

# THE ROAD™

## Personal Development Course

- Discipline and Problem Solving
- Love and Relationships
- Personal and Spiritual Growth

**The Road Counselling and Personal Development**  
**<http://www.alecgore.com>**

## Why THE ROAD™ for you?

We are all travelling on a journey through life that is also a journey towards personal growth and wholeness. Like any road, it has its ups and downs, twists and turns, potholes and obstructions. Sometimes the journey is rough, sometimes smooth. We can get stuck or get lost. We can travel alone or in community and either way maybe right for us.

It is when things are not going so well that we lose sight of where we are, where we are going, wonder why we are going there at all, or ask with whom should we be travelling.

It is at these tough times when we get depressed, angry, sad, guilty, afraid or stressed. It is then that our relationships suffer. It is then that we cease to grow personally. I'm sure you have experienced some of these.

Who doesn't sometimes feel depressed, anxious, stressed, guilty or afraid? Who doesn't see life as a series of problems and difficulties? Who doesn't struggle in their relationships?

And even as you do, travelling along life's road, **you want to change**. You do?

Now, you can change with **THE ROAD™** so you are:

- **flexibly coping with life's problems and pain;**
- **experiencing more loving relationships;** and
- **growing personally and spiritually.**

You can, can't you?



## The Road Less Travelled

The wisdom contained here is a gift, a resource we may all use in our life's journeys. I'm offering it for your personal use only, as a resource for your life's journey, because I believe everybody can grow to be the truly magnificent person you are.

The course is divided into 16 parts and covers three broad areas:

- Discipline and problem solving;
- Love and relationships; and
- Personal and spiritual growth

Each part consists of course notes and an **Exploration**, usually a few questions so you can respond and show your understanding, feelings and insights. If you wish, I will then discuss these with you. You can cover the material in your own time.

When do we read a book that changes our lives even we are not looking for it? This happened to me with M. Scott Peck's **The Road Less Travelled** (Arrow, 1990). I was given a copy to read during a mountain vacation in the Philippines. Maybe I was in a welcoming frame of mind. Undoubtedly, many of the themes in the book rang true with what I already believed and had experienced in life. But, it was more than that.

Peck's book was described in a **Washington Post** review as, "... not just a book but a spontaneous act of generosity written by an author who leans towards the reader for the purpose of sharing something larger than himself". He sets out a psychology of spiritual growth based on his experience as a psychotherapist.

The book is divided into parts on discipline, love and grace. Discipline provides us with tools to accept responsibility for our lives. Love is the will to extend one's self for our own or another's spiritual growth. Grace is the means by which we realise spiritual growth.

This series of studies is my own condensation of Peck's psychology. It remains substantially his work. I have merely edited some of his language

and re-arranged the order of ideas in some of his narrative sections with the following aims:

- to give coherence and clarity to the significant themes;
- to provide a more natural progression of ideas; and
- to make the language (originally written before 1978) more inclusive, preferring "we" to "some individuals" and "human beings" etc. emphasising his idea that the road to spiritual growth is one we can all travel and that I'm on the journey too.

Material under the headings **Exploration** is for personal or group use and is loosely based on **Exploring The Road Less Travelled** (Arrow, 1990) by Alice and Walden Howard, with my own additions.

Why have I presumed to condense such a remarkably profound book? It is because I found that many people who would benefit greatly from the insights it contains do not take the time or opportunity to study and develop them. Yet they are too valuable to miss out on. Most of us can benefit from psychotherapy, but it is incomplete unless it accounts for spiritual as well as psychological development.

### **Help with Your Journey**

If you would like to discuss your own journey along this road, and such discussion will allow you to know that your growth can be the more magnificent, then I would encourage you to discuss your course work with me. Its advantage for you is that it helps put your life's problems in context and enables you to resolve specific issues as they are dealt with in the course. Remember that I'm flexible: If you feel one area needs more time or detail, then that is what I will give you.

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## Problems and Pain

- **Life is difficult**
- **Discipline**
- **Exploration**

### **Life is difficult**

Once we know that life is difficult, once we understand and accept this, then it is no longer difficult. This is because, once accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.

You may not fully see the truth of this. Are you always moaning, noisily or subtly about the enormity of your problems?

Life is a series of problems. Do we want to moan about them or solve them?

What makes life difficult is that the process of confronting and solving problems is a painful one. Yet, it is in this whole process of meeting and solving problems that life has meaning.

Problems bring out our courage and our wisdom; indeed, they create our courage and our wisdom. It is only because of our problems that we grow personally. So wise people learn not to dread problems, but to welcome their pain.

Most of us are not so wise. We fear the pain involved and attempt to avoid problems. We put them off, ignore them, forget them and pretend they do not exist. We even take drugs to deaden the pain, forgetting that problems cause pain. We skirt round problems, rather than meet them head on. We attempt to get out of them, rather than suffer through them.

This tendency to avoid problems and the emotional suffering that comes with them is the basis of all our mental illness. Since most of us have this tendency, none of us enjoys complete mental health.

Some people go to extraordinary lengths, far from all that is good and sensible, building elaborate fantasies in which to live to the exclusion of reality. Their neuroses become bigger and more painful than the original

problem. Some will build layer upon layer of further neuroses in an attempt to avoid the pain.... In chronic mental illness, there is no personal growth.

**Fortunately, some people have the courage to face their neuroses and, usually with the help of psychotherapy, learn how to experience the legitimate suffering and personal growth that problems provide.**

## **Discipline**

Discipline is the basic set of tools we require to solve life's problems. Without discipline, we can solve nothing. With only some discipline, we can solve only some problems. With total discipline, we can solve all problems.

These tools are techniques of suffering, a means to experience the pain of problems in such a way as to work through them and solve them successfully, learning and growing in the process.

There are four:

- 1. Delaying of gratification**
- 2. Acceptance of responsibility**
- 3. Dedication to truth**
- 4. Balancing**

They are not complex tools. You do not need exhaustive training to apply them. You do need the will to use them, for they are tools with which pain is confronted, rather than avoided. If you don't want to face legitimate suffering and personal growth, you will avoid the use of these tools.

## Exploration

1. If the line from one side of the page to the other, marked on one side with "Very Difficult" and the other side with "Very Easy", represents how you see your life in terms of difficulty or ease, at which point between these two extremes would you place yourself?

Very Difficult<----->Very Easy

2. What are the reasons for your position?

3. What negative emotions or feelings do you have about these reasons?

4. In what ways do you customarily avoid problems?

5. What negative emotions do you associate with this avoidance behaviour?

6. What would you most like to change in your life?

7. What are you doing or not doing that is stopping you making this change?

8. Can you describe an experience of growing through a problem that was difficult at the time, but which turned out to be an opportunity to learn and to grow personally?

9. How willing are you to confront your problems in order to change and grow?

## Delaying Gratification

- **Quality of parenting**
- **Problem solving and time**
- **Exploration**

Delaying gratification is a process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in a way that will enhance the pleasure, by meeting and experiencing the pain first and getting it over with.

Most people develop a capacity to delay gratification. However, some fail. Why is this? Most signs point to the quality of parenting.

### **Quality of parenting**

When parents do things in a certain way, it seems to the young child the way they should be done. If a child sees his parents always behaving with self-discipline, restraint, dignity and with a capacity to order their own lives, then the child will deeply feel that this is the way to live. If a child sees his parents are without self-discipline or restraint, then he will believe this is the way to live.

More important than role modelling is love. For even in chaotic and disordered homes, genuine love is present, and from these homes can come self-disciplined children. Often parents who are professional people, who lead lives of strict orderliness and decorum, but lack love, send children into the world who are undisciplined, destructive and disorganised.

Ultimately, love is everything. When we love something, it is of value to us. When something is of value to us, we spend time with it, time in enjoying and taking care.

Good discipline requires time. Those parents who spend time with their children, even when it is not demanded, will see in them subtle needs for discipline, to which they can respond with guidance, offered with thoughtfulness and care.

So it is that the quality of discipline afforded by loving parents is superior to the discipline of unloving parents. But, this is just the beginning. In taking the

time to observe and to think about their children's needs, loving parents will frequently agonise over the decisions to be made. They will, in a very real sense, suffer along with the children. The children are not blind to this. They will know when their parents are willing to suffer with them and, although they may not respond with immediate gratitude, they too will learn to suffer. This is the beginning of their self-discipline.

The time and the quality of the time parents devote to their children will show how much they are valued by their parents. When children know that they are valued and feel this deeply, then they themselves will feel valuable.

The feeling of being valuable is essential to mental health. It is the cornerstone of self-discipline, a direct product of parental love. Such a conviction must be gained in childhood. It is extremely difficult to acquire as an adult.

Consequentially, when children have learned, through their parents' love, to feel valuable, almost nothing in adult life can destroy their spirit. They will have a deep sense of security.

When we think of ourselves as valuable, we will take care of ourselves in all ways that are necessary. We will think of our time as valuable and want to use it well.

With an internal sense of the consistent safety of the world, a child is free to delay gratification of whatever kind, secure in the knowledge that the opportunity for gratification, like home and parents, is always there, available when needed.

Children, abandoned in actuality or psychologically, enter adulthood lacking any deep sense that the world is a safe and protective place. To the contrary, they see it as dangerous and frightening. They are not about to forsake any gratification or security in the present for the promise of greater gratification or security in the future, since for them the future seems very dubious.

So, for children to develop the capacity to delay gratification, it is necessary for them to have:

- self disciplined role models;
- a sense of self-worth; and,
- a degree of trust in the safety of their existence.

These gifts are ideally acquired through the self-discipline and consistent, genuine care of their parents. When these gifts have not been received from parents, it is possible to acquire them from elsewhere, but the process will be a lifelong uphill struggle and often unsuccessful.

## **Problem solving and time**

Many people simply do not take the time necessary to solve life's intellectual, social or psychological problems. However, there is a defect in the approach to problem solving more basic and destructive than impatient, inadequate attempts to find instant solutions. It is the universal hope that problems will go away of their own accord.

Problems do not go away. They must be worked through or else remain, forever, a barrier to our growth and development.

To willingly confront a problem early, before we are forced to by circumstances, means to put aside something pleasant or less painful for something more painful. It is choosing to suffer now in the hope of future gratification, rather than choosing to continue present gratification in the hope that future suffering will not be necessary.

Parents see problems in their children, or in their relationship with them, long before they take action. While children may "grow out of it", it never hurts to help them or look closely at problem earlier before it becomes larger, more painful and more difficult to solve.

## Exploration

1. To what degree were your needs met as a child? Complete the table below, where 1 means "unmet" and 5 means "fully met".

	1	2	3	4	5
Your own space and possessions					
Your right to privacy					
A dependable schedule					
Someone who listened to you					
Affirmation of your worth					
Freedom to make choices					
Affection shown to you					
Promises made to you and kept					

2. Who was there for you when you came home?

3. How secure did you feel in your world?

4. Concerning delaying gratification:

(a) What messages did you receive?

(b) What did your parents model?

(c) What did they teach you verbally?

5. What gratification were you denied, and why?

6. What influences in the world today encourage or discourage delaying gratification? List as many as you can think of.

7. Which influences have the most impact in your life? Underline them in your list.

8. How do they impact on your life?

9. What issue of satisfying or delaying gratification are you most struggling with at present?

10. What do you want most in your life and what are you prepared to put aside now in order to attain it?

## Acceptance of Responsibility

- **Escape from freedom**
- **Neuroses and Character Disorders**
- **Exploration**

### Escape from freedom

Most of us seek to avoid, in ways that can be quite subtle, the pain of assuming responsibility for our own problems. The difficulty we have in accepting responsibility for our behaviour lies in the desire to avoid the pain of the consequences of that behaviour.

The extent to which we will go psychologically to avoid assuming responsibility for personal problems, while always sad, is sometimes ludicrous.

We must accept responsibility for a problem before we can solve it. We cannot solve a problem by saying, "It's not my problem". We cannot solve a problem by hoping that someone else will solve it for us.

Do you seek to avoid the pain of your problems by saying to yourself, "This problem was caused me by other people, or by social circumstances beyond my control, therefore it is up to other people or society to solve this problem for me? It is not really my personal problem". By attempting to give that responsibility to some other individual or organisation or entity, we give away our power to them.

As children, by virtue of our dependency, our parents have power over us. They are responsible for our well being and we are largely at their mercy. When parents are oppressive, children are powerless to do much about it; their choices are limited. But as adults, our choices are almost unlimited. That does not mean they are not painful, but it is still within our power to make these choices.

If we feel unable to cope or unable to change things, we are escaping, partially or totally, from the pain of freedom, through failing to accept responsibility for the problems in our lives. The impotence comes from having surrendered some of our power.

**We must learn that the whole of our adult lives is a series of personal choices and decisions. If we accept this totally, then we become free people. To the extent that we do not accept it, we will forever feel powerless.**

## **Neuroses and Character Disorders**

Most people who seek psychiatric help are suffering from either a neurosis or a character disorder. Put simply, these conditions are disorders of responsibility. They are opposite styles of relating to the world and its problems. The neurotic assumes too much responsibility; the people with a character disorder not enough. When neurotics are in conflict with the world, they automatically assume they are at fault. When those with character disorders are in conflict with the world, they automatically assume the world is at fault.

Neurotics, rather than character-disordered people, respond better to psychotherapy because they assume responsibility for their difficulties and see themselves as having problems. Those with character disorders have greater difficulty because they don't see themselves as the source of their problems; they see the world rather than themselves as being in need of change and therefore fail to recognise the necessity for self-examination.

**In reality, many of us have a combination of both neuroses and character disorders, i.e. there are some areas of our lives where we are guilt-ridden through having assumed responsibility that is not really ours, while in other areas of our lives we fail to take realistic responsibility for ourselves. For this reason, most of us can benefit from psychotherapy if we are seriously willing to participate in the process.**

The problem of distinguishing what we are and what we are not responsible for in this life is one of the greatest problems of our existence. It is never completely solved. We must continually assess and reassess where our responsibilities lie as events change. The process is not painless if performed adequately and conscientiously. We need to be willing to suffer continual self-examination. Such capacity or willingness is not inherent in any of us.

Only through vast experience and lengthy and successful maturation do we see the world and our place in it, thus realistically assessing our responsibilities.

Parents can help their children mature into this process by confronting them with their tendency to avoid or escape responsibility for their actions, or to reassure them in certain situations that they are not at fault. This requires parents to be sensitive to their children's needs and willing to take time to

make the often uncomfortable effort to meet those needs; to show love and willingly assume appropriate responsibility for the enhancement of their children's growth.

Conversely, more than just insensitivity or neglect, many parents hinder this maturation process. Neurotics, because of their willingness to assume responsibility, may be quite excellent parents if their neuroses are relatively mild and they are not so overwhelmed by unnecessary responsibilities that they have little energy left for the necessary responsibilities of parenthood. Character-disordered parents, however, can be disastrous parents. They fail to assume responsibility for their children. They brush them off when they need attention. When their children are delinquent or having difficulty at school, they will blame the school system or other children. This attitude, of course, ignores the problem. Because they avoid responsibility, character-disordered parents serve as role models of irresponsibility for their children. Finally, character-disordered parents will often lay responsibility for their own lives - for the quality of their marriage, their mental health, their lack of success - on their children. Since they don't see how inappropriate this is, the children will often accept this criticism, and in accepting it, they will become neurotic. So character-disordered parents invariably produce character-disordered or neurotic children.

