my soul that I have read about for many years in the ancient writings of the masters and the spiritual teachers of our times who tell the story of a mystical path to wholeness in understandable language. However, reading about the path to wholeness and experiencing the path are quite different. I thought I had a deep understanding of the teachings. Indeed, I have had many blessed experiences along the way, but I was not prepared for the startling new insights and revelations that came to me.

Those insights and revelations constituted a sacred gift within the gift of my experience in 2009. It truly shifted the core beliefs of my life and resulted in an expansive ability to love unconditionally in ways that were not available to me at the beginning of my sojourn.

Let me take you on a whirlwind tour of where I have been, pulling together the highlights of the journey, to give you a sampling of where you are about to travel with these written words as your guide. May you open your consciousness to the thought that there is truly only One entity reverberating through the entire universe and that because of that awareness in your crown chakra, you will know *you are never alone*.

You will explore the corridors of your mind, knowing that when you see God in the details of your day from a higher consciousness, you can avoid becoming stuck in the illusions of the Monkey Mind in your third eye chakra. You will become aware that all your choices in thought, word, and deed, when aligned with the Truth of who you are, will reflect your connection to that Oneness in your throat chakra. You will learn that your heart chakra is the place of your spiritual birth where you experience how beloved you are by Spirit, allowing you to radiate compassion and unconditional love to all beings. This is where you will give spiritual birth to all the wisdom so freely given by Spirit along your way, knowing that you will need to nurture it as a loving parent would until the wisdom matures into the guiding principles that will navigate your external life in your lower three chakras.

The new wisdom revealed to you will become infused in your soul, shifting the compass of your life and affecting how you interact with your interior and exterior worlds. You will shift the foundation of what you choose to include in your

sense of self from the values of the exterior world to the Truth of your internal sanctuary. You will know in your solar plexus chakra the detrimental effects on your soul of compromising that Truth. You will discover where to go to receive creative inspiration and know that you can experience the presence of Spirit through each of your physical senses. You will become aware of how much relationships inform your soul's journey of illumination in your sacral chakra. Last, but not least (by any stretch of our imaginations), you will become aware in your root chakra that you are part of the same tribe of humanity and are one with all creation, with no need to be fearful. You will realize that you end up where you started: What is in the One is in the whole, the message of the crown chakra. What a journey!

Here are a few travel tips to remember along the way as you move along on this continual journey of illumination of your soul. Know that Spirit will always respond to your heartfelt prayers with compassion and unconditional love for you and will shower you with Divine grace. Keep in mind that the answers you receive may not be what you were hoping for and that those answers will come at a time of Spirit's choosing, but never doubt that your answer will come. Eckhart Tolle, spiritual teacher and author has told us, "The power is in you. The answer is in you. And you are the answer to all your searches: you are the goal. You are the answer. It's never outside." Tolle is speaking about the Truth of who you are, not about your egoic self, and that Truth always contains the answer to all your searching.

When you do not feel grounded or feel unsettled and possibly fearful, go within to that place where the still, small voice resides that has called to you so many times. Center yourself

in the peace and harmony you have previously touched. Know that it is always there within you. Do not focus on the imbalance you think surrounds you; this is the illusion of chaos. Consciously shift to the infinite array of choices you will discover along your journey when going within to ask for Divine revelation. Always remember that you may choose unconditional love and peace to replace your unbalanced energy. Look at the illusion you are in through the eyes of your heart and not of your egoic mind.

Once you are centered, reverently ask to have the place where you are not aligned with the Truth of who you are to be illuminated. Listen with an open heart for the answer, without judgment. That answer will redirect you back to your path. Take notes in a journal and review those notes to remind yourself of the wisdom that was hidden in previous times when you were feeling the same way. Reassure yourself that that wisdom will now enable you to navigate through the current challenge. Think of how much smoother challenges will be now, knowing where to go when you are searching for answers.

You will learn that Divine grace and guidance have and always will lead you on your soul's journey. This knowing will allow you to go easy on yourself and the others around you who are catching up to your new evolving being. The relationships you develop with fellow soul sojourners will support you along the way.

Self-“excavation” is usually an arduous task. Even though no one can make your journey for you, you need not fend for yourself throughout your odyssey. The classic traps that have been described by souls who have traversed this path throughout the ages are fear and desire. Saint Teresa of Avila referred

to them as reptiles that have invaded your peace. You will learn how to keep a watchful eye for these invaders that slip in when you are centered in your egoic mind and not in your heart.

The reading of this book will be the easy part of your soul's journey of illumination, the passive part of the journey. The next part will not be nearly as easy. It is the active part, and it involves putting what resonated with your soul not only into your consciousness, but into your physical world, which is a more challenging task.

The Truths and practices that I will share with you from the sages and mystics with whom I am most familiar will not at first be effortless or painless for you to grasp. Yet they are exceedingly necessary to guide you. Put into place in your life, they will keep you from taking the wrong fork in the road. "Wrong" here means a longer way to get to where you want to go, for all roads take most of us within ourselves eventually. However, as the saying goes, "You can go by wisdom or by woe." The fourteenth-century Persian poet Shamsuddin Muhammad Hafiz gives us a similar way of contemplating the journey in a portion of his poem *A Divine Invitation*. Daniel Ladinsky's translation captures the poem's message beautifully in this stanza:

*We can come to God
Dressed for dancing.
Or
Be carried on a stretcher
To God's ward.*

After all, we are all heading to the destination of returning to the Source of our being.