## Exploration

1. Avoiding responsibility involves blaming others. What kind of state are you in for you to blame, e.g. feelings, emotions, body posture, gestures, words said, tone of voice?

2. Assuming too much responsibility involves placating others. What are you feeling when you decide you have to placate others?

3. What do you avoid responsibility for?

4. What do you assume too much responsibility for?

5. What specific responsibilities were you given at different stages in your growing up?

6. Who modelled responsibility for you? How?

7. What could have been more helpful?

8. What recent problems have you faced and taken responsibility for?

9. Did you find the process rewarding?

## Dedication to the Truth

- **Map of reality**
- **Openness to challenge**
- **Withholding truth**
- **Exploration**

### **Map of reality**

To deal with the pain of problem solving, we must be dedicated to the truth. On the face of it, this should be obvious. Truth is reality; that which is false is unreal. The more clearly we see the reality of the world, the better equipped we are to deal with the world. The more our minds are befuddled with falsehood, misperceptions and illusions, the less we will be able to determine our correct course and make wise decisions.

**Our view of reality is like a map with which to negotiate the terrain of life. If the map is true and accurate, we will generally know where we are, and if we have decided where we want to go, we will generally know how to get there. If the map is false and inaccurate, we will generally be lost.**

Obvious or not, we often choose to ignore this because the route to reality is not easy. We are not born with maps; we have to make them, and the making requires effort. Many people do not want to make this effort. Some people stop making them by the end of adolescence. Their maps are small and sketchy, their views of the world narrow and misleading. By the end of middle age, most people have given up the effort. They feel that their maps are complete, correct and even sacrosanct. They are no longer interested in new information. It is as if they are tired.

**Only a relative and fortunate few continue until the moment of death exploring the mystery of reality, ever enlarging, refining and redefining their understanding of the world and what is true.**

**If our maps are to be accurate, we have to continually revise them. The world itself is constantly changing. More dramatically, the point from which we view the world is constantly and quite rapidly changing.**

When we are children we are dependent and powerless. As adults we may be powerful. Yet in illness or infirm old age we may become powerless and dependent again. When we have children to care for, the world looks a different place from when we have none; when we are raising infants, the world looks a different place from when we are raising adolescents. When we are poor, the world looks a different place from when we are affluent.

We are daily bombarded with new information as to the nature of reality. If we are to incorporate this information, we must continually revise our maps. Sometimes, when enough new information has accumulated, we must make very major revisions. The process of making revisions, particularly major revisions is painful, sometimes very painful. And in this lies the major source of our troubles.

What happens when we have worked hard to develop a working view of the world, a seemingly useful map and are then confronted with new information suggesting that the view is wrong and the map needs to be redrawn? The effort required seems frightening, almost overwhelming. What we often do, usually unconsciously, is to ignore the new information. Sometimes the ignoring is more than passive. We may denounce the new information as false, dangerous, heretical or evil! We may fight against it, attempting to make the world conform to our view of reality. Rather than change our map, we may try to destroy the new reality. Sadly, as much energy can ultimately be spent in defending an outmoded view of the world than would have been required to correct it in the first place.

The process of actively clinging to an outmoded view of reality is the basis of much mental illness. It represents a way of perceiving and responding to the world that is developed as a child, is entirely appropriate to the child's environment, but which is inappropriately transferred into the adult environment.

**Psychotherapy is, among other things, a process of map revising. Clients come to therapy because their maps are clearly not working. But how they may cling to them and fight the process every step of the way!**

### **Openness to challenge**

A life of total dedication to the truth means a life of constant and never ending stringent self-examination. We know the world only through our relationship with it. Therefore, to know the world, we must not only examine it, but also simultaneously examine ourselves.

A person who examines the world, but never himself will be competent, but never wise. The life of wisdom must be a life of contemplation combined with

action. It is our capacity to think and examine ourselves that most makes us human. We are beginning to realise that the sources of danger to the world lie more within us than outside and, that the process of constant self-examination and contemplation is essential for ultimate survival.

Examination of the world without is never as personally painful as examination of the world within. It is certainly because of the pain involved in self-examination that most people steer away from it. Yet when you are dedicated to the truth, this pain seems relatively unimportant - and less and less important, therefore less and less painful, the further one proceeds along the path of self-examination.

A life of total dedication to the truth means a life of willingness to be personally challenged. The only way that we can be certain that our map of reality is valid is to expose it to criticism and challenge from other mapmakers.

The tendency to avoid challenge is so omnipresent in us that it can be considered a characteristic of our nature. That it is natural does not make it essential, beneficial or unchangeable behaviour. We teach ourselves to do the unnatural until the unnatural itself becomes second nature. Indeed, all self-discipline may be thought of as doing the unnatural, but then another characteristic of humans is our capacity to do the unnatural, to transcend and hence transform our own nature.

A life of total dedication to the truth means a life of total honesty. It means continuous self-monitoring to ensure that our communication - the words we say and the way we say them - invariably reflect as accurately as humanly possible the truth or reality as we know it.

Such honesty does not come painlessly. The reason people lie is to avoid the pain of challenge and its consequences. We lie not only to others but also to ourselves. Challenges to our maps can come from our own unconscious. Our own realistic perceptions may be as legitimate and painful as any challenge from anybody else. Where the challenge is legitimate (and it usually is), lying is an attempt to get round legitimate suffering and hence produces mental illness. One of the roots of mental illness is invariably an interlocking system of lies we have been told and lies we have told ourselves. Two of the most common lies that people tell themselves are, "We really love our children" and "Our parents really loved us".

**As human beings we should grow and progress as rapidly as possible. We should make use of any legitimate shortcut to personal growth. Genuine psychotherapy is a legitimate shortcut to personal growth that is often ignored. It can be referred to as the "truth game" or the "honesty game"**

**because it aims to make clients confront their lies. The roots of mental illness can be uncovered and dealt with only in an atmosphere of total honesty.**

### **Withholding truth**

Lies can be black or white. A black lie is a statement we make knowing it to be false. A white lie is not exactly false, but omits a significant part of the truth. The fact that it is white does not make it any less false or any more excusable. White lies may be as destructive as black ones.

Because it seems less reprehensible, the withholding of essential information is the most common form of lying. Because it is more difficult to detect and confront, it is even more pernicious than outright lies.

White lies are considered socially acceptable in relationships because, "We don't want to hurt peoples' feelings". Yet, we may bemoan our superficial relationships. Nonetheless, a real conflict may arise when desire for total honesty is opposed by the needs of some people for certain kinds of protection.

The selective withholding of our opinions is also necessary in business or politics, if we are to be welcomed into the councils of power. If people were always to speak their minds on all issues, they would be considered insubordinate by the average supervisor and, a threat to an organisation by management. On the other hand, if we regard our effectiveness in an organisation as the only goal of organisational behaviour, permitting only the expression of those opinions that would not make waves, then we have allowed the end to justify the means. We have lost personal integrity and identity if we become total organisation people.

**If we are dedicated to the truth, we should never speak falsehood. We should remember that by withholding truth, we are potentially lying and in each instance when the truth is withheld, a significant moral decision is required. The decision to withhold truth should never be based on our personal needs, such as the need for power or the need to be liked or the need to protect our maps from challenge. It should always be based entirely on the needs of the person or people from whom the truth is being withheld. The assessment of another's need in this context is an act of responsibility, which is so complex that it can only be executed wisely when one acts with genuine love for another. The primary factor in assessing another's needs is their ability to utilise the truth for their personal growth; an ability in others which we tend to underestimate.**

Honesty is a never ending burden of self discipline, which is why many people opt for a life of very limited honesty and relative closedness, hiding

themselves and their maps from the world. It is easier that way. Yet the rewards of the difficult life of honesty and dedication to the truth are more than commensurate with the demands. By virtue of the continual challenge to their maps, open people are continually growing. Through their openness they can establish and maintain intimate relationships far more effectively than more closed people. Because they never speak falsely they can be sure in the knowledge that they have done nothing to contribute to the confusion of the world, but have served as sources of illumination and clarification. Finally, they are totally free to be. They are not burdened by the need to hide. They do not have to construct new lies to hide old ones. They need waste no effort covering their tracks or maintaining disguises. Ultimately, they find that the energy required for self-discipline is less than the energy required for secretiveness. The more honest we are, the easier it is to continue to be honest, just as the more lies we tell, the more necessary it is to lie again. By their openness, people dedicated to the truth live in the open. Through this exercise of courage, they become free from fear.

## Exploration

1. Visualise your world, as it was when you were aged eight. Was it closed or open, restrictive or free, scary or safe, uncertain or predictable?

2. What beliefs did you hold as a child about:

(a) Yourself?

(b) Your parents?

(c) Your brothers/sisters?

(d) Your place in the family, in school and in the neighbourhood?

3. Were these beliefs similar to your parents', brothers'/sisters' or peers'?

4. When did your world change, e.g. when you left home, went to college, got a job, entered a relationship, became ill? What was happening to your world at that time? How did your map of reality change?

5. What beliefs did you hold as a child but have now discarded?

6. How do you see your map of the world today? Where are you uncomfortable with it? Where do you see a need to explore?

7. Do you feel at risk by disclosing your map to yourself, to others?

## Balancing

- **Depression can be healthy**
- **Putting one's self aside**
- **Mastering life**
- **Exploration**

The exercise of discipline is demanding and complex. It requires both flexibility and judgement. Balancing is the discipline that gives us flexibility. We are all inadequate in our flexible response systems. However, mature mental health requires an extraordinary capacity to flexibly strike and restrike a delicate balance between conflicting needs, goals, duties, responsibilities, directions, etc.

The essence of discipline is the ability to give something up. Giving something up is painful, but the only alternative is not to travel along the road of life. Most people choose this alternative. They don't continue with their life's journey - stopping short in order to avoid the pain of giving up some parts of themselves.

To travel far on the journey of life, we must be able to give up personality traits, well-established patterns of behaviour, ideologies and even whole life styles.

### **Depression can be healthy**

**A period of psychotherapy is a period of intensive personal growth during which a person may undergo more changes than some people experience in a lifetime. For this growth spurt to occur, a proportionate amount of the "old-self" must be given up.**

There is a feeling of depression associated with giving up something loved, or something that is familiar and part of us. Human beings must grow mentally, and since the giving up or loss of the old self is an integral part of the process of mental and spiritual growth, depression is a normal and basically healthy phenomenon. It only becomes abnormal or unhealthy when something interferes with the giving up process, with the result that the depression is prolonged and cannot be resolved by the completion of the process.

**A main reason that people seek psychotherapy is depression. In other words, they are already involved in a giving-up, or growth, and it is the symptoms of this process that propels them to seek help. The therapist or counsellor's job, therefore, is to help them complete a process that they have already begun.**

This is not to say that a person coming to psychotherapy is often aware of what is happening to them. To the contrary, they frequently desire only relief from the symptoms of their depression "so that things can be as they used to be". They do not know that things cannot "be the way they used to be". But the unconscious knows.

**It is precisely because the unconscious in its wisdom knows that "the way things used to be" is no longer tenable or constructive that the process of growing and giving up is begun on an unconscious level and depression is experienced. The fact of the unconscious being one step ahead of the conscious may seem strange, but it is a fact that applies generally to mental functioning.**

### **Putting one's self aside**

In giving up self we can find the most ecstatic, lasting, solid and durable joy of human life. Putting one's self aside to make room for the incorporation of new material into the self is a form of balancing - balancing the need for stability and assertion of the self with the need for new knowledge and greater understanding. It is a form of temporary giving up that is an essential requirement for significant learning and significant personal growth during adulthood.

This discipline illustrates the most consequential fact of giving up and of discipline in general: namely, that for all that is given up even more is gained. Self-discipline is a self-enlarging process. There is a pain in giving up which is the pain of death. For us to develop a new and better idea, concept, theory or understanding means that the old idea, concept, theory or understanding must die.

Life is therefore a series of simultaneous deaths and births, of pain and joy. The further we travel on the journey of life, the more births and deaths we will experience. We will never evolve to a level of personal growth where it is possible to become free from emotional pain. However, we can reach a level of consciousness where the pain is diminished, because once suffering is accepted, it ceases to be, in a sense, suffering.

## **Mastering life**

The unceasing practise of discipline leads to mastery in life. One who has grown personally is masterful, as the adult is masterful in relation to the child. Things that present problems and pain to the child are of no consequence to the adult.

To evolve to a higher level of personal growth also brings responsibilities. There is a vacuum of competence in the world crying out to be filled. Extraordinarily competent and loving people cannot withhold their competence, any more than adults would deny food to hungry children. Through their discipline and love, they will answer the call to serve the world.

**People who have mastered life will love extraordinarily and from their ability to love will come extraordinary joy.**

They are, therefore, people of considerable power, although the world may see them as quite ordinary people, since more often than not they will exercise their power quietly and unassumingly. This exercise of power will bring suffering because exercising power involves making decisions that will affect the lives of others. To make such decisions with total awareness is often more painful than making them with incomplete awareness. The best decision-makers are those who are willing to suffer over the decisions they have to make, yet still retain the ability to be decisive.

## Exploration

1. Striking a balance in the three areas of discipline brings tensions, e.g.:

### **Delaying Gratification**

Delay v. Spontaneity

### **Accepting Responsibility**

Assuming too much v. Not accepting

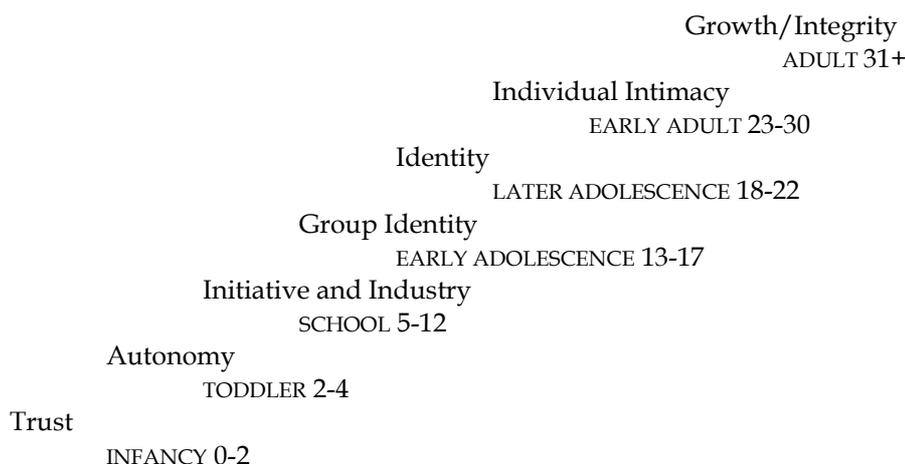
### **Dedication to the Truth**

Total honesty v. Withholding

List some of the tensions that you feel.

2. Failure to develop successfully from one stage leaves "unfinished business" that can complicate dealing with the next stage. Moving to the next stage means letting go of the security of the present stage. There is risk in growth.

### **Stages of personal growth**



(a) What stage are you at?