Not only will this arduous journey be difficult for you, it will be just as arduous, if not more so, for those around you. You have the benefit at least of having some idea about what you are doing, but those around you will likely be clueless, especially if they have no experience with the “going within” odyssey. There may be casualties along the way. You may lose some relationships. For some of you, the journey now is no longer optional; for others, it will be the wrong time or season. Seasons change and come around again, so there will be innumerable opportunities to gather your intentions and sincere desires to launch your discovery of Self.

No purchased tickets are required for this journey, and there are no security checks. All are welcomed with open arms.

THE METAPHOR OF WATER AS THE FLOW OF DIVINE GRACE

In the prelude and introduction of this book, I use the metaphor of water for the Divine grace that I was given that morning as I was smudging. Divine grace is the power that removes the obstacles that stand in the way of our soul’s illumination. That power intricately weaves its way into our consciousness. The illuminating process reveals the wisdom of wholeness that is within our being not yet unveiled, for many of us, yearning to be discovered. Each and every one of us has been touched by Divine grace in very individualized and intimate ways.

As we follow the path of this metaphor, we will have a deeper understanding of how Divine grace has affected our life, and our personal hidden wisdom will be revealed. One major Truth of this wisdom is the realization that we were never alone and that we are indeed One with our Creator. We will become aware that there is a very different way to interact with our life’s journey,

hand in hand with our soul on its journey of illumination.

The metaphor of water has been used throughout the centuries to describe something that is ineffable and one that many of us are all familiar with. Artists, composers, authors, poets, mystics, and others have used the metaphor of water to convey the indescribable experience they have had with something out of the ordinary. When anyone tries to relate a profound experience to someone, they often begin by saying “it was like” because there are no words that can capture the experience; then they proceed to describe something they think the person they are speaking with can resonate with. Metaphors that use water as the vehicle of conveyance of a concept are plentiful: it is like the immensity of an ocean, the stillness of a pond, the flow of a river, or the depth of a well, and so on. Saint Teresa of Avila used the metaphor of water to relate the Source of her being. She spoke of drinking from the well of God, which never goes dry. In some cases this metaphor of water has been used by humans to describe their experiences and understanding of what their culture refers to as the unnamable: Allah, Creator, God, Source, Spirit, Waken Tanka, or Yahweh, to name a few.

Water also seems to be a substance that evokes a stirring of deep emotion within us and is probably why so many beings have used it as a metaphor. More than likely, you can reflect on an experience you have had, something beyond what mere words can describe, when you have been drawn into the enchantment of water. Have you had the experience of sitting by a river or stream of water observing a leaf or feather being carried along by the flow of the water’s current and wondered where it might be going or where it will end up and realized that you were on a similar journey of “unknowing” in your life? Or maybe you have had the opportunity to observe a body of

water that appeared to be still and calm, unaware of the strong current running deep under its surface until you heard the roar of its powerful waterfall as it fell free to the ground below and recognized the times in your life that you were in a free fall and did not see it coming. How about the immensity of an ocean that resonates with our inner sense of expansion that you cannot describe?

Do you compare events in your life's journey to bodies of water, some twisting and turning at times, some slowly and gracefully meandering with no view of its destination? Or do you relate more to an ocean that reaches the cliffs and then crashes against the inflexible barrier of that landmass? Maybe you have experienced your life as moving along on a fairly lovely ride on a wandering stream, a few bumps along the way, maybe a slight change in direction because of some debris that made its way into your stream, but you think you have successfully navigated your way around the obstacle. Or did you? Some of us experience life as a tumultuous white water rapids river ride with clenched fists and white knuckles. We have all met those whose lives appear — and I emphasize the word *appear* — to flow at just the right speed and direction at all times.

Although our ride has been on the stream of life, most of us come to a place where our stream comes to a still point, if even for an ever so brief period. The movement of our lives stops. It takes a while for most of us even to become aware that something has changed in the flow of our lives. As stillness seeps into our consciousness, we may be somewhat uncomfortable with the inactivity of this space. We start to question what is going on and may explore our journey so far and how we reached this place. When we ask that question, be assured, the journey of our souls has begun in earnest.

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

We are instinctively becoming aware of an emerging desire to have the course of our lives move in a significantly different way since we know we are not “there” yet, wherever “there” is. We inquire of ourselves if we have made “it” yet. We have heard about “it,” read books about “it,” attended workshops on “it,” but we have not yet experienced the “it” that has completed us.

We may begin to be nagged by thoughts like, “Is this all there is?” We feel within us that something is missing, but we cannot quite get a handle on what we are reaching for. Many of us are not aware that this yearning is the call for an alignment of ourselves with the Truth of who we really are. We intuitively know we are a part of something bigger than what we are currently experiencing ourselves to be, but we are unsure of what that something is. We look around in an effort to get our bearings, comparing our current surroundings with places and circumstances we have known before. We long to go back to some of those places, even though we know that is not possible. We are aware that we cannot stand in the same river of days gone by as all rivers are continually changing. This awareness is the underlying principle of the well-worn phrase “We can never go back home.”

Upon reflection, some of us become aware of how relieved we are no longer to be stuck in episodes of the chaotic whirlpools we once called our life. This can be the dawning of our awakening as we begin to explore and question where we are in our lives and where we think we want to be. We know there is more to life because we have had ever so brief touches of “it” now and then. When we have shared our times on the “wondering what life is about” theme, we may have been told by very

well meaning people to “get over” ourselves and move on. But we have come to a place in our lives where the yearning to be connected to something deep within our being can no longer be silenced. For many of us, including myself, we ask, “How could I have ended up here, yet again?” It seems the harder some of us try to redirect the flow of our course and take control of our lives, the more we keep ending up in a very similar place with an intuitive knowing that this is definitely not the “it” we were searching for.

Have you not found yourself at a loss for words when someone has asked you to describe what you are searching for? Have you heard yourself say, “I don’t know, but I’ll know it when I find it,” or “I’ll know it when I feel it”? Like most of us, I have looked for fulfillment in many different places. Driven by this sense of restlessness, I have looked outside myself to find the things, people, places — you name it — to fill the void in my heart and soul. Now, however, I know that the only place to look for wholeness is within, and I call on the gift of Divine grace to lead me to the Source of my yearning and searching.

To begin the journey of reuniting with the Oneness, the Truth of who we are, we must be open to the space within that has been calling us, allowing ourselves to feel any discomfort or, for some of us, pain that our separation has created. We must have the courage to follow the call of our soul, the awareness that we are not yet whole. Once we are committed to this path of self-discovery, we must open our hearts and minds to a different way of being, experiencing our vulnerability and fear of the unknown. From a place deep within our being, we need to ask humbly for help and guidance and allow ourselves to be carried by the flow of Divine grace to our Source, with

no preconditions or expectations. We must have trust and faith that we will be embraced with unconditional love beyond anything we have experienced before. After all, have we not come to this fork in the road many times before, hoping the direction we took would have a different outcome than the well-worn paths we had previously traversed? Different set of characters or surroundings present maybe, but pretty much the same old “me” was reaching for that infamous “it” at the end of the trail.

“What’s wrong with me?” we demand of ourselves, but no answers come. These deep feelings of despair and sense of abandonment constitute what some refer to as the “dark night of the soul”, which is the title of an infamous poem by St. John of the Cross, a sixteen-century Spanish mystic. The poem was based on his arduous journey within his soul. Joseph Campbell, an American mythologist and scholar, has written extensively in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* about the “hero’s journey,” again about the individual taking the classic journey within toward transformation of the self. Many familiar stories and myths tell of that journey: Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, Simba in *The Lion King*, Ulysses in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and many, many more. The theme is the same, with great anguish being the catalyst that puts us on the road of discovering the Truth of who we are. When we face this abyss we are still not conscious that the fear and isolation we are experiencing is an essential part of our transformational process.

If you have this book in your hands, you are obviously seeking something more for your life than you are living now. You must be one of those souls searching for more awareness of the Truth of your being, as I doubt you would have ended up reading even this far in this book otherwise. I sincerely hope this

writing will assist you in some small way on your journey of expanding your awareness of the Truth of who you are.

My intent in offering this book is to share the experiences of my soul's journey thus far, in the hope that maybe something that I have experienced may shed some small ray of light on a struggle you may be encountering in your life at this time or this sharing may be a catalyst to deepen your quest to become more whole. This is not a scholarly work; it is an experiential work of sharing the gifts that have been given to me. I will be using many different names for God throughout this book, such as Creator, Source, and Spirit.

Please use the word that is most meaningful to you and that describes the designer of creation as you know it. I will also be sharing my understanding of the teachings of many great souls who have guided me on my way. My hope is that as you read and participate in the reflections I suggest, the knowledge and wisdom you gain from your interior work on this soul journey will benefit you on your voyage of transformation and ultimately will benefit the universe itself, as we are all One.

Please keep a journal with you as you read this book as there will be reflections I will ask you to participate in. It is essential to go deeply within your own being when doing work of a transformative nature and then to write about thoughts and feelings that arise in you. You will also want to capture any new insights and wisdom that will be revealed to you as a result of reflective and contemplative moments.

My experience is that when I do not write about sacred gifts in the moment, many times I lose the subtle nuances of the gift from the Divine that I received.



CHAPTER 1

OPENING TO THE FLOW OF DIVINE GRACE

Self is the only prison that can ever bind the soul.

— *Henry Van Dyke*

Man stands in his own shadow and wonders why it's dark.

— *Zen proverb*

A FEW YEARS BACK I took the proverbial “leap of faith” into the abyss out of desperation. After quite an extensive journey within that included a great deal of soul searching, I became aware that what had been guiding me along the tumultuous twists and turns of my sojourn was indeed Divine grace. I had a preconceived idea that if God was communicating with me, I would know it for sure. I thought it would be like being blinded by a most powerful light or hearing a voice from on high that I had been told about in my early childhood religious education classes. I will share some of the wisdom I have come in contact with and what I have learned along the endless road I am traveling.