(b) What have you attained?

(c) What have you had to give up to grow up?

(d) How did you feel at the time? Did you allow yourself time to mourn your losses?

(e) What are the tasks facing you before you move on to the next stage? What help do you need? What are you willing to do?

3. Take the time to temporarily put your self aside, give up the familiar and leave yourself open to the strange and the new. What did you learn?

4. Now:

(a) In what area of your life do you need to gain a new perspective?

(b) How can you?

(c) What do you allow to stand in your way?

5. It has been said that once we leave home, we can never go home again, and yet, we can always go home. We can lose home and we can choose home. Where and with whom/what do you feel "at home"?

## What is Love?

- **A definition**
- **Falling in love**
- **The myth of romantic love**
- **Towards real love**
- **Exploration**

Discipline has been defined as a system of techniques for dealing constructively with the pain of problem solving. Instead of avoiding that pain, we can use the system to solve any of life's problems. Four basic techniques have been distinguished and elaborated:

- **delaying gratification**
- **acceptance of responsibility**
- **dedication to the truth, and**
- **balancing**

Discipline is a system of techniques, because they are very much interrelated. In a single act, we may use one, two, three or even all of them at the same time and in such a way that they may be indistinguishable from each other.

**The strength, energy, motivation and willingness to use the techniques of discipline are provided by love.**

In examining love, we are toying with a mystery, attempting to examine the unexaminable or know the unknowable. Love is too large, too deep even to be truly understood or measured or limited within the framework of words. However, consider the following:

**"Love is the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's personal and spiritual growth."**

Love here is defined as behaviour in terms of the goal or purpose it is to serve, i.e. personal and spiritual growth. It is also a circular process, for when we have successfully extended our limits, we have grown larger as individuals. The act of extending one's limits implies effort. We cannot extend our limits without exceeding them. Love requires exertion and is not effortless.

Thus the act of loving is an act of self-evolution, even when the purpose of the act is someone else's growth. It is through reaching towards evolution that we evolve. Love of self is included with love for another. Since we are human, to love others means to love ourselves as well as others. I am dedicated to my own growth as well as to yours. Indeed, we are incapable of loving others unless we love ourselves, just as we are incapable of teaching our children self-discipline unless we are self-disciplined. We cannot be a source of strength unless we nurture our own strength.

That we have the will to love distinguishes love as desire from love as action. Desire alone will not produce action. Will is desire of sufficient intensity that it is translated into action. Everyone would seem to desire to some extent to love, yet many do not in fact love; so the desire to love is not in itself love. Love is an act of will, an intention as well as an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love. We choose to grow. We choose to help others grow.

### **Falling in love**

Of all the misconceptions about love, the most powerful and pervasive is the belief that "falling in love" is love, or at least, one of the manifestations of love. It is a potent misconception because falling in love is subjectively experienced in a very powerful fashion as an experience of love.

However, two problems are immediately apparent:

First, falling in love is specifically a sex-linked erotic experience. We fall in love only when we are consciously or unconsciously sexually motivated.

**It is obvious and generally understood that while sex and love can happen together, they are often disassociated. This is because they are separate phenomena. In itself, sexual intercourse is not an act of love.**

Nonetheless, the experience of sexual intercourse and particularly of orgasm is an experience associated with a greater or lesser collapse of ego boundaries and attendant ecstasy. This is not to say that the ecstasy of the orgasmic experience cannot be heightened by sharing it with the one who is beloved; it can.

Secondly, falling in love is invariably temporary. This is not to say that we will cease loving the person with whom we have fallen in love, but it is to say that the feeling of ecstasy and lovingness that characterises the experience of falling in love will always pass.

To consider the nature of the phenomenon of falling in love, we have to examine what psychologists call ego boundaries. These are our individual identities - bounded by our flesh and the limits of our power. They are not necessarily particularly distinguished, but isolate us from other members of society. Behind them there is certain loneliness, from which we would wish to escape to a condition that we can be more unified with the world outside of ourselves. The experience of falling in love temporarily allows us this escape. The essence of the phenomenon of falling in love is the sudden collapse of a section of our ego boundaries, permitting us to merge our identity with another person. The sudden release of oneself from oneself, the pouring out of oneself to another and the dramatic release from loneliness that accompanies the collapse of these ego boundaries is experienced ecstatically by most of us. Our beloved and we are one! Loneliness is no more!

In some respects, the act of falling love is an act of regression. The experience of merging with the loved one has its echoes from the time when we were merged with our mothers in infancy. Along with the merging, we also re-experience the sense of omnipotence that we had to give up in our journey out of childhood.

Sooner or later, in response to the problems of daily living, individual will reasserts itself. One by one, gradually or suddenly, the ego boundaries snap back into place; gradually or suddenly we fall out of love. Once again we are two separate individuals. At this point, the ties of the relationship are either dissolved or we initiate the work of real loving.

**Only when a couple falls out of love, do they begin to really love. Real love does not have its roots in any feeling of love. To the contrary, real love often occurs in a context where the feeling of love is lacking, when we act lovingly despite the fact that we don't feel loving.**

Falling in love is not an act of will. It is not a conscious choice. No matter how open to it or eager for it we may be, the experience may still elude us. Contrarily, the experience may capture us at times when we are definitely not seeking it, when it is inconvenient or undesirable. We are as likely to fall in love with someone with whom we are obviously ill matched as we are with someone more suitable. This is not to say that the experience of love is immune to discipline. The struggle and suffering of the discipline involved may be enormous. But discipline and will only control the experience; it cannot create it. We can choose how to respond to the experience of falling in love, but we cannot choose the experience itself.

Falling in love has little to do with positively nurturing one's personal or spiritual development. If we have any purpose in mind when we fall in love,

it is to terminate our own loneliness and perhaps ensure this result through marriage.

So what is falling in love, other than a temporary and partial collapse of ego boundaries? Probably, it is a sexually specific phenomenon that is a genetically determined instinctual component of mating behaviour - a configuration of internal sexual drives and external sexual stimuli which serves to increase the probability of sexual pairing and bonding, so as to enhance the survival of the species. It is a trick that our genes pull on our otherwise perceptive minds to hoodwink us or trap us into marriage. Frequently, the trick goes awry one way or another, as when the sexual drives and stimuli are homosexual or when other forces - parental interference, mental illness, conflicting responsibilities or mature self-discipline - supervene to prevent the bonding. On the other hand, without this trick, this illusory and inevitably temporary (it would not be practicable were it not temporary) regression to infantile merging and omnipotence, many of us who are happily or unhappily married today would have retreated in wholehearted terror from the realism of the marriage vows.

### **The myth of romantic love**

To serve as effectively as it does to trap us into marriage, the experience of falling in love probably must have as one of its characteristics the illusion that the experience will last forever. This illusion is fostered in our culture by the commonly held myth of romantic love that has its origin in our favourite childhood fairy tales wherein the prince and princess, once united, live happily forever after. The myth of romantic love tells us, in effect, that for every young man in the world there is a young woman who was "meant for him" and vice versa. Moreover, the myth implies that there is only one man meant for a woman and only one woman meant for a man and this has been predetermined, usually by the stars! When we meet the person for whom we are intended, recognition comes through the fact that we fall in love. We have met the person for whom all the heavens intended us and, since the match is perfect, we will then be able to satisfy all of each other's needs forever and ever and, therefore live happily forever after in perfect union and harmony. Should it come to pass, however, that we do not satisfy or meet all of each other's needs and friction arises and we fall out of love, then it is clear that a dreadful mistake was made. We misread the stars. We did not hook up with our one and only perfect match. What we thought was love was not real or "true" love, and nothing can be done about the situation except to live unhappily every after or get divorced.

**The myth of romantic love is a dreadful lie. Millions of people waste vast amounts of energy desperately and futilely attempting to make the reality of their lives conform to the unreality of the myth.**

## Towards real love

Falling in love is not an extension of one's limits or boundaries; it is a partial collapse of them. The extension of one's limits requires effort; falling in love is effortless. Lazy and undisciplined people are as likely to fall in love as energetic and dedicated ones. Once the precious moment of falling in love has passed and the boundaries have snapped back into place, we may be disillusioned, but are usually none the larger for the experience. When the limits are extended or stretched, however, they tend to stay stretched. Real love is a permanently self-enlarging experience. Falling in love is not. Falling in love is very close to real love and is part of the great and mysterious scheme of love.... Indeed, the misconception that falling in love is a type of love is so potent precisely because it contains a grain of truth. The experience of real love also has to do with ego boundaries, since it involves the extension of our limits. Our limits are our ego boundaries. When we extend our limits through love, we do so by reaching out towards the beloved whose growth we wish to nurture. For us to be able to do this, the beloved object must first become beloved to us. In other words, we must be attracted towards, invested in and committed to an object outside of ourselves, beyond the boundaries of ourselves.

Psychologists call this process of attraction, investment and commitment **cathexis** and say that we **cathect** the beloved object. When we cathect an object outside of ourselves, we also psychologically incorporate a representation of that object into ourselves.

What happens in the course of many years of loving, of extending our limits for our cathexes, is a gradual but progressive enlargement of the self, an incorporation within of the world without and a growth, a stretching and a thinning of our ego boundaries. In this way, the more we extend ourselves, the more we love, the more blurred becomes the distinction between the self and the world. We become identified with the world. As our ego boundaries become blurred and thinned, we begin more and more to experience the same sort of feeling of ecstasy that we have when our ego boundaries partially collapse and we "fall in love". Only, instead of having merged temporarily and unrealistically with a single beloved object, we have merged realistically and more permanently with much of the world. A "mystical union" with the entire world may be established. The feeling of ecstasy or bliss associated with this union, while perhaps more gentle and less dramatic than that associated with falling in love, is nonetheless much more stable and lasting and ultimately satisfying. The heights are not suddenly glimpsed and lost again; they are attained forever.

## Exploration

1. Describe:

(a) Your first "crush";

(b) An experience in which you felt loved by your mother;

(c) An experience of "falling out of love";

(d) Your love for some object or activity;

(e) Early messages you received about sexuality;

(f) An experience in which you felt loved by your father;

(g) An adult who loved you as a child;

(h) Your first date;

(i) An experience of unrequited love;

(j) The myths of romantic love that you grew up with.

2. Without reference to text above, write in your own words a paraphrase of what love is.

3. To see how well you have grasped this idea of love, tick the following statements true or false.

	True	false
1. Love of self and love of others become indistinguishable.		
2. The act of loving is an act of self-evolution.		
3. We are incapable of loving others unless we love ourselves.		
4. Love becomes real only through exertion.		
5. Ego boundaries provide safety.		
6. Ego boundaries can create loneliness.		
7. The experience of falling in love is an act of regression.		
8. The work of loving begins when we fall out of love.		
9. Falling in love is very, very close to real love.		
10. The more we love, the more blurred becomes our distinction between the world and ourselves.		

4. How are you extending yourself to nurture your own personal and spiritual growth?

5. How are you extending yourself to nurture someone else's personal and spiritual growth?

6. Where are you dissatisfied with your present state of loving?

7. What old beliefs about love do you need to give up in order to grow towards true loving?

8. What balancing do you need to do in order to love more effectively?

## What Love is not

- **Dependency**
- **Cathexis without love**
- **"Self-sacrifice"**
- **A feeling**
- **Exploration**

### **Dependency**

A common misconception is that dependency is love. When you require another person for your survival, you are a parasite on that person. There is no choice, no freedom involved in your relationship. It is a matter of necessity rather than love. Love is the free exercise of choice.

**"Two people love each other only when they are quite capable of living without each other but choose to live with each other."**

Dependency is the inability to experience wholeness or to function adequately without being certain of another's care. It is to be distinguished from dependency needs or feelings. Even the strongest, most caring and responsible adult would like to be taken care of for a change. But for most of us, these desires or feelings do not rule our lives. When they do, then we have something more than dependency needs or feelings: we are dependent.

Dependent people are so busy seeking to be loved that they have no energy left to love. They have an inner emptiness crying out to be filled. They can never be completely "full-filled". They tolerate loneliness very poorly. They have no real sense of identity, and they define themselves solely by their relationships.

Rapidly changing partners is a characteristic of dependent people. It does not matter who they are dependent on, so long as it is just someone. Their identity does not matter so long as there is someone to give it them. So their relationships, although seemingly dramatic in their intensity, are actually extremely shallow. Because of the strength of their feeling of inner emptiness and their hunger to fill it, dependent people will accept no delay in gratifying their need for others.

These dependent people are passive in their dependency in the sense that they concern themselves only with what others can do for them, to the exclusion of what they can do. This is not to say that they never do things for others, but that their motive in doing things is to cement the attachment of the others to them so as to assure their own care. When the possibility of care from another is not directly involved, they do have great difficulty in doing things.

**In marriage there is normally a differentiation of spouse's roles, a normally efficient division of labour. Healthy couples, however, will instinctively switch roles from time to time in a process that diminishes their mutual dependency.**

But, for dependent people, the loss of the other is such a frightening prospect that they cannot face preparing for it or tolerate a process that would lessen their dependency or increase the freedom of the other. Consequently, it is one of their behavioural hallmarks in marriage to rigidly differentiate roles and to seek to increase, rather than diminish, mutual dependency so as to make marriage more rather than less of a trap. By so doing, in the name of what they call love, but what is really dependency, they diminish their own and each other's freedom and stature. Occasionally, as part of the process, they will actually forsake skills that they had gained before marriage. Through such behaviour, dependent marriages may be made lasting and secure, but they cannot be considered either healthy or genuinely loving, because the security is purchased at the price of freedom and the relationship retards or destroys the growth of the individual partners.

**"A good marriage can only exist between two strong and independent people."**

Dependency begins with lack of love. The suffered inner feeling of emptiness is the result of their parents' failure to fulfil their needs for affection, attention and care during their childhood. Children growing up where love and care are lacking, or given inconsistently, enter adulthood with no sense of inner security. They feel the need to scramble for love, care and attention wherever they can find it, and having found it, cling to it desperately, leading them to unloving, manipulative behaviour that destroys the very relationships they seek to preserve.

It is no accident that the most common disturbance that dependent people manifest beyond their relationships to others is dependency on drugs and alcohol.

## **Cathexis without love**

Love is never nurture or cathexis without regard to spiritual growth.

We speak of people loving inanimate objects or activities, e.g. money, power, gardening, golf etc. Certainly, you may extend yourself beyond ordinary personal limits, working long hours to accumulate money and power. Yet, despite the extent of your fortune or influence, all this may not be self-enlarging at all.

Hobbies are self-nurturing activities. In loving ourselves, i.e. nurturing ourselves for the purpose of spiritual growth, we need to provide ourselves with things that are not directly spiritual. To nourish the spirit, the body must also be nurtured. We need food and shelter. No matter how dedicated we are to spiritual development, we need rest, relaxation, exercise and distraction. But, if a hobby becomes an end in itself, then it becomes a substitute for rather than a means to self-development. Sometimes it is precisely for this reason that hobbies are so popular.

Alternatively, power and money may be means to a loving goal. A rare person may suffer a career in politics to use political power for the betterment of humankind. Some people yearn riches, not for their sake, but to send their children to college or to provide themselves with the freedom and time for study and reflection necessary for their own spiritual growth. It is not power or money that such people love; it is humanity.