DIVINE GRACE

Divine grace is a power that cannot be literally described. It really is beyond words. I can only share my limited understanding of it and my experiences with its power, profound compassion, and unconditional love. Divine grace is a glorious gift from Spirit that is given freely and unconditionally to all, a signature of Spirit's presence. Whether we are able to sense it or identify that we have been blessed by it when it flows into our lives in an ever so subtle way is the question to ask ourselves. For some of us, it is only with reflection on the experiences we have had, and well after the event has occurred, that we become aware that God had indeed touched our souls.

Think of an experience you had that seemed inconsequential at the time, perfectly ordinary, but managed to get your attention in a slightly different manner than most of the everyday occurrences in your life. You still remember that "ordinary" moment to this day. Have you ever revisited that seemingly ordinary experience and questioned why, of all the millions of events that have occurred in your life, that moment still remains with you? Reflect on that once-thought-of "ordinary" moment, and in retrospect you may discover that it contained an "extraordinary" message from your soul.

Divine grace can also be a force that rocks you out of your unconsciousness and fills you with ecstasy. Being blessed with Divine grace can leave you with an overwhelming sense of humility, your mind perplexed in its thinking of what you could have possibly done to be touched in this way. It is not an experience of your senses, mind, or body, but one of your soul. The experience of being permeated with God's presence is beyond your limited understanding and reasoning ability.

Being touched by Divine grace is a transformational event that comes unannounced and of a time of God's choosing. You cannot make the experience happen. In many cases it takes time to realize the effect it has had on you, but one thing is for sure: you can never, ever forget the experience. It is a momentous connection with the innate Divinity of creation that makes you aware that there is so much more to God than you can possibly imagine or grasp with your limited mind. Yet you are indeed a part of it. Divine grace carves a path in your soul to the Truth and sets afire your quest for union with the Divine. Mystics from all spiritual traditions have spoken or written about it, but I imagine they were left with a sense of frustration, as it is impossible to give a clear and concise description of something as profound as Divine grace.

Some of you may be thinking, "I really have not received any Divine grace." Yet I assure you that you have, and as you move through this book you will be able to identify the distinct way that the gift of Divine grace has been given to you. Each of us receives Divine grace and guidance in a different format, but we all are blessed with those gifts. The challenge is to recognize them as gifts and to allow them to transform our lives.

The question to ask regarding these messages is not whether the message given was "Divine guidance," but what will we do with the new awareness we have received. Our interpretation of the message will determine the choices we make in response to the gift and therefore the consequences of those choices. Our lives and the lives of others will be directly affected as a result of our actions. We will learn to trust Divine guidance as we ask and open ourselves further to the flow of Divine grace into our lives.

Just as early, mysterious signs of life begin anew with spring without our knowing, when we are not conscious of its signs, we may be unaware of the presence of Divine grace. Most of us are so caught up in our daily activities that we may not slow down enough to sense the delicate stirring of its presence. We may never have noticed that Divine grace has surrounded us throughout our lives. Its presence and essence are not something that can be taught the way spelling rules, mathematical principles, and theories of quantum physics are taught. We are sometimes not even aware that it was Divine grace that played an intimate role in a very challenging time in our lives until years later in a journey of reflection. However, once we begin to sense that something beyond us is intervening in our lives and we honor that presence, we will never be able to deny its presence again. Our awareness quickens to the essence of this ever so subtle movement within our souls. Little do we realize that the awakening has already begun; we were simply not yet awake to its stirrings within.

Take some time to reflect on the following poem by James Dillet Freeman, which attempts to describe the constant presence of God in our lives.

I AM THERE

Do you need me?

I am there.

You cannot see Me, yet I am the light you see by.

You cannot hear Me, yet I speak through your voice.

You cannot feel Me, yet I am the power at work in your hands.

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS

In our unconscious state we are similar to caterpillars crawling along, so many legs to coordinate to get them to where they think they need to go. Similarly, our interior vision is limited because we are so busy trying to control and coordinate our lives that we miss the subtleties of the presence of Divine grace. We are consumed with survival, with what is next to accomplish, what direction or action we should take to get us where we need to be and obtain what we think we need. We may believe we can obtain what we need by dominating and manipulating circumstances at any cost to achieve our desires and be in control of our lives.

Life at this point in our consciousness is pretty simple. We have it all figured out. Things are pretty much black and white, and we judge those around us who do not see life according to our beliefs. We are certain that we are right and that those who do not agree with us are simply wrong. Yet at times something feels slightly off center, and we may attribute that uneasy feeling to not trying hard enough or not being focused enough. With sheer determination we plow ahead and leave a wake behind us. We are oblivious to the consequences of our actions as we have been many times before. We move on and do not ask, “What was that all about?” never pausing to consider what we have done. We tell ourselves, “Keep moving, stay focused, for God’s sake! What’s wrong with you anyway?” And on we go until the next time our soul whispers that it wants to be heard. When we finally surrender, knowing that what we are continually doing is not getting us where we think we need to be, we are able to ask for assistance. We get a sense of what Albert Einstein’s definition of insanity means, “Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Again the feeling of uneasiness rises, but this time more powerfully. It gets our attention. This time it cannot be ignored. This time we pause long enough to ponder what is really going on, and we begin to realize that we really do not have all the answers. The next step in the process is somewhat similar to the cocoon stage of the caterpillar: we go within, searching for answers, although we are not protected from everything outside ourselves the way the silk cocoon protects the caterpillar. We find ourselves feeling isolated within, still unaware of the Divine grace that is guiding us through a most difficult process — the process of not knowing what to do next. We can no longer deny that we are off track, confused about our direction.