As long as we continue to use the word "love" to describe our relationship with anything that is important to us, anything we cathect, without regard for the quality of that relationship, we will continue to have difficulty discerning the difference between the wise and foolish, the good and bad, the noble and ignoble.

**Using our more specific definition of love, it is clear that we can only love human beings, as only they are perceived of as possessing a spirit capable of substantial growth.**

Many people are capable of "loving" only pets and incapable of genuinely loving others. The liberated woman is right to beware of the man who affectionately calls her his "pet". His affection may be dependent on her being his pet, without regard for her strength, independence and individuality.

Probably the most saddening example of this phenomenon is the large number of women who are only capable of "loving" their children as infants. Once a child begins to assert its own will - to attach itself to other people, to move out into the world on its own - the mother's love ceases.

The "love" of infants, pets and, even dependently obedient spouses, is an instinctual protective pattern of behaviour which we can call "maternal", or more generally, "paternal instinct". We can liken this to the instinctual behaviour of "falling in love":

- it is not a genuine form of love as it is relatively effortless, and it is not totally an act of will or choice;
- it encourages the survival of the species, but is not directed towards improvement or spiritual growth;
- it is close to love in that it is a reaching out for others and serves to start bonds between people from which real love might grow.

Much more is required to develop a healthy, creative marriage, raise a healthy, spiritually growing child or contribute to the evolution of humanity. Nurturing spiritual growth is an infinitely more complicated process than can be directed by any instinct.

Love is judicious giving and judicious withholding as well. It is judicious praising and criticising. It is judicious arguing, struggling, confronting, and urging and pushing and pulling in addition to comforting. It is leadership, requiring judgement more than instinct, and thoughtful, often painful decision-making.

### **"Self-sacrifice"**

Examples of injudicious giving and destructive nurturing are many, e.g. mothers who push food on already overweight children, fathers who give their children roomfuls of toys or clothes, parents who always drive their children places, parents who set no limits and deny no desires. The motivation has a feature in common: The "giver", under the guise of love, is responding to and meeting his or her own needs without regard to the spiritual needs of the receiver.

**Whenever we think of ourselves as doing something for another, we are denying our own responsibility. We do what we do because we choose to do it, and we make that choice because it satisfies us most. Whatever we do for someone else, we do because it fulfils a need we have.**

Parents who expect gratitude from their children for all they have done are invariably significantly lacking in love. Anyone who genuinely loves knows the pleasure of loving. When we genuinely love, we do so because we want to love.

It is true that love involves a change in the self, but it is an extension of the self, rather than a sacrifice of the self. Genuine love is a self-replenishing

activity. Indeed, it is even more: It enlarges rather than diminishes the self; it fills the self, rather than depleting it. In a real sense, love is as selfish as nonlove. Here again is a paradox in that love is selfish and unselfish at the same time. It is not selfishness or unselfishness that distinguishes love from nonlove; it is the aim of the action. In the cases of genuine love, the aim is always spiritual growth. In the case of nonlove, the aim is always something else.

### **A feeling**

**Love is an action, an activity. Love is not a feeling. Many people, who possess a feeling of love and, even respond to that feeling, act in unloving and destructive ways. On the other hand, a genuinely loving person will often take loving and constructive action towards a person he or she consciously dislikes, actually feeling no love, or even feeling repugnance at the time. Conversely, it is not only possible but also necessary for a loving person to sometimes avoid acting on feelings of love.**

The feeling of love is the emotion that accompanies the experience of cathexis. Genuine love implies commitment and wisdom. When we are concerned for someone's spiritual growth, we know that a lack of commitment is likely to be harmful and that commitment is necessary for us to manifest concern effectively.

**In a constructive marriage, just as in constructive therapy, the partners must regularly, routinely and predictably attend to their relationship no matter how they feel.**

When love exists, it does so with or without cathexis and with or without a feeling of love, although it is easier, indeed fun, to love with cathexis and the feeling of love. It is in the fulfilment of love without cathexis or feeling that genuine love transcends simple cathexis. The key word in the definition of love is "will", the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth. This love is volitional rather than emotional.

Our feelings of love may be unbounded but our capacity for loving is limited. We must therefore choose on whom we will focus our capacity to love, and towards whom we will direct our will to love. True love is not a feeling by which we are overwhelmed; it is a committed, thoughtful decision.

The tendency to confuse love with the feeling of love allows us to deceive ourselves. There may be a self-serving tendency here; it is easy and pleasurable to find evidence of love in one's feelings. It may be difficult and painful to search for evidence of love in one's action. But, because true love is an act of will that often transcends feelings of love or cathexis, it is true to say, "Love is as love does".

## Exploration

1. "We are meant to love people and use things, not love things and use people" REINHOLD NIEBUHR. Consider this statement as it applies in your life. What changes would you like to make to your significant personal relationships?

2. Dependency:

(a) What do you like about being dependent?

(b) What do you dislike about being dependent?

(c) What do you like about having others dependent on you?

(d) What do you dislike about having others dependent on you?

3. What are some legitimate dependency needs and what are some legitimate ways of getting them met?

4. Love is defined as being an extension of the "will". Surely, feelings simply "are". Can love be willed? Can we make a decision to like someone?

5. "Love is as love does." What loving have you done recently?

## The Work of Love

- **Listening**
- **Discipline**
- **Separateness**
- **Exploration**

Love is a form of work or courage directed towards the nurture of our own or another's spiritual growth. The principal form of the work is attention. Attention requires that we make the effort to set aside our existing preoccupations and actively shift our consciousness.

### Listening

The most common and important way in which we can exercise our attention is by listening. Listening well is hard work. It is because we do not realise this or are not willing to do the work that most of us do not listen well.

An essential part of true listening is the discipline of balancing, the temporary giving up or setting aside of one's own prejudices, frames of reference and desires so as to experience the speaker's world from where they are. This unification of speaker and listener is actually an extension and enlargement of ourselves and new knowledge is always gained from this. It temporarily involves the total acceptance of the other. Sensing this acceptance, the speaker will feel less vulnerable and more inclined to open up the inner recesses of their mind to the listener. There is mutual appreciation; the duet dance of love has begun. The energy required for setting oneself aside and focusing with total attention is so great that it can only be accomplished with love, by the will to extend oneself for mutual growth. Most of the time we lack this energy.

Since true love is love in action it is most appropriate in marriage. Yet most couples never truly listen to each other. The energy and discipline involved is more than they are willing to expand or submit themselves to. True listening can only occur when time is set aside for it and conditions are supportive of it. It cannot occur when people are driving, cooking, or are tired and anxious to sleep, easily interrupted or in a hurry.

## **Discipline**

Any genuine lover behaves with self-discipline and any genuinely loving relationship is a disciplined relationship. If I truly love another, I will obviously order my behaviour in such a way as to contribute the utmost to his or her spiritual growth.

Passion is a feeling of great depth. The fact that it may be uncontrolled is not to say that it is any deeper whatsoever than when that same feeling is disciplined. We must not assume that someone whose feelings are modulated and controlled is not a passionate person.

The proper management of our feelings clearly lies along a complex, balanced path, requiring constant judgement and continuing adjustment. This is neither simple nor easy. This is the path of healthy self-discipline.

The feeling of love must be disciplined. It is not genuine love, but the feeling associated with cathexis. If it is allowed to run wild, the result will not be genuine love but confusion and unproductiveness.

Because genuine love involves an extension of oneself, vast amounts of energy are required, and the store of our energy is limited. We simply cannot love everyone. True, we may have a feeling of love for mankind and this feeling may also be useful in providing us with enough energy to love a few specific individuals. However, genuine love for a few individuals is all that is within our power. To attempt to exceed the limits of our energy is to offer more than we can deliver. There is a point of no return beyond which an attempt to love all comers becomes fraudulent and harmful to the very ones we desire to assist.

Consequently, if we are fortunate enough to be in a position in which many people ask for our attention, we must choose those among them whom we are actually to love. This choice is not easy. Many factors need to be considered, primarily the capacity of a prospective recipient of our love to respond to that love with spiritual growth. There are many whose spirits are so locked in behind impenetrable armour that even the greatest efforts to nurture the growth of these spirits are doomed to almost certain failure. To attempt to love someone who cannot benefit from your love with spiritual growth is to waste your energy.

Genuine love is precious. Those who are capable of genuine love know that their loving must be focused as productively as possible through self-discipline.

It is possible for some people to love more than one person at the same time, to simultaneously maintain a number of genuinely loving relationships. This itself is a problem for several reasons: One is the western myth of "romantic love" that suggests that certain people are "meant for each other"; hence, not for anyone else. The myth therefore prescribes exclusivity for loving relationships, most particularly sexual exclusivity. For these people, the myth of exclusivity is not only patently false but also represents an unnecessary limitation on their capacity to give of themselves to others outside their family.

However, very few of us have self-discipline great enough to maintain genuinely loving, constructive relationships both inside and outside the family.

Genuine love, with all the discipline that it requires, is the only path in this life to substantial joy. Other paths may bring rare moments of ecstatic joy, but they will be fleeting and progressively more elusive. When I genuinely love, I am extending myself, and when I am extending myself I am growing. The more I love and the longer I love, the larger I become. Genuine love is self-replenishing. The more I nurture the spiritual growth of others, the more my own spiritual growth is nurtured. I am a totally selfish person. I never do something for somebody else but that I do it for myself. As I grow through love, so my joy grows, ever more present and ever more constant.

### **Separateness**

Although the act of nurturing another's spiritual growth has the effect of nurturing our own, a characteristic of genuine love is that the distinction between others and us is always maintained and preserved.

**The genuine lover always perceives the beloved as someone who has a totally separate identity. Moreover, the genuine lover always respects and even encourages this separateness and the unique individuality of the beloved. Failure to see and respect this separateness is extremely common, however, and the cause of a lot of mental illness and much unnecessary suffering.**

In its most extreme form the failure to see the separateness of others is called narcissism. Basically, narcissistic individuals are unable to see their spouses, children or friends as being separate from themselves on an emotional level. Since they see others as only extensions of themselves, narcissistic individuals lack the capacity for empathy - the capacity to feel what another is feeling. Lacking empathy, narcissistic parents usually respond inappropriately to their children on an emotional level and fail to offer any recognition or affirmation of their children's feelings. It is no wonder, then, that such

children grow up with grave difficulties in recognising, accepting and managing their own feelings.

The difficulty that we so generally seem to have in fully appreciating the separateness of those we are close to interferes not only with parenting, but also with all our intimate relationships, including marriage. It is the separateness of the partners in a marriage that enriches the union. Individuals who are terrified by their basic aloneness, as so commonly is the case, and seek a merging in marriage cannot construct great marriages. Genuine love not only respects the individuality of the other but also actually seeks to cultivate it, even at the risk of separation or loss. The ultimate goal of life remains the spiritual growth of the individual.

## Exploration

1. How much time do you spend in really listening to others?
2. What is the "duet dance of love" in respect of listening?
3. What gets in the way of your really listening to others?
4. Are you a "passionate" person?
5. Can you be passionate and still control your feelings of love?
6. How many people can you genuinely love?

7. How do you grow as you are loving?

8. Who has, or does, truly love you? In what specific ways did, or do, they show their love?

9. Take time to reflect on a significant present relationship. How is separateness recognised and honoured? What are your feelings about it? Could there be room for more separateness?

10. "The ultimate goal in life remains the spiritual growth of the individual." Discuss.

## The Risks of Love

- **Independence**
- **Commitment**
- **Confrontation**
- **Exploration**

When we extend ourselves, our self enters new and unfamiliar territory. It becomes a new and different self. We do things we are not accustomed to doing. We change.

The experience of change, or unaccustomed activity, of being on unfamiliar ground or of doing things differently is frightening. It has always been and will always be. People handle their fear of change in different ways, but the fear is inescapable if they are to change.

**Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the making of action in spite of fear, the moving out against the resistance engendered by our fear, into the unknown and into the future.**

On some level, spiritual growth, and therefore love, always requires courage and involves risk.

### **Loss**

We have said that cathexis is not the same as love, that love transcends cathexis. This is true, but love requires cathexis for a beginning. We can only love that which is important to us. But, with cathexis there is always the risk of loss or rejection. If you move out towards another person, there is always the risk they will move away from you, leaving you more painfully alone than you were before. Love anything that lives and it will die. Trust anybody and you may be hurt. Depend on anyone and they may let you down. The price of cathexis is pain.

**If someone is determined not to risk pain, they must do without many things: having children; getting married; the ecstasy of sex; the hope of ambition; friendship - all that makes life alive, meaningful and significant. Move out or grow in any dimension and pain as well as joy will be your**

**reward. A full life will be full of pain. But the only alternative is not to live fully or not to live at all.**

The essence of life is change - of growth and decay. Elect life and growth and you elect change and the prospect of death. If we can live with the knowledge that death is our constant companion then death can become our ally, still fearsome, but continually a source of wise counsel. With death's counsel, the constant awareness of the limit of our time to live and love, we can always be guided to make the best use of our time and to live life to the fullest. But if we are unwilling to fully face the fearsome presence of death we deprive ourselves of its counsel and cannot possibly live or love with clarity. When we shy away from death, the ever-changing nature of things, we inevitably shy away from life.

### **Independence**

The more lovingly we live our lives, the more risks we take. Of the thousands, maybe millions, of risks we can take in a lifetime the greatest is the risk of growing up.

Growing up is the act of stepping from childhood into adulthood. Actually, it is more of a fearful leap than a step. It is a leap that many people never really take in their lifetimes. Though they may outwardly appear to be adults, even successful adults, perhaps the majority of "grown-ups" remain until their death psychologically children who have never truly separated themselves from their parents and the power that their parents have over them.

The process of growing up usually occurs very gradually with multiple little leaps into the unknown. If you watch even the healthiest of children you will see an eagerness to risk new adult activities, but also, side by side, a reluctance, a shrinking back, a clinging to the safe and familiar, a holding onto dependency and childhood. Moreover, on more or less subtle levels, you can find this same ambivalence in an adult, including yourself, with the elderly particularly tending to cling to the old, known and familiar.

Among all the little leaps we might take, there are also some enormous ones. Many never take any of these potentially enormous leaps, and consequentially many do not really grow up at all.

What has this business of growing up got to do with love, apart from the extension of the self involved in loving being the enlargement of the self into a new dimension? The answer is that major changes are acts of self-love.

**Only when we have taken the leap into the unknown of total self-hood, psychological independence and unique individuality are we free to**

**proceed along the still higher paths of spiritual growth and free to manifest love in its greatest dimensions.**

As long as we marry, enter a career, or have children to satisfy our parents or the expectations of anyone else, including society as a whole, the commitment, by its very nature, will be a hollow one. As long as we love our children because we are expected to behave in a loving manner towards them, then as parents we will be insensitive to the more subtle needs of our children and unable to express our love in the most responsive, most important way. The highest forms of love are inevitably totally free choices and not acts of conformity.