Our answers are not so black and white after all; many more shades of gray have entered our expanding field of thought. We become aware that we are losing our bearings, and we begin to doubt our core beliefs. Where is this sense of bewilderment coming from? “How did I get here?” we ask. At this point in our journey, we are not aware that this sense of being lost is essential for our transformation to begin. We find ourselves more alone than we have ever been before. We certainly would not consider this state of utter confusion to be a gift of Divine grace and that this very unsettling sense of not knowing is a wake-up call.

In its own time and when we are stripped of our previous futile attempts to control our world and have asked for answers as to why things are as they are, we have unknowingly opened a space for Divine grace to flow more freely into our consciousness and our hearts, like the dawn of a new day.

With newfound courage and the beginning awareness of our connection to the Truth of who we are, we release some of our old beliefs and embrace the sense of true peace that is beginning

to unfold within our being. Our vision is expanding; we are no longer crawling on the ground focused on survival or lost in the darkness of a cocoon. We are beginning to view our lives from a much different prospective. Our wings are beginning to take form, and we are preparing to take flight.

This transformational process is not a linear experience with a beginning, middle, and end. We are not caterpillars that experience a specified period in a cocoon and then poof! — We are butterflies! I have experienced transformation to be a recurring process, usually different every time. From what friends have shared with me regarding their experiences with the transformational effects of Divine grace, the process is also different for everyone. On occasion, Divine grace announces itself in a manner that leaves the person without doubt that it has intervened dramatically in his or her life. These people become aware that they are in touch with awe, a place within they have never encountered before, instructing them to go in a definitive direction. On most other occasions, Divine grace is much more subtle until our consciousness is attuned to its presence.

As I stated earlier here, for some the process can begin with just a wisp of awareness that something is amiss in our lives. For others, it is a genuine crisis that can be followed by a profound going within, and for others, a crisis situation brings them to their knees. Whatever shape the process takes, we always come out the other end as different people, sometimes for the better and sometimes temporarily for the worse. On and on it goes, our soul beckoning us to become aware of the Truth of who we are. Over and over we begin the journey, but somehow it is not quite the same each time because we have received Divine guidance along our way and have retained that wisdom in our souls. Each time that we embark on the journey within, the flow of

Divine grace clears more of our resistance from our path toward becoming more aligned with the Truth of who we are. Thus, we show up in our lives in a slightly more present way. Again similar to the flow of water, rivers can carve canyons in mountains. Divine grace clears mountains of debris to clear the path to our souls. Divine grace's force permeates our souls with the knowing that we are most certainly not alone. This is the journey of illumination, with the final destination of union with the One.

I now believe that it is impossible not to be surrounded with Divine grace, whether or not we are aware of its presence. Within the past few years I have reflected deeply on my life and have become aware that Divine grace has always protected me and guided me on my soul's journey. There have been times in my life that I have labeled as tumultuous episodes, where I felt as though I were a lost soul and fully alone. I now know that there is nowhere to go that Divine grace is not present. It is a matter of opening oneself to its presence and becoming aware of it yourself.

But "how do you do this?" you ask. I truly wish I had an easy and simple answer for you. I know for me, asking with an open heart in reverent prayer and becoming as still as I possibly can within my being allows me to become more and more aware of the power that Divine grace has had in my life.

A Course in Miracles, a large work published in 1976 that was channeled by Helen Schucman and scribed by William Thetford, both professors of medical psychology at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, states that "a universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary." It further states that this "universal experience" is the knowing that you have been in God's presence or that you have experienced union with God, the

Oneness of the universe that so many mystics, sages, and individuals have experienced quite unexpectedly. Some of these blessed beings have written about their experiences to guide us along our way. I hope you find something in this writing that will fuel your desire to know the Divine presence of God.

SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY

We will spend a portion of our time on this journey together exploring our past to uncover the gifts we did not recognize at the time they were given. These periods of reflection will assist us in awakening our inner wisdom instead of dwelling on what we have once viewed as pain and suffering. We may think we have successfully navigated around the debris in the stream of our lives or planted the experiences in a deep hole, never to see the light of day again, putting them behind us. In most cases, however, they unexpectedly sprout up. By that I mean that we are unconscious of the enormous toll they continue to have on our lives and souls because they remain alive and well. We will delve into the depths of these experiences with the skills of a spiritual alchemist and retrieve the golden wisdom these leaden experiences contain.

Alchemy is described as a chemical philosophy that attempts to change a base metal into gold. One of my goals in this book is to transform some of the experiences you have had in your life, the ones you label as negative. We will go within our beings, reverently asking for Divine grace to pierce through that negativity and reveal the golden wisdom that it contains. To retrieve this latent wisdom, we need to go deep within.

We will open our hearts and souls to Divine grace, releasing the fear and false beliefs that keep us from connecting with our souls. Part of the process of transformation is understanding

how that wisdom affects the interaction between the energies of the *chakras* and the energies of the world outside yourself. You will then be able to use that understanding, revealed wisdom, and new wisdom you will discover, to navigate your soul's journey in alignment with a new life compass.

You will discover that many of the events that you previously experienced with great sadness or fear at the time were gems in the rough. These as-yet unrevealed gems have the potential to offer you a clearer perception of events once described as painful, resulting in the ability to be more present in your life today. You will be able to move into your future knowing, from your own experience that things truly do work according to a Divine order for the greatest good. Your inner wisdom will reveal that Divine grace has guided you along the way and was always present throughout your life. This is captured well by a poem by Mary Stevenson that many of you may already be familiar with:

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.

Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed
that during the low periods of my life,

when I was suffering from
anguish, sorrow or defeat,

I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,

“You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,

you would walk with me always.

But I have noticed that during
the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one
set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most,
you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied,
"The times when you have
seen only one set of footprints
is when I carried you."

The journey of the illumination of the soul, as I noted before, is a process, but by no means a sequential one, many times feeling more like two steps forward and one step back. Many times we are unaware of the changes that are occurring, not unlike a farmer and a newborn calf: A farmer found himself in a position that he needed to lift a newborn calf over an obstacle so it could receive its nutrients. Every day he faithfully lifted this calf over the obstacle so the calf could eat. One day, someone passing by stopped and asked the farmer, "How is that you have the strength to lift a cow?" The farmer only then realized the calf was no longer a calf. The farmer had not noted the calf's incremental weight gain because he was accustomed to lifting the "calf," which had become a cow.

You may find that you do not notice the changes within yourself for quite some time, similar to the caterpillar's myopic view of self. It may take someone else remarking how surprised he or she was because of the way that you responded to a stressful situation in a way that was not characteristically "like you." You become gradually in touch with a new compass of your life, and this influences how you interact with the external world — you interact rather than react. Inner peace arises in your soul. This is the most precious gift that anyone can receive.

ILLUMINATION

When I use the word *illumination* in regard to the journey of our souls, simply put, I am referring to the conscious awareness of being connected, transcendent of self, with the Source from which we were created. This consciousness is not undertaken by our intellects. Quite the opposite. It is the process of our hearts opening to the presence of the Infinite within our souls. Illumination is an experiential occurrence by which we feel the awareness of Spirit's presence, allowing us to experience precious moments of the nature of our being.

Enlightenment represents the end of the false belief that we are separate from the Source of our creation, the point when all fear is dissolved. Spiritual masters who have become aware of the Source of their beings or souls and have the ability to remain in that consciousness are called enlightened. Their awareness is consistently "in the light." Their enlightenment comes from union with the Divine within their being, not from the world outside themselves. It may be, however, that the external world will serve as a catalyst for flashes of illumination. When, for example, we are driven deeply within ourselves by an external event, we may touch the luminous light of our souls, or we may experience these brief glimpses of illumination during periods of reverent prayer, contemplation, or reflection.

For most of us, illumination is an infrequent and inconsistent occurrence as we move through the journey of our lives. If we were to experience the full force of enlightenment, it would overwhelm most of us. Many mystics and sages throughout the ages have written extensively on their experiences of illumination and its overwhelming effects, often rendering them speechless and powerless to describe what they experienced. Two examples of enlightened beings are Buddha and Christ,

who had the ability to remain in union with Oneness consistently and consciously.

A few words of clarification here before we move on. In this book I make frequent references to the Truth, with a capital *t*. The reason for this is that Truth is something that never changes, just as the earth rotates around the sun and birth comes before death. No one can change the Truth; however, Truth does change people. Something can be true at one time but not at other times. The outside temperature one day is often different from the next day's temperature; both are true temperatures so therefore they are true but not Truth. Thus, each time you read the word *Truth*, know that I am referring to something that does not change. Likewise, I will also capitalize many other words throughout the book: Creator, One, Source, Spirit, and the like. Whenever you note a capitalized word that is not usually capitalized, know that I am referring to God or the Truth of who we are.



THE CHAKRAS

In chapters two through eight, I focus on chakras. There are seven major chakras. We will explore how Divine grace brings illumination and empowerment to each chakra's wisdom, offering us options and choices as we move forward on the journey of our souls toward illumination. Indian yogis were the first people to identify the chakra system many thousands of years ago. Many authors through the ages describe the chakra system as comprising individual vortices of energy that receive and transmit energy. These vortices are located along the spinal column from the base of our spines to above the crown

of our heads. Although chakras are described as individual energy centers, they work together as a whole system. Some authors have described additional chakras but I focus on the seven most familiar ones in this book.