### **Commitment**

Whether it be shallow or not, commitment is the foundation of any genuinely loving relationship. Frequently we are not consciously aware of the immensity of the risk involved in making a deep commitment. Anyone who is truly concerned for the spiritual growth of another knows, consciously or instinctively, that he or she can significantly foster that growth only through a relationship of constancy. Children cannot grow to psychological maturity in an atmosphere of unpredictability, haunted by the spectre of abandonment. Couples cannot resolve in any healthy way the universal issues of marriage - dependency and independence, dominance and submission, freedom and fidelity, for example - without the security of knowing that the act of struggling over these issues will not itself destroy the relationship.

Issues of commitment are crucial in the course of psychotherapy. Character-disordered individuals lack understanding of what commitment is all about and tend to form only shallow commitments. When their disorders are severe, these individuals seem to lack totally the capacity to form commitments at all. Neurotics, on the other hand, are generally aware of the nature of the commitment but are frequently paralysed by the fear of it.

**Commitment is the cornerstone of the psychotherapeutic relationship. For basic healing to take place it is necessary for the psychotherapist to bring to his or her relationship with a new client the same high degree of commitment that genuinely loving parents bring to their children. If the therapist's commitment is sufficient, then usually, although not inevitably, the client will respond with a developing commitment of his or her own, a commitment to the therapist and to the therapy itself. The point at which the client begins to demonstrate this commitment is the turning point of the therapy. But, reach it they must if they are to be healed. The risk of commitment to therapy is not only the risk of commitment itself but also the risk of self-confrontation and change.**

For the therapist, it is a wonderful moment of relief and joy when they realise that the client has assumed the risk of commitment and therefore that therapy will succeed.

## **Confrontation**

Possibly the greatest risk of love is the risk of exercising power with humility - the act of loving confrontation. Most criticism and confrontation, usually done impulsively in anger or annoyance, does more to increase the amount of confusion in the world than the amount of enlightenment.

**For the truly loving person, the act of criticism or confrontation does not come easily; it is evident to such a person that the act has great potential for arrogance.**

Genuine love recognises and respects the unique individuality and separate identity of the other person. However, reality is that there are times in life when one person will know better than the other what is good for the other and is in a position of superior knowledge or wisdom in regard to the matter at hand. Under these circumstances, the wiser of the two does have an obligation, out of loving concern for the spiritual growth of the other, to confront the other with the problem. The loving person is therefore frequently in a dilemma: caught between a loving respect for the beloved's own path in life; and, a responsibility to exercise loving leadership when the beloved seems to need such leadership.

This dilemma can only be resolved by painstaking self-scrutiny in which the lover examines stringently the worth of his or her "wisdom" and the motives behind this need to assume leadership. The self-scrutiny is the essence of humility or meekness.

There are, then, two ways to confront or criticise another person: with instinctive and spontaneous certainty that we are right, or with a belief that we are probably right arrived at through scrupulous self-doubting and self-examination. The first is the way of arrogance; it is the most common way of parents, spouses, teachers and people generally in their day to day affairs; it is usually unsuccessful, producing more resentment and other unintended effects than growth. The second is the way of humility; it is not common, requiring as it does a genuine extension of ourselves; it is more likely to be successful, and it is never likely to be destructive.

**To fail to confront when confrontation is required for the nurture of spiritual growth represents a failure to love equally as much as does thoughtless criticism or condemnation and other forms of uncaring. Mutual loving confrontation is a significant part of all successful and meaningful**

**human relationships. Without it, the relationship is either unsuccessful or shallow.**

To confront or criticise is a form of exercising leadership or power. Loving people must concern themselves with this art, for if we desire the nurture of another's spiritual growth, then we must concern ourselves with the most effective way to accomplish this in any given instance.

To confront someone with something he or she cannot handle will at best be a waste of time and likely to have a deleterious effect. If we want to be heard we must speak in a language the listener can understand and on a level at which the listener is capable of operating. If we are to love we must extend ourselves to adjust our communication to the capacities of our beloved.

What is this about the risk involved? The problem is that the more loving one is, the more humble one is; yet the more humble one is, the more one is awed by the potential for arrogance in exercising power. Who am I to influence the course of human events? Who gives me the right to believe in my own understanding and then to presume to exert my will upon the world? Who am I to play God? That is the risk. For whenever we exercise power we are attempting to influence the course of the world, of humanity, and we are therefore playing God.

But those who truly love and work for the wisdom that love requires are aware that they are playing God. They know that there is no alternative except inaction and impotence. Love compels us to play God with full consciousness of the enormity of the fact that that is just what we are doing. With this consciousness, the loving person assumes the responsibility of attempting to be God and not to carelessly play God; to fulfil God's will without mistake. We arrive, then, at yet another paradox: only out of the humility of love can humans dare to be God.

## Exploration

1. Complete the following chart:

the risk	how I avoided it	how I faced it
loss		
independence		
commitment		
confrontation		

2. What losses have been most difficult for you to face?

3. How have you grown in love through facing a loss?

4. What "leaps" into adulthood have you taken?

5. How did you love yourself in taking these leaps?

6. What relationships of constancy/commitment have you experienced?

7. How have they contributed to your personal growth?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. How do you need to extend yourself to become committed to a particular relationship?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What are your feelings about such a commitment?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. In the same relationship, picture yourself in confrontation (in the manner described in the notes, above) over some issue or difference. What feelings does this produce in you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. How can confrontation be helpful and healthy?

## Love and Psychotherapy

- **Ethical boundaries**
- **When to terminate therapy?**
- **Exploration**

**The essential ingredient that makes psychotherapy effective and successful is more than "unconditional positive regard", more than clever words, techniques or postures; it is human involvement and struggle. It is the willingness of the therapist to extend himself or herself for the purpose of nurturing the client's growth - a willingness to go out on a limb, to truly involve oneself at an emotional level in the relationship, to actually struggle with the client. In short, the essential ingredient of successful, deep and meaningful psychotherapy is love.**

There is nothing inappropriate about clients coming to love a therapist who truly listens to them hour after hour in a non-judgemental way, who truly accepts them as they have probably never been accepted before, who totally refrains from using them and who has been helpful in alleviating their suffering.

Similarly, there is nothing at all inappropriate in the feelings of love that a therapist develops for his or her client when the client submits to the discipline of psychotherapy, co-operates and is willing to learn from the therapist and successfully begins to grow through the relationship.

To the contrary, it is essential for the therapist to love a client for the therapy to be successful, and if the therapy does become successful, then the therapeutic relationship will become a mutually loving one. It is inevitable that the therapist will experience loving feelings coincidental with the genuine love he or she has demonstrated towards the client.

No matter how well trained and credentialed psychotherapists may be, if they cannot extend themselves through love to their clients, the results of their psychotherapeutic practice will generally be unsuccessful. Conversely, a totally uncredentialed and minimally trained lay therapist who exercises a great capacity to love will achieve psychotherapeutic results that are equal to those of the very best psychiatrists.

## **Ethical boundaries**

Since love and sex are so closely related and interconnected, it is appropriate to consider briefly the issue of sexual relationships between psychotherapists and their clients.

Because of the necessary loving and intimate nature of the psychotherapeutic relationship, it is not surprising that both clients and therapists sometimes develop strong sexual attractions to each other.

**It is difficult to see how a therapist who related sexually with a client would not be using the client to satisfy his or her own needs or how the therapist would be encouraging the client's independence by so doing. Even if it is not a sexual relationship, it is detrimental for the therapist to "fall in love" with a client, since falling in love involves a collapse of the ego boundaries and a diminution of the normal sense of separation that exists between individuals.**

The therapist who falls in love with a client cannot possibly be objective about the client's needs or separate those needs from his or her own. It is out of their love for their clients that therapists do not allow themselves the indulgence of falling in love with them. Since genuine love demands respect for the separate identity of the beloved, the genuinely loving therapist will recognise and accept that the client's path in life is and should be separate from that of the therapist.

Social contact with the client outside of therapy, even after therapy has been formally terminated, is something that should be entered into only with great caution and stringent self-examination as to whether the therapist's needs are being met by the contact to the detriment of the client's.

## **When to terminate therapy?**

Clients frequently ask when they will be ready to terminate therapy. The majority of clients, even in the hands of the most skilled and loving therapists will terminate their therapy at some point far short of completely fulfilling their potential. They may have travelled a short way or far along the road towards personal and spiritual growth, but the whole journey is not for them. It is or seems to be too difficult. They are content to be ordinary men and women and do not strive to be God.

## Exploration

1. Psychotherapy is a major investment in terms of money, time and energy. It is high risk in the sense that if the choice of psychotherapist is right, your spiritual dividends will be greater than you could ever have imagined. How do you feel your investment in your relationship with your psychotherapist is bringing the returns you hope for? Are the returns so far greater than you hoped for?

2. You are travelling a less travelled road towards personal and spiritual growth. To what extent do you find it comforting to have a psychotherapist accompanying you in your journey? Does it diminish your sense of aloneness?

3. Do you feel comfortable in the idea that it is essential for a psychotherapist to extend himself in love, to be genuinely caring, that you should successfully grow?

4. How have you submitted to the discipline of psychotherapy in order that you may grow?

5. Can you see that, while you may learn from your therapist, your path in life is uniquely individual, separate from your therapist?

6. Most clients terminate therapy short of fulfilling their potential. What will be your criterion for terminating therapy?

## Personal and Spiritual Growth

- World views
- Spiritual growth
- Belief in God
- The baby and the bath water
- Scientific tunnel vision
- Exploration

### World views

As people grow in discipline and love and experience of life, their understanding of the world and their place in it naturally grows apace. Conversely, as people fail to grow in discipline, love and experience of life, so their understanding fails to grow. Consequently, there is an extraordinary variability between people in the breadth and sophistication of their understanding about what life is all about.

However, since everyone has some understanding, then everyone has some worldview, no matter how limited or inaccurate.

**Sooner or later in the course of psychotherapy most therapists will come to recognise how a client views the world, but if the therapist is specifically on the lookout for it, he or she will come to this recognition sooner. It is essential that therapists arrive at this knowledge, for the worldview of a client is always an essential part of their problems. A correction in their worldview will be necessary for their progress in therapy.**

Usually our worldview is only partially conscious. We are often unaware of how we view the world. Sometimes we think we have a particular view of the world when we may actually have a completely different view.

The most important factor in the development of our worldview is our culture. We tend to believe what people around us believe. We tend to accept as truth what these people tell us of the nature of the world as we listen to them during our formative years.

But less obvious, except to psychotherapists, is the fact that the most important part of our culture is our particular family. It is where we develop,

and our parents are its "culture leaders". Moreover, the most significant aspect of that culture is not what our parents tell us about God and the nature of things, but rather what they do, how they behave towards each other, towards our brothers and sisters and, above all, towards us.

**What we learn about the nature of the world when we are growing up is determined by the actual nature of our experience in the microcosm of the family. It is not so much what our parents say that determines our worldview as it is the unique world they create for us by their behaviour.**

When we are children our parents are godlike figures to our child's eye and the way they do things seems to be the way they must be done throughout the universe. If we have loving, forgiving parents, we are likely to believe in a loving, forgiving God. In our adult view, the world is likely to seem as nurturing a place as our childhood was. If our parents were harsh and punitive, we are likely to mature with a concept of a harsh and punitive monster-god. If they failed to care for us, we will likely see the universe as similarly uncaring.

The fact that our worldview is initially largely determined by our unique childhood experience brings us up against a central problem: the relationship between our worldview and reality. It is the problem of the microcosm and the macrocosm. In the larger world, the macrocosm, there are many different kinds of parents and people and societies and cultures.

**To develop a worldview that is realistic, i.e. conforms to the reality of the world and our role in it, as best we can know that reality, we must constantly revise and extend our understanding to include new knowledge of the larger world. We must constantly enlarge our frame of reference. We are dealing again with the issues of map-making and transference.**

The worldview of most adults is a product of transference, i.e. the childhood map that works in the microcosm of the family is inappropriately transferred into the larger adult world.

Most of us operate from a narrower frame of reference than we are capable of, failing to transcend the influence of our particular culture, our particular set of parents and our particular childhood experience on our understanding.

It is no wonder, then, that the world is so full of conflict. We have a situation in which people, who must deal with each other, have vastly different views as to the nature of reality, yet each one believes his or her own view to be the correct one since it is based on the microcosm of personal experience. To make matters worse, most of us are not even fully aware of our own worldviews, much less the uniqueness of the experience from which they are

derived. So we squabble over our different microcosmic worldviews, and all wars are holy wars!

## **Spiritual Growth**

Spiritual growth is a journey out of the microcosm into an even greater macrocosm. In its earlier stages it is a journey of knowledge and not of faith.

**In order to escape the microcosm of our previous experience and free ourselves from transference, it is necessary that we learn. We must continually expand our realm of knowledge and our field of vision through the thorough digestion and incorporation of new information.**

To develop a broader vision we must be willing to forsake, to kill our narrower vision. In the short run it is more comfortable not to do this - to stay where we are, to keep using the same microcosmic map, to avoid suffering the death of cherished notions. The road of spiritual growth, however, lies in the opposite direction.

We begin by distrusting what we already believe, by actively seeking the threatening and unfamiliar, by deliberately challenging the validity of what we have previously been taught and hold dear. The path to holiness lies through questioning everything.

We must rebel against and reject the worldview of our parents, for inevitably it will be narrower than we are capable of if we take full advantage of our personal experience, including our adult experience and the experience of an additional generation of human history. There is no such thing as a good inherited worldview. To be vital, to be the best we are capable of, ours must be a wholly personal one, forged from our own questioning and doubting; the product of our own experience of reality.

We have to be sceptical of everything we have learned to date. It is the scientific attitude that enables us to transform our personal experience of the microcosm into a personal experience of the macrocosm. However, while the worldview of the scientific minded is a distinct improvement on a worldview based upon blind faith, local superstition and unquestioned assumptions, most of the scientifically minded have only barely begun the journey of spiritual growth. Scientists have grave difficulty in dealing with the reality of God.

## **Belief in God**

When we look from a vantage point of sophisticated scepticism at the phenomenon of belief in God, we are not impressed. We see dogmatism, holy wars, inquisitions and persecutions. We see hypocrisy: people professing the brotherhood of man, yet killing their fellows in the name of faith; lining their pockets at the expense of others. We see a bewildering multiplicity of rituals and images without consensus. We see ignorance, superstition and rigidity. The track record for belief in God looks pretty poor. It is tempting to think that humanity might be better off without a belief in God. It would seem reasonable to conclude that God is an illusion in the minds of humans.

Is belief in God a sickness? Is it a manifestation of transference - a concept of our parents derived from the microcosm and inappropriately projected into the macrocosm? Is such a belief a form of childish, primitive thinking that we should grow out of as we seek higher levels of awareness and maturity? What happens to one's belief in God as one grows through the process of psychotherapy?

Many psychiatrists and psychotherapists see religion as an enemy. They may even think of it as being a neurosis - a collection of inherently irrational ideas that serve to restrict people's minds and oppress their instincts towards better mental health. Freud, scientist, rationalist and the most influential figure in modern psychiatry, seemed to see things in this light and his attitudes contributed to the idea of religion as a neurosis. It is tempting for psychiatrists to see themselves as nobly combating the destructive forces of ancient religious superstition and irrational, authoritarian dogma.