These energy centers, when illuminated by Divine grace, assist us in balancing our physical world with our spiritual world. As we grow in our ability to incorporate the wisdom and knowledge that each chakra contains, our consciousness expands and our alignment with the universal laws of creation strengthens. Each chakra holds wisdom that assists us in navigating our lives through the challenges we all inevitably encounter along the way on the journey of our souls toward illumination. Just as important as aligning ourselves with the “light side” of the chakra energy patterns, we must be continually alert to the shadow, or to what is sometimes referred to as the dark side, of these energy centers as well. The illuminated energy of the chakras will expand our awareness of our connection to the “One” and consequently guide our choices in thought, word, and deed with unconditional love, while the shadow energy of the chakras will constrict our awareness through fear and guide us based on the principle of the small “one”: me and what’s in it for me.

Each chakra does not have a clear-cut definitive boundary where its energy pattern begins and the other starts. The chakras function as an interrelated system, the energy of each influencing the others. Most important for us to understand is that these energy patterns are continually providing us with input from our environment. The energy patterns also affect how we respond to our environment, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is up to us to actively decide to align with the Divine grace that is constantly available to guide us in our ability

to interpret the energetic message that the chakras are sending. How we interpret the message will determine all our choices in thought, word, and deed, which will directly affect our lives, the lives of all the others we interact with, and the universe itself.

I present the chakras from the top down, as opposed to the traditional presentation from the bottom up. I describe how Divine grace flows down through the chakras, illuminating aspects of each chakra's energies, as this is the inspiration I received. What follows is a truly brief description of the individual chakra patterns. I hope the description will give you a basic understanding of our interior landscape and what aspects of our interior and exterior world each chakra influences. At the beginning of each chapter, I also give a brief review of the specific chakra's pattern. As we travel on the path of our souls' journey through the chakras, always keep in mind that the chakras constitute a system rather than individual parts.

THE CROWN CHAKRA

The crown chakra, located just above the crown of the head, is the chakra that connects us to universal, or pure consciousness, an awareness of the One and that we are contained in that One. This experience can happen in an instant through the Divine grace of Spirit uniting us with the Oneness of cosmic consciousness and takes us beyond our physical world. Duality and illusion are no longer present in the lives of beings that are able to hold this consciousness consistently. As I have said, these souls are enlightened beings. These are beings who chose to remain in their physical bodies for the sake of humanity, to teach and enlighten others. However, enlightened souls may choose to drop their physical bodies when they become enlightened and merge into the Oneness.

The experience of Divine grace here is life altering; it shifts our perception of the limited finite world to the infinity of the Divine world. Spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer can certainly help to create a receptive space for enlightenment, but people who were not consciously on a spiritual path have received a profound, transforming spiritual experience of Oneness. The crown chakra becomes illuminated with the awareness of what is best for the whole rather than just for the self. This consciousness benefits not only the self but all, as the Truth that we are all *One* has been revealed. This is the consciousness that is beyond there being a subject and an object; there is just the One.

THE THIRD EYE CHAKRA

The third eye chakra, located behind the center of the forehead, is where the soul experiences its object, the object of all its yearnings and searching: God. In the Hindu tradition, this chakra is depicted as a lotus blossom with two petals: the individual and God. When this chakra is illuminated, the vision of the internal and external world is beyond duality or opposites. This is the realm of spiritual vision and awareness, where we go beyond our individual desires and are aligned with what is for the good of all. This is the realm of the mystics and sages. The illumination of this energy center dramatically changes the trajectory of our lives.

The changes we make in our lives as a result of this experience with Divine grace are based on the belief that we are indeed all One, no longer centered in what is best for the individual.

When the third eye chakra is not fully illuminated, it is connected to the intellect and the mind. This energy pattern is associated with the rationalization of the world around us by

our minds and our futile attempts to use our reason to know why things are as they are, which is attached to the belief that we are separate from the One, which is also the illusion of duality. This illusion therefore results in our narrow perspective of reality: that there is you and me. Our separatist thought pattern puts us in a position to dance with the energy of duality. And what a dance we do! The belief of separation is so potent it can control our thoughts and the basic understanding of our individual world. Divine grace sheds light on our gross misinterpretation of the world around us and has the profound ability to shift our awareness into a higher consciousness.

THE THROAT CHAKRA

The throat chakra, located in the center of the throat, is associated with our personal wills, the choices we make in life in all our thoughts, words, and deeds. These choices affect everyone involved in the decisions we make and all the other beings with whom we interact. Our beliefs have a pervasive effect on our wills, and they affect which level of consciousness we choose to apply to all the decisions we make in our lives. This chakra is also associated with our ability to communicate, not only with others but with ourselves, with what we tell ourselves. Divine grace can shift the energy of our personal will to the Divine: Your will versus my will.

When not illuminated, the throat chakra energy pattern can shrink our lives to the world according to us. Our choices will then be based on how to get what we want at any cost, without regard to how our choices affect those around us. We communicate from a place of self-centered interests and are willing to speak untruths if that will get us where we think we need to be.