**Psychotherapists must spend time and effort in the struggle to liberate their client's minds from outmoded religious ideas and concepts where they are clearly destructive. It may be necessary for the therapist to actively challenge a client's religious ideas to dramatically diminish the influence of the God-concept in his or her life. Conversely, the therapist may even consider actively challenging a client's atheism or agnosticism and deliberately leading a client in the direction of a belief in God.**

Is developing a belief in God a form of psychotherapy? If we are to move away from childhood teaching, local tradition and superstition in a direction of spiritual growth, it is a question that must be asked. The answer sometimes is yes.

## **The baby and the bath water**

Scientists are dedicated to asking questions in the search for truth. But, they are too human and would like the answers to be clean, clear and easy. In their desire for simple solutions, they are prone to fall into two traps as they question the reality of God: The first is to throw the baby out with the bath water; the second is tunnel vision.

There is certainly a lot of dirty bath water surrounding the reality of God, as we have already discussed. But is all this what God has done or what we have done to God? It is abundantly evident that belief in God is often destructively dogmatic. Is the problem that we tend to believe in God or that we tend to be dogmatic? Is it the belief in God or the dogmatism that we need to get rid of? A mark of maturity in scientists is their awareness that science may be subject to dogmatism just as much as religion. Scientific notions can also become cultural idols that need approaching sceptically as, in our quest for spiritual growth, we question all that we have been taught.

It is indeed possible for us to mature out of a belief in God. However, it is also possible to mature into a belief in God. A sceptical atheism or agnosticism is not the highest state of understanding we can arrive at. On the contrary, there is reason to believe that behind all the spurious notions and false concepts of God, there lies a reality that is God.

It is possible that the path of spiritual growth leads first out of superstition, through agnosticism, then towards an accurate knowledge of God. The God that comes before scepticism may bear little resemblance to the God that comes after.

**There are many levels to belief. Some may be unhealthy; others may be healthy. Psychotherapists are dealing so directly with the growth process that they have to consider the healthiness of a client's belief system. Where psychotherapists are blinkered by a purely scientific approach, they will be unable to do this because they will consider any passionate belief in God to be pathological. They will then be doing a disservice to some of their clients. This will also be true where they regard all belief in God as healthy.**

**A psychotherapist cannot withdraw behind a cloak of objectivity and fail to deal with the religious issues of their clients. Clients need their involvement and psychotherapists need to be more aware of religious and spiritual issues than they frequently are.**

## **Scientific tunnel vision**

Many scientists simply do not look at the evidence of the reality of God. They suffer from psychological tunnel vision that prevents them from turning their attention to the realm of the spiritual.

The use of measurement has enabled science to make enormous strides in the understanding of the material universe. But, by virtue of its success, measurement has become a scientific idol. The result is an attitude on the part of many scientists not only of scepticism but also of outright rejection of what cannot be measured. Because of this attitude many scientists exclude from their serious consideration all matters that are, or seem to be, intangible, including the matter of God.

The strange, but remarkably common assumption that things that are not easy to study do not merit study is beginning to be challenged by several recent developments within science itself: Methods of study are more sophisticated. We can now measure complex phenomena that were for decades unmeasurable. The other development is the discovery by science of the reality of paradox.

Is it possible that we are beginning to see a meeting of minds between science and religion? When we are able to say "a human is both mortal and eternal at the same time", and that "light is both a wave and a particle at the same time", we have begun to speak the same language. Is it possible that the path of spiritual growth that proceeds from religious superstition to scientific scepticism may ultimately lead us to a genuine religious reality?

It is exciting to consider intellectually, but it is only a beginning. For the most part, both the religious and the scientific remain in self-imposed narrow frames of reference: Even the idea of a miracle is anathema to most scientists. The church is more broad minded; what cannot be considered in terms of known natural laws is a miracle, but the church has been unwilling to consider them very closely. However, such phenomena as spontaneous remissions in cancer patients and apparently successful examples of psychic healing are prompting examination by some scientists and religious truth-seekers.

In thinking about miracles, our frame of reference has probably been too dramatic. We have been looking for the burning bush, the parting of the sea or the bellowing voice from heaven. Instead, we should be looking at the ordinary daily events in our lives for evidence of the miraculous, while maintaining a scientific orientation. In this way we will come to an understanding of the extraordinary phenomenon of grace.

See also **Appendix - Stages of Spiritual Growth**

## Exploration

1. What does "spiritual growth" mean to you? How would you define it?

2. Arriving at our own beliefs we go through the following stages:

- Unquestioning acceptance
- Questioning non-acceptance
- Experiencing uncertainty and mystery
- Some certainty of beliefs

Where are you now?

3. The word "belief" comes from the old Anglo-Saxon "by-life". What are your operational beliefs, the beliefs by which you actually live?

4. In what ways would you wish to change your beliefs?

5. What is helping and what is hindering you in growing?

6. What was your earliest impression of God, as a child? (You may wish to present this as a drawing)

7. How has your concept of God changed? Describe God or Reality as it is for you today.

8. Miracles are often day to day occurrences. What miracles have you seen recently?

## The Phenomena of Grace (1)

- **The miracle of health**
- **The miracle of serendipity**
- **Exploration**

**An understanding of the phenomena of grace is essential to completely understand our process of spiritual growth.**

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

And when we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We'll have no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we first begun.

JOHN NEWTON (1725-1807)

The first word associated with grace in this famous early hymn is "amazing". Something amazes us when it is not in the ordinary course of things, when it is not predictable by what we know of "natural law".

Grace can be demonstrated to be a common phenomenon and, to a certain extent, a predictable one, but the reality of grace will remain inexplicable within the conceptual framework of conventional science and "natural law", as we understand it. It will remain miraculous and amazing.

The phenomena of grace are characterised as follows:

- (a) They serve to nurture - support, protect and enhance - life and spiritual growth;
- (b) The mechanism of their action is either incompletely understandable, or totally obscure according to the principles of natural law as interpreted by current scientific thinking;
- (c) Their occurrence is frequent, routine, commonplace and essentially universal among humanity;
- (d) Although potentially influenced by our consciousness, their origin is outside of the conscious will and beyond the process of conscious decision-making.

Their commonness indicates that these phenomena are manifestations of a single phenomenon:

**A powerful force originating outside of our consciousness that nurtures our spiritual growth.**

This force has consistently been recognised by the religious, who have applied to it the name of grace. We cannot touch this force. We have no appropriate way to measure it. Yet it exists. It is real.

We cannot even locate this force. We have only said where it is not: residing - in our consciousness. Then, where does it reside? Some of the phenomena of grace suggest that grace resides in the unconscious mind of the individual. Other phenomena indicate that this force exists way beyond the boundaries of the individual.

The religious, who, of course, ascribe the origins of grace to God, believe it to be literally God's love, but throughout the ages have had the same difficulty in locating God. There are within theology two contrary traditions: one which holds that grace emanates down from an external God to man; the other which holds that grace is immanent of the God within the centre of man's being.

This problem, the whole problem of paradox, in fact, results from our desire to locate things. We have a profound tendency to conceptualise in terms of discrete entities.

However, consider an alternative way of thinking of the individual. Think of him or her not as a true individual entity, but one with boundaries marked by a most permeable membrane through which, under which and over which

other "entities" may climb, crawl or flow. Just as our conscious mind is continually partially permeable to our unconscious, so is our unconscious permeable to the "mind" without, the "mind" that permeates us yet is not us as entities.

"For as the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skin and the bones in the flesh and the heart in the whole, so are we, soul and body, clad in the goodness of God and enclosed. Yea, and more homely; for all these may wear and waste away, but the Goodness of God is ever whole."

DAME JULIAN OF NORWICH (c.1393)

Regardless of how we ascribe them or where we locate them, the following described "miracles" indicate that our growth as is assisted by a force other than our conscious will.

### **The miracle of health**

It is an amazing fact that so many psychotherapists' clients are in remarkable mental health. It is seldom that clients are not basically more healthy mentally than their parents are. We know why people become mentally ill. What we don't understand is why we survive the traumas in our lives as well as we do. We can probably know why certain people commit suicide. We don't know, within the ordinary concepts of causality, why certain others don't commit suicide.

**All we can say is that there is a force, the mechanics of which we do not fully understand, that seems to operate routinely in most of us to protect and foster our mental health even under the most adverse of conditions.**

Although the concept of resistance is most commonly applied to the infectious diseases, it can also be applied to all physical disease in one way or another, except that in the instance of non-infectious disease we have almost no knowledge of how resistance works. Individuals with a certain personality pattern seem to have different types of difficulty in resisting a particular disorder, while the vast majority of us have no difficulty whatsoever. How does this happen? We don't know. These questions can be asked about almost all diseases, including the most common ones, such as heart attacks, strokes, cancer, peptic ulcers and others. An increasing number of thinkers are beginning to suggest that almost all disorders are psychosomatic - that the psyche is somehow involved in the causation of the various failures that occur in the resistance system.

The amazing thing is not these failures of the resistance system; it is that the resistance system works as well as it does. In the ordinary course of things we should be eaten alive by bacteria, consumed by cancer, clogged up by fats and

clots, eroded by acids. It is hardly remarkable that we sicken and die; what is truly remarkable is that we don't normally often get sick and we don't die very quickly.

**We can therefore say the same thing about physical disorders as we said about mental disorders: There is a force, the mechanism of which we do not fully understand, that seems to operate routinely in most of us to protect and encourage our physical health even under the most adverse conditions.**

The matter of accidents raises further interesting questions. We need to apply the concept of resistance to accidents as well as to disease, to think in terms of accident-resistance as well as accident-proneness. It is not simply that certain people at certain times of their lives are accident-prone; it is also that in the ordinary course of things most of us are accident-resistant.

Most of us will find in our own experience patterns of repeated narrowly averted disasters, a number of accidents that almost happened that is many times greater than the number of accidents that actually did happen. Furthermore, we may acknowledge that our personal patterns of survival, of accident-resistance, are not the result of any process of conscious decision-making. Could it be that most of us do lead "charmed lives"? Could it really be that the line in the hymn is true: "'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far"?

We may think there is nothing exciting about all this, that what we are talking about are simply manifestations of the survival instinct. Actually, the matter of accidents suggests that our tendency towards survival may be something other than, and even more miraculous than an instinct, which is a phenomenon miraculous enough in itself. While we understand hardly anything about instincts, we do conceive of them as operating within the boundaries of the individual who possesses them. Resistance to mental disorders or physical disease we can imagine is localised within the unconscious mind or bodily processes of the individual. Accidents, however, involve interactions between individuals or between individuals and inanimate things. It is clear that our traditional concept of instinct will not be of help. Of more assistance perhaps will be the concept of synchronicity.

### **The miracle of serendipity**

We still have no conceivable explanation for so-called "psychic-phenomena" that are clearly related to the operation of the unconscious.

The fact that highly implausible events, for which no cause can be determined within the framework of known natural law, occur with implausible frequency has come to be known as the principle of synchronicity. It is the timing that is the important, perhaps crucial, element in these implausible

events. The principle of synchronicity does not explain why or how events happened; it simply states that such implausible conjunctions of events in time occur more frequently than would be predicted by chance alone. It does not explain miracles. It serves to make clear that miracles seem to be matters of timing and matters that are extremely commonplace.

Another characteristic of psychic phenomena is that a significant number of such occurrences seem to be fortunate - in some way beneficial to one or more of the people involved.

It is possible that occurrences statistically improbable to a degree to suggest they are examples of synchronicity or the paranormal are as likely to be harmful as they are beneficial. (We hear of freak accidents as well as freak non-accidents.) However, the impression is that the frequency of such statistically improbable occurrences that are clearly beneficial is far greater than that in which the result seems detrimental. The beneficial results of such occurrences need not be life-saving; far more often they are simply life enhancing or growth producing.

**Paranormal events with beneficial consequences can be defined as the phenomenon of serendipity, i.e. "the gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for". There is significance in the term, "gift". It implies that some people have it, while others don't, that some people are fortunate while others are not. If grace is, "valuable or agreeable things not sought for", it would seem to be available to everyone. However, some of us take advantage of it, while others do not. One of the reasons we fail to take full advantage of grace is that we are not fully aware of its presence. Serendipitous events occur to us all, but we frequently fail to recognise their serendipitous nature; we consider them unremarkable and, consequently, fail to take full advantage of them.**



## The Phenomena of Grace (2)

- **The miracle of evolution**
- **The miracle of the unconscious**
- **Exploration**

### **The miracle of evolution**

Our bodies may undergo the changes of the life cycle, but they do not evolve. Decline of physical competence in old age is inevitable. Within our lifetimes, however, our spirits may evolve dramatically. Our spiritual competence can (but usually does not) increase until the moment of death in advanced old age. Our lifetime offers us unlimited opportunities for spiritual growth until the end.

The process of physical evolution is similar to spiritual evolution and provides us with a model for further understanding the process of spiritual growth and the meaning of grace.

Given what we understand of the universe, evolution should not occur. One of the basic laws of nature states that energy naturally flows from a state of greater organisation to a state of lesser organisation, from a state of higher differentiation to a state of lower differentiation. In other words, the universe is in the process of winding down. Ultimately, the universe will completely wind down until it reaches its lowest state as an amorphous, totally disorganised, totally undifferentiated "blob" in which nothing happens anymore. This state is termed "entropy" and may be regarded as a force.

We can now see that the "flow" of evolution is against the force of entropy. The process of evolution has been the development of organisms from lower to higher states of complexity, differentiation and organisation.

**Spiritual growth is a difficult effort because it too is conducted against natural resistance and a natural inclination to keep things the way they were, to cling to old maps and old way of doing things and to take the easy path. The miracle is that this resistance is overcome. We do grow. We do become better people; not all of us, not easily, but in significant enough numbers to improve our cultures and ourselves. As we evolve as individuals, so do we cause our society to evolve? There is a force that**

**pushes us to choose the more difficult path, to transcend the mire into which we were born. Each of us has his or her own urge to grow and each of us must fight his or her own resistance.**

The notion that the plane of our spiritual development is ascending may seem unrealistic to people disillusioned with the dream of progress. Everywhere is war, corruption and pollution. How could one reasonably suggest that the human race is progressing spiritually? But, it is our very disillusionment that arises from our increased expectations. We expect more of ourselves than previous generations. Human behaviour that was once a matter of course is now considered repugnant and outrageous, e.g. the quality of parenting, while on average still poor is considerably better than a few generations ago.

**What is this force that pushes us, and so our whole species, to grow against the natural resistance of our own lethargy? We have already considered it. It is love. Love was defined as, "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's personal and spiritual growth". When we grow, it is because we are working at it, because we love ourselves. It is through love that we elevate ourselves. It is through love for others that we help them to elevate themselves. Love, the extension of the self, is the very act of evolution in progress. It is a miraculous evolutionary force, present in all our life, which defies the natural law of entropy.**

Where does love come from? Where does the whole force of evolution come from? What of grace (for love is conscious, but grace is not)? What is the origin of this powerful force, outside of human consciousness, that nurtures our spiritual growth?

### **The miracle of the unconscious**

**If we work long enough and hard enough to understand ourselves, we will come to discover a vast part of our minds - the unconscious - of which we have little awareness but which contains riches beyond imagination.**

One way that we know of the existence of this vast but hidden realm of the mind and the wealth it contains is through dreams. In dreams, the unconscious can produce dramas that elucidate the causes of problems of which we have previously been unaware. Sometimes, however, the significance of dreams completely eludes us and it is tempting to wish that the unconscious would speak to us in clearer language. But, on those occasions when we succeed in making the translation, the message always seems one designed to nurture our spiritual growth. Dreams that can be interpreted invariably provide helpful information to the dreamer. This assistance comes in a variety of forms: warnings of personal pitfalls; guides to the solutions of problems we have been unable to solve; indications that we are wrong when we think we are right, and as correct encouragement when

we are probably right but think we are wrong; sources of information about ourselves; direction finders when we feel lost; pointers to the way we need to go when we are floundering.

Our unconscious may communicate to us when we are awake with as much elegance and benefit as when we are asleep, although in a slightly different form. This is the form of "idle thoughts" or even fragments of thoughts. Most of the time, as with dreams, we pay these idle thoughts no attention and cast them aside as if they were without significance. However, these "idle thoughts" can provide us, not only with insights into ourselves, but with dramatic insights into others or the world outside ourselves.

A third way in which the unconscious manifests itself and speaks to us, if we care to listen, is through "slips of the tongue" and other "mistakes" in behaviour or "Freudian slips", which Freud initially demonstrated to originate in the unconscious. When a client makes a slip in psychotherapy, the event is usually helpful to the process of therapy or healing. When the conscious mind of the client is trying to combat therapy, intent on hiding the true nature of the self from the therapist and from self-awareness, it is the unconscious that is allied to the therapist and struggling towards openness, honesty, truth and reality. Not all slips express hostility or denied "negative" feelings. They express all denied feelings, positive and negative. They express the truth, the way things really are as opposed to the way we like to think they are.

There is a seemingly alien and unwanted quality that is characteristic of material from the unconscious mind and the way it is presented in the conscious mind. It was partly because of this quality and the associated resistance of the conscious mind that Freud and his initial followers tended to perceive the unconscious as a repository of the primitive, antisocial and evil within us. It is as if they assumed that because the conscious did not want it, then the material from the unconscious must be "bad". Along the same lines, they tended to assume that mental illness somehow resided in the unconscious as a demon. To Jung fell the responsibility of initiating a correction in this view, which he did, in a variety of ways, including coining the phrase: **"The Wisdom of the Unconscious"**.

Our conscious self-concept diverges from the reality of the person we are. We are usually either less or more competent than we believe ourselves to be. The unconscious, however, knows who we really are.

**An essential task in the process of our spiritual development is the continuous work of bringing our conscious self-concept into progressively greater congruence with reality. When a large part of this lifelong task is completed relatively rapidly, as it is in psychotherapy, the client will often feel "reborn", joyfully admitting that they are not the person they were but**

**a totally new and different person. Such a person has no difficulty recognising the words of the hymn, "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see".**

If we identify our self with our self-concept or self-awareness or consciousness in general, then we must say, concerning the unconscious, that there is a part of us that is wiser than we are. We have referred to the "wisdom of the unconscious" in terms of self-knowledge and self-revelation. However, our unconscious is wiser than we are about everything.

Among the possible explanations for this is Jung's theory of the "Collective Unconscious", in which we inherit the wisdom of our ancestors without our having the personal experience. While this kind of knowledge may seem bizarre to the scientific mind, its existence is recognised in our common everyday language. Take the word "recognise" itself. When we are reading a book and come across an idea or theory that appeals to us, that "rings a bell" with us, we "recognise" it to be true. Yet, this idea or theory may be one that we have never before consciously thought of. The word "recognise" means to "re-know". We meet a concept, as if we knew it once upon a time, forgot it, but then recognised it as an old friend. It is as if all knowledge and all wisdom were contained in our minds and when we learn "something new" we are actually only discovering something that existed in our self all along.

This concept is similarly reflected in the word, "education" from the Latin meaning, "to bring out of" or "to lead forth". Therefore, when we educate ourselves, if we use the word seriously, we do not stuff something new into our minds; rather, we lead this something out, bringing it forth from the unconscious into our awareness. We were the possessors of the knowledge all along.

What is the source of this part of us that is wiser than we are? Jung's theory of the collective unconscious suggests that our wisdom is inherited. Recent scientific experiments into genetic material and memory suggest it is indeed possible to inherit knowledge, which is stored chemically in the brain, but speculation on the sophistication of the technology involved is hardly different from speculation on there being a God who orders the universe.

**Spiritual growth can be equated with the development of consciousness, i.e. the development of awareness in our conscious mind of knowledge along with our unconscious mind, which already possess that knowledge. It is a process of the conscious mind coming into synchrony with the unconscious mind.**

But, we still have not explained how it is that the unconscious possesses all this knowledge that we have not yet consciously learned.

## Exploration

1. How, where and when have you experienced the forces of evolution and entropy in your life?

2. Consider the following activities:

- Dreams
- Psychic Phenomena
- Solitude
- Meditation
- Free Association
- Brain Storming
- Keeping a Journal
- Hypnosis
- Prayer
- Listening to or Making Music
- Fantasising
- Moments of Clarity (like first thing in the morning or before you go to sleep)
- Reflection
- Jogging
- Being in touch with Nature

For those you are familiar with, say how they allow your unconscious to break through into your conscious.

3. On dreams, idle thoughts, slips of the tongue, mistakes etc. How do you usually deal with these "sources of wisdom"?

4. When have you taken one seriously and what did you learn?

5. How do you work on bringing your self-concept into progressively greater congruence with reality, or do you resist working on it?

## God - The Alpha and The Omega

- **Communion**
- **Spiritual power**
- **Exploration**

There would seem no better hypothesis to explain love and the force of evolution than the postulation of:

**A God who loves us, who wants us to grow.**

There would seem no better hypothesis to explain how it is that the unconscious possesses all knowledge that we have not yet consciously learned than the postulation of:

**A God who is intimately associated with each of us - so intimately that he is part of us.**

If we want to know the closest place to look for grace, it is within us. If we desire wisdom greater than our own, we can find it within us.

This suggests that the interface between God and man is in part the interface between our unconscious and our conscious. God is within us. God has been with us all along, is now and always will be.

**The ultimate goal of spiritual growth is for us to become as one with God.**

Since God is with us, certainly at the level of our unconscious, it is for the conscious self to become aware of God. It is to know with God. God wants us to know Him. We have all been growing towards God, who is the goal of our individual spiritual growth. This is the meaning of our individual existence. We are born that we might become, as a conscious individual, a new life of God.

**It is God who is the source of the evolutionary force and God who is the destination. This is what we mean when we say God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.**

Once we know God and become at one with Him, then we can through our

conscious decisions influence the world according to His will. Our lives will themselves become agents of God's grace. We will become one form of God's grace, working on His behalf among people, creating love where it did not exist before, encouraging others in raising their level of awareness, pushing forward the plane of human consciousness and evolving to higher levels of spirituality.

## **Communion**

There is a joy that comes with this knowledge. Indeed, there is no greater satisfaction than that of being competent, of really knowing what we are doing. Those who have grown the most spiritually are the most competent in living. There is even greater joy in communion with God. For when we know what we are doing, we are participating in the omniscience of God. With total awareness of the nature of a situation, of our motives for acting on it, of the results and ramifications of our action, we have attained that level of awareness that we normally only expect of God. Our conscious self has succeeded in coming into alignment with the will of God. We know with God.

Yet those who have attained this stage of spiritual growth, this state of awareness, are invariably possessed by a joyful humility. For they are aware that theirs is an unusual wisdom that has its origin in their unconscious and their connectedness to God. So, the truly powerful experience a diminution in their sense of self:

**"Let your will, not mine be done. Make me your instrument."**

Such a loss of self always brings with it a kind of calm ecstasy, not unlike the experience of being in love. Once aware of our connectedness to God, we experience a surcease of loneliness. There is communion.

## **Spiritual power**

Spiritual power is not simply awareness; it is the capacity to maintain our ability to still make decisions with greater and greater awareness. It is consciousness. God-like power is the power to make decisions with total awareness. Contrary to popular perception, omniscience does not make decision-making easier. The closer one comes to God, the more one feels sympathy for God. To participate in God's omniscience is also to share His agony.

Spiritual power can be distinguished from political power because it resides entirely within the individual, as opposed to a given position or money, and has nothing to do with the capacity to coerce others. Political power is unrelated to goodness or wisdom. Very stupid and evil people have walked

as kings on earth. People of great spiritual power may be wealthy and may on occasion occupy political positions of leadership, but they are as likely to be poor and lacking in political authority.

There is another facet of power: aloneness, i.e. the unavailability of someone to communicate with at your level of awareness. When we have evolved to the highest level of awareness, of spiritual power, we will likely have no one in our circle of acquaintances with whom to share such depth of understanding. One of the most poignant themes of the gospels is Christ's continual sense of frustration on finding that there was no one who could really understand him. No matter how hard he tried, how much he extended himself, he could not lift the minds of even his own disciples to his level. The wisest followed him but could not catch up with him. All his love could not relieve him of the necessity to lead by walking ahead, utterly alone. This kind of aloneness is common to all that travel the furthest on the journey of spiritual growth. It is such a burden that it could not be carried, except that as we outdistance our fellow humans our relationship to God inevitably becomes closer. In the communion of growing consciousness, of knowing with God, there is enough joy to sustain us.

## Exploration

1. The idea that God is actively nurturing you so that you can grow up to be like him can be both ecstatic and a terrifying thought. What possibilities does it bring you face to face with?

2. Why does God want us to grow?

3. What are we growing towards?

## Resistance to Grace

- **Laziness**
- **Fear**
- **Mental Illness**
- **Exploration**

Despite the joy we may experience, the idea of coming close to God is terrifying, to put it mildly. No idea ever came into our minds that places on us such a burden. The essence of the idea is simple, but if we believe it then it demands from us all that we can possibly give, all that we have and are.

**It is one thing to believe in a nice old God who will take care of us from a lofty position of power that we ourselves could never begin to attain. It is quite another to believe in a God who has it in mind for us precisely that we should attain His position, His power, His wisdom, His identity.**

Were we to believe it possible for man to become like God, this belief would place on us an obligation to attempt to attain the possible. But we do not want this obligation. We don't want to have to work that hard. We don't want God's responsibility. We don't want the responsibility of having to think all the time. As long as we believe it is impossible to become God-like, we don't have to worry about our spiritual growth, we don't have to push ourselves to higher levels of consciousness, we don't have to be more loving; we can relax and just be human.

If God is in His heaven and we are down here, and never shall we meet, then He can have all the responsibility for evolution and the direction of the universe. We can do our bit towards assuring ourselves a comfortable old age, hopefully complete with health, happiness and grateful children and grandchildren; but beyond that we need not bother ourselves. These goals are difficult enough to achieve and should not be disparaged, but once we believe it is possible for man to become like God then we can never really rest and say our work is done.

We must constantly push ourselves to greater wisdom and greater effectiveness. By this belief we will have committed ourselves until the moment of our death to self-improvement and spiritual growth. God's responsibility must be our own.

**It is no wonder then that belief in the possibility of becoming God-like is repugnant. The idea that God is actively nurturing us so that we might grow up to be like Him brings us face to face with our own laziness.**

## **Laziness**

**Ultimately, there is only one impediment to spiritual growth: laziness. If we overcome our laziness, then all other impediments can be overcome. If we do not overcome laziness, then none of the other hurdles will be overcome.**

In looking at discipline we considered the laziness of attempting to avoid necessary suffering - taking the easy way out. In looking at love we considered the laziness of nonlove - the unwillingness to extend our self.

Laziness is something we have in common with everybody else. It is the closest we can get to the idea of "original sin". It makes sense of the biblical story of the serpent and the apple.

The key lies in what is missing. The story suggests that God habitually walked in the garden in the cool of the day and that there were open channels of communication between Him and man. But, if this was so, then why did Adam and Eve, separately and together, before or after the serpent's urging, not say to God, "We are curious as to why you do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We really like it here and we don't want to seem ungrateful, but your law on the matter doesn't make much sense to us. We'd really appreciate it if you could explain it to us". But, of course, they did not say this. Instead they went ahead and broke the law, without making the effort to challenge God directly, question His authority or even communicate with Him on a reasonably adult level. They listened to the serpent, but they failed to get God's side of the story before they acted.

Why this failure? Why was no step taken between the temptation and the action? It is this missing step that is the essence of our sin of laziness. The missing step was debate. Adam and Eve could have set up a debate between the serpent and God, but in failing to do so, they failed to obtain God's side of the question. The debate between God and the serpent is symbolic of the debate between good and evil that can and should occur in our minds. Our failure to conduct, fully and wholeheartedly, this internal debate between good and evil is the cause of those evil actions, which constitute sin.

**In deliberating the wisdom of a proposed course of action, we routinely fail to get God's view on the issue. We fail to listen to God within us, to the knowledge of rightness, which inherently resides in all our minds. We fail because we are lazy.**

To hold these internal debates is work. They require time and energy. If we take them seriously and listen to God within us, we usually find ourselves being urged to take a more difficult path, the path of more effort rather than less. To conduct the debate is to open us to suffering and struggle. We all hold back to some degree. Like our ancestors - right back to Adam and Eve - we are all lazy.

## **Fear**

Our laziness is very real. It is the force of entropy within us, holding us back from spiritual evolution. But, it not only relates to the number of hours we spend on our work or devote to our responsibilities towards others. Laziness also takes the form of fear. We can say that it was not so much laziness that prevented Adam and Eve from questioning God as to the reasons behind His law, but fear in the face of an awesome God, fear of His wrath. So they attempted to take the easy way out, the illegitimate shortcut to knowledge they had not worked for, and hoped they could get away with it. But they did not. To question God may result in a lot of hard work, but the moral of the story is that it must be done.

Not all fear is laziness, but much of it is. We fear change from the status quo, a fear that we might lose what we have now if we venture forward. We fear new information because of the work that would be involved in incorporating it into our maps of reality. Consequently, we resist its assimilation. We fear new commitments and responsibilities, new relationships and new levels of existence. Consequently, we resist extending ourselves in love.

**Psychotherapists know that although clients come to them seeking change, they are actually terrified of change - of the work of change. It is because of this fear or laziness and the realisation that the process will require us to accept total responsibility for our condition that most of us who begin, however eagerly, the process of psychotherapy drop out long before it has been completed.**

In the earlier stages of spiritual growth, we are mostly unaware of our own laziness, although we may pay lip service to it. As we move towards the more advanced stages of spiritual growth, we become acutely aware of our own laziness. The fight against entropy never ends. No matter how seemingly healthy and spiritually evolved we are, there is still a part of us that does not want to exert us, that clings to the old and familiar, desiring comfort and fearing the pain of change even when the penalty is ineffectiveness, stagnation or regression.

## **Mental illness**

We live our lives in a real world. To live them well it is necessary that we come to understand that reality as best we can. Such understanding does not come easily. Many aspects of the reality of the world and our relationship to it are painful to us. We can understand them only through effort and suffering. We ignore the painful aspects of reality by thrusting unpleasant facts out of our awareness. In other words, we attempt to defend our consciousness, our awareness, from reality.