THE HEART CHAKRA

The heart chakra, located in the heart region, between the breasts, is ground zero for all our emotions. It is the energy center where compassion and unconditional love of self and others are generated. The emotion of fear rather than compassion will be the ruler of our thoughts, words, and deeds when we are not aligned with the Truth of who we are. When we humbly ask for Divine grace to illuminate our hearts from a place of purity of this desire, we are blessed with the capacity to love others and ourselves unconditionally and radiate compassion to all. The heart chakra is the center where we give birth to compassion and unconditional love. With the illumination of Divine grace, we have the ability to act from a place of forgiveness, and reverence for all life.

The shadow energy of the heart chakra is anger, an inability to forgive, and revenge. Again, the emotion of fear becomes the ruler of our thoughts, words, deeds, and emotions when we are not aligned with the Truth of who we are, and we will consequently live our lives from a lonely and resentful space.

THE SOLAR PLEXUS CHAKRA

The solar plexus chakra, located an inch or two above the naval, is the center of our sense of self, also known as self-esteem. Here we choose the criteria on which we will base our self-esteem, our inner wisdom of the Truth of who we are, or the external world with its ever-changing standard of what makes us “good enough” in the eyes of this world. Divine grace sheds light on our inner wisdom, which results in a sense of wholeness and strength.

The solar plexus chakra is also the center of our intuition, the “gut” feeling — with the emphasis on *feeling*— we have when we sense that something is either aligned or not aligned with the

Truth of who we are. It is also connected to the awareness that we feel when we have an “Aha!” moment, an episode of insight that resonates with our being. When this chakra is not illuminated, our thoughts, words, and actions will compromise our personal integrity and therefore our soul.

THE SACRAL CHAKRA

The sacral chakra, located a few inches below the naval in the sacrum, is connected to our one-on-one relationships and to the quality of power we bring to those relationships: our light energy or our shadow energy. The sacral energy center holds our sense of individual, or personal power and is highly influenced by our natural “fight or flight” reaction. Divine grace is essential to guide us through the maze of perceived power plays and the fear of being manipulated or humiliated by others. Divine grace is the gift that allows us to view our relationships with the awareness that we are not alone — rather than being driven by fear, resulting in a sense of “me” against “you” — and to interact with others with respect and reverence, as expressions of creation.

Our ability to be creative is also connected to the sacral chakra. When we go within to the space of peace and stillness, we are more likely to align with the creativity of the universe and be inspired by Spirit. This space is also the center of sensuality, a place where our sexual encounters can be infused with unconditional love, allowing us to open ourselves to the vulnerability of intimacy. Many people experience a sense of human oneness, going beyond the duality of “me” and “you,” during the height of sexual excitement.

This is the place where we can experience Spirit through our auditory and visual senses as well as our senses of smell,

touch, and taste. Creation is full of opportunities to experience the Divine with our senses being the vehicle to enjoy its many pleasures.

THE BASE CHAKRA

The base chakra, sometimes referred to as the root chakra, is located at the base of the spine and is connected to our tribal beliefs. These beliefs can include our family traditions, our tribal spiritual beliefs, our ethnic and cultural traditions, the beliefs of the country we live in, our social-class beliefs, and the like. Our awareness of our attachment to these beliefs and a willingness to explore them deeply will determine whether we choose to expand our vision of the world or remain rigid in our beliefs and ultimately our actions. Divine grace brings the gift of going beyond our limited view of our world to the true belief that we are indeed all One. Imagine how different our lives could be while living from that higher perspective, interacting with others from the belief that we are all One rather than *me* against all the others of the world.



Before exploring deeply the effect Divine grace and guidance can have on our energy centers and consequently on our journey, I would like to leave you with a story that reminds me of my own soul's journey and the spirit in which I offer these writings. I am told its origins are in the Muslim Sufi tradition.

A group of people was wandering in the desert for a very long time. They were exhausted and on the brink of dying from thirst. In the distance they saw what appeared to be a monk walking toward them. Their hearts were lifted because they felt they were saved. They believed that surely this holy monk would be able to tell them the way out of the desert. When they

were close enough to speak with the monk, one of them said, “Praise God! We have found you. Tell us how we can get out of this desert.” The monk lowered his head, knowing they would be disappointed when he replied, “Alas, I wish that I could, but I cannot. However, I can tell you the many ways that I tried to leave the desert but to no avail.”

I, and may I be presumptuous in saying that many of you as well, have been looking for a way out of the illusory “desert journey.” Moreover, we have felt sure that once found, we would be able to share the many ways we believed would lead us to our goal of inner peace and joy. Alas, we have not found the way. However, the wisdom those experiences hold can change our suffering to joy and our lead to gold, when we reclaim the power we have been Divinely given by becoming spiritual alchemists for our souls, with the power of Divine grace to help us along the way.

For some of you this book will generate a sense of reassurance of the wisdom you are already aware of. For others it may shift your perspectives and perceptions in a way that allows you to have access to the wisdom that is available to you. For still others, this book may create a space inside of you for the first time that allows Spirit to enter into places you have long ago closed to light.

Begin by taking a moment to center yourself, go within to a place of stillness, and then set your intention for this voyage before you embark on this journey into your soul. Reverently ask that your awareness may be infused with Divine grace and guidance so that you may see this journey through the vision of your open heart and not of your wayward mind. Grab your journal to capture the wisdom you will undoubtedly receive. Let us begin the journey of our soul’s illumination!