We do this by means that psychologists call defence mechanisms. All of us employ such defences, thus limiting our awareness. If, in our laziness and fear of suffering, we massively defend our awareness, then our understanding of the world will bear little or no relation to reality. Because our behaviour is based on our understanding, it will then become unrealistic. When this occurs to a sufficient degree, other people will recognise that we are "out of touch with reality" and will deem us to be mentally ill - even though we ourselves are most likely convinced of our sanity. But, long before that extreme has been reached we will have been served notice by our unconscious of our increasing maladjustment.

Although our conscious mind has denied reality, our unconscious, which is omniscient, knows the truth and attempts to help us out by stimulating, through symptom formation, our conscious mind to the awareness that something is wrong. The means employed may be bad dreams, anxiety attacks, depression and other symptoms.

**We are considering the thesis that the conscious is the seat of psychopathology and mental disorders are disorders of consciousness. It is because our conscious self resists our unconscious wisdom that we become ill. It is precisely because our consciousness is disordered that conflict occurs between it and the unconscious that seeks to heal it. In other words, mental illness occurs when our will deviates substantially from the will of God, when our conscious deviates from the wisdom of our own unconscious. The painful and unwanted symptoms of mental illness can therefore be seen as manifestations of grace.**

As is common with grace, most of us reject this gift and do not heed the message. We do this in a variety of ways, all of which attempt to avoid the responsibility for our illness. We try to ignore the illness by pretending they are not real symptoms, that they are common to everyone. We try to get around them by quitting jobs, stopping certain activities, leaving relationships, moving to new places etc. We attempt to rid ourselves of the symptoms with painkillers, little pills from the doctor, or by using alcohol or other drugs with which to anaesthetise ourselves.

Even if we do accept our symptoms, we will usually, in many subtle ways, blame the world outside ourselves - uncaring relatives, false friends, greedy businesses, a sick society or even fate - for our condition.

**Only when we accept responsibility for our symptoms, when we realise that our symptoms are a manifestation of a disorder within us, will we heed the message of our unconscious and accept its grace. We must accept our own inadequacy and the pain of the work necessary to heal us.**

To all that are willing to face the pain of psychotherapy comes great reward. It was of them that Christ spoke in the first of the beatitudes: "Blessed are poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Most of us must still be taught to assume total responsibility for ourselves as part of our healing. This training can be a painstaking process when a therapist methodically confronts clients with their avoidance of responsibility again and again.

Those who have faced their mental illness, accepted total responsibility for it and made the necessary changes in themselves to overcome it, find themselves not only cured and free from the curses of their childhood and ancestry but also living in a new and different world. What they once perceived as problems they now perceive as opportunities. What were once loathsome barriers are now welcome challenges. Previously unwanted thoughts become helpful insights; previously disowned feelings become sources of energy and guidance. Occurrences that once seemed to be burdens now seem to be gifts, including the symptoms from which they have recovered.

**Even if they emerge from therapy without a belief in God, such successful clients generally do so with a very real sense that they have been touched by grace.**

Psychotherapy is only a tool - a discipline. It is up to the client to choose or reject the tool and, once chosen, it is the client who determines how much to use the tool and to what end.

A therapist may be tempted to think at the successful conclusion of a case that they have "cured" the client. But the reality is that they have been no more than a catalyst - and fortunate to be that since, ultimately, people heal themselves with or without the tool of psychotherapy. Why is it that so few do and so many do not?

**Since the path of personal and spiritual growth, albeit difficult, is open to all, why do so few choose to travel it?**

Christ addressed this question when he said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14, also Matthew 20:16). But why is it that so few are chosen and what is it that distinguishes those few from the many? The answer that most psychotherapists are accustomed to give is based on a concept of differing severity of psychopathology. In other words, they believe that while most people are sick, some are sicker than others are and the most sick will be the most difficult to heal. Moreover, the severity and the earliness of parental deprivation experienced in childhood directly determine the severity of mental illness.

This schema is useful in many ways, but nonetheless incomplete. It, for instance, ignores the importance of parenting in late childhood and adolescence. It fails to take into account in the individual client the ephemeral something that might be called the "will to grow". A client may be extremely ill, yet possess a strong will to grow so healing will occur.

On the other hand, a client with a relatively mild neurosis, but who lacks the will to grow will not progress from an unhealthy position. The will to grow will therefore be one crucial determinant in the success or failure of psychotherapy.

**The will to grow is in essence the same phenomenon as love. Love is the will to extend one's self for personal and spiritual growth. Genuinely loving people are, by definition, growing people.**

## Exploration

1. Grace originates in a God who is "intimately associated with us - so intimately that He is part of us" and, "We are born that we might become, as a conscious individual, a new life form of God". What are your gut reactions to this postulation? Write down your thoughts quickly and without premeditation, stopping only when you can write no more.

2. How are you resisting grace?

3. Through grace,  
(a) Barriers become....

(b) Unwanted thoughts become....

(c) Feelings become....

(d) Symptoms become....

4. Imagine you have a close friend who is struggling with mental illness. Write a brief note to them outlining your new insights into grace and mental illness.

## Welcoming Grace

- **Peace (but not as the world gives)**
- **Accepting the call to grace**
- **Mystery and paradox**
- **Our own journey**
- **Exploration**

Our capacity to love and hence our will to grow is nurtured, not only by the love of our parents during childhood, but also throughout our lives by grace, or God's love. This is a powerful force, external to our own consciousness, which operates through the agency of our own unconscious, through additional mediums that we do not understand and through loving people other than our parents.

**It is because of grace that people are able to transcend the traumas of loveless parenting and become themselves loving individuals who have risen far above their parents on the scale of human evolution.**

Why, then, do only some people grow spiritually and evolve beyond the circumstance of their parentage? Grace is available to everyone as we are all cloaked in the love of God, but most of us choose not to heed the call of grace and reject its help. Christ's assertion, "Many are called, but few are chosen" could be translated as, "All of us are called to and by grace, but few of us choose to listen to the call".

The question then becomes why is it that so few of us choose to heed the call of grace? Why do most of us actually resist grace? Grace provides us with a certain unconscious resistance to illness. How then, do we seem to possess an almost equal resistance to health? The answer to these questions has already been given. It is our laziness, our submission to entropy. Just as grace is the force that pushes us to ascend the ladder of spiritual growth and human evolution, so entropy causes us to resist that force, to stay at the comfortable easy rung where we are now, or even to descend to less and less demanding forms of existence.

## **Peace (but not as the world gives)**

**However, the call to grace is a promotion, a call to a position of higher responsibility and power. To be aware of grace, to personally experience its constant presence, to know one's nearness to God, is to know and constantly experience an inner tranquillity and peace that few people possess.**

This knowledge and awareness brings with it an enormous responsibility, for to experience one's closeness to God is also to experience the obligation to be like God, to be the agent of His power and love. The call to grace is a call to a life of caring, a life of service. It is a call out of spiritual childhood into adulthood.

"Reflect now, how our Lord himself spoke of peace. He said to his disciples, 'My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you'. Did he mean peace as we think of it? .... If you ask that, remember then that he said also, 'Not as the world gives, give I unto you'. So then he gave to his disciples peace, but not peace as the world gives."

So, with the peace of grace come agonising responsibilities, duties and obligations. It is not surprising that so many well-qualified people have no desire to assume the mantle.

**Psychotherapists are familiar with the fact that people are routinely terrified by mental health. A major task of psychotherapy is not only to bring patients to the experience of mental health but also, through a mixture of consolation, reassurance and sternness, to prevent them from running away from that experience once they have arrived at it.**

One aspect of this fearfulness is legitimate: the fear that if we become powerful we might misuse power.

**If people progress far enough in psychotherapy they will eventually leave behind the feeling that they cannot cope with a merciless and overwhelming world. One day they will realise that they have it in their power to do what ever they want.**

The realisation of this freedom is frightening. If it is experienced as a call to grace, then the response is likely to be, "O Lord, I fear I am not worthy of your trust in me". This fear is part of our diligence and love, useful in our self-governance in that it prevents the abuse of power. However, it should not be so great as to prevent us from heeding the call to grace and assuming the power of which we are capable. Some of us who have been called to grace wrestle for years with our fearfulness before we are able to transcend it so as to accept our own godliness.

## **Accepting the call to grace**

We may fear the abuse of power, but for most of us it is not the central issue in our resistance to grace. We believe that the freedom and power of adulthood are due to us, but we have little taste for adult responsibility and self-discipline. We seem to need to have powers above us to blame for our condition, be they parents, society or fate.

**To rise to an exalted position of such power that we have no one to blame but ourselves would be a fearful one were it not for God's presence with us. We would be terrified by our aloneness. Even then, many of us have little capacity to tolerate the aloneness of power so we reject God's presence rather than experience mastery over our own lives. We want peace without the aloneness of power. We want the self-confidence of adulthood without having to grow up.**

The process of psychological maturation is inseparable from spiritual growth. The call to grace is ultimately a summons to be as one with God; the call to total adulthood is a summons to greater and greater responsibility. Very few of us answer unambivalently and unhesitatingly.

We are accustomed to imagining the experience of conversion or a sudden call to grace as an "Oh, joy!" phenomenon. More often than not, it will be an "Oh, shit!" phenomenon. At the moment we finally listen to the call we may say, "Oh, thank you, Lord"; or we may say, "O Lord, I am not worthy", or "O Lord, do I have to?"

## **Mystery and paradox**

So the fact that "many are called, but few are chosen" is easily explainable in view of the difficulties inherent in responding to the call of grace. How then, do the few who do, heed the call to grace? What distinguishes them from the many? We don't really know.

We may come from wealthy, cultured or educated backgrounds or from impoverished, superstitious or deprived ones. We may have had basically loving parents, but we are as likely to have experienced deprivation of genuine parental affection and concern. We may come to psychotherapy with minor difficulties of adjustment or with overwhelming mental illness. We may be old or young. We may heed the call to grace suddenly and with apparent ease or we may fight against it, only gradually and painfully giving way to it.

**There is no way for a psychotherapist to predict which of their clients will respond to therapy, which will respond with significant but still partial growth, or which will respond, miraculously, growing all the way into**

**grace. Christ himself spoke of the unpredictability of grace when he said to Nicodemus: "Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell from where it comes or to where it will go, so it is with the Spirit. We do not know on whom He will next bestow his life from heaven" (John 3:8 - Living Bible). Much as we have been able to say about the phenomena of grace, in the end we are left having to acknowledge the mystery.**

Paradoxically, whether or not we become blessed by grace is a matter of our choice. Essentially, the truth is that grace is earned. Yet, it is not that way at all. We do not come to grace; grace comes to us. Try as we might to obtain grace, it may elude us. We may not seek it, yet it will find us. Consciously we may avidly desire the spiritual life but then discover many stumbling blocks in our way. Or, we may have little taste for the spiritual life but find we are vigorously called in spite of ourselves.

While on one level we do choose whether or not to heed the call of grace, on another it seems clear that God is the one who does the choosing. The common experience of those who have achieved a state of grace, on whom "this new life from heaven" has been bestowed, is one of amazement at their condition. They do not feel that they have earned it. While they may be aware of the particular goodness of their nature, they do not ascribe their nature to their own will; rather, they distinctly feel that hands wiser and more skilled than their own have created the goodness of their nature. Those who are closest to grace are the most aware of the mysterious character of the gift they have been given.

We can't resolve this paradox. Perhaps the best we can say is that while we cannot will ourselves to grace, we can by will open ourselves to its miraculous coming. We can prepare ourselves to be a fertile ground, a welcoming place. If we can make ourselves into totally disciplined, wholly loving people, then though we may be ignorant of theology and give little thought to God, we will have prepared ourselves well for the coming of grace. Conversely, the study of theology is a relatively poor method of preparation and, by itself, completely useless.

The existence of grace can be of considerable assistance to those who have chosen to travel the difficult path of spiritual growth. This awareness will facilitate their journey in at least three ways:

- it will help them to take advantage of grace along the way;
- it will give them a surer sense of direction; and,
- it will provide encouragement.

The paradox that we both choose grace and are chosen by grace is the essence of the phenomenon of serendipity. This was defined as "the gift of finding

valuable or agreeable things not sought for".

The same phenomenon is routinely demonstrated by the way clients use dreams in psychotherapy. To use dreams fully we must work to be aware of their value and to take advantage of them when they come to us. We must also work sometimes at not seeking them or expecting them. We must let them be true gifts.

So it is with grace. The same paradoxical approach should be taken to all the other forms: sudden insights, premonitions and all other synchronistic and serendipitous events and also with love. Everyone wants to be loved, but first we must make ourselves loveable. We do this by becoming ourselves loving, disciplined people. If we seek to be loved, if we expect to be loved, this cannot be accomplished; we will be dependent and grasping, not genuinely loving. But when we nurture others and ourselves without a primary concern of finding reward, then we will have become loveable and the reward of being loved, which we have not sought, will find us. So it is with human love and so it is with God's love.

Let us redefine serendipity not as a gift itself, but as a learned capacity to recognise and use the gifts of grace that is given to us from beyond the realm of our conscious will. With this capacity, we will find that the invisible hand and unimaginable wisdom of God guide our journey of spiritual growth with infinitely greater accuracy than that of which our unaided conscious will is capable. So guided, the journey becomes faster.

### **Our own journey**

**The journey of spiritual growth requires courage, initiative and independence of thought and action. While the words of the prophets and the assistance of grace are available, the journey must still be travelled alone. No words can be said, no teaching can be taught that will relieve spiritual travellers from the necessity of picking their own ways, working out with effort and anxiety their own paths through the unique circumstances of their own lives towards the identification of their individual selves with God.**

Even when we truly understand this, the journey of spiritual growth is still so lonely and difficult that we become discouraged. However, once we see the reality of grace, our understanding of ourselves as meaningless and insignificant is shattered. The fact that there exists beyond our conscious will and us a powerful force that nurtures our growth and evolution is enough to turn our notions of self-insignificance upside down. For the existence of this force (once we see it) indicates with uncontrovertible certainty that our human spiritual growth is of the utmost importance to something greater

than we are. This something we call God. The existence of grace is prima facie evidence not only of the reality of God, but also of the reality of God's will is devoted to the growth of the individual human spirit.

We live our lives in the eye of God, not at the periphery but at the centre of his vision. We are his concern. It is probable that the universe as we know it is but a single stepping stone towards the entrance to the Kingdom of God. But we are hardly lost in the universe. To the contrary, the reality of grace indicates humanity to be at the centre of the universe. This time and space exist for us to travel through.

**"The human race is in the midst of making an evolutionary leap. Whether or not we succeed in making that leap is our personal responsibility - each one of us."**

The universe, this stepping stone has been laid down to prepare a way for us. But we ourselves must step across it, step by step. Through grace we are helped not to stumble and through grace we are being welcomed. What more could we ask?

## Exploration

1. If the line from one side of the page to the other marked on one side with "I want none of it" and the other side with "I am open to all of it" represents your response to grace, at which point between these two extremes would you place yourself?

I want none of it <-----> I am open to all of it

2. Why did you choose to place yourself there?

3. How are you welcoming grace?

4. "We live our lives in the eye of God, and not at the periphery but at the centre of his vision." What feelings does this statement produce in you? (You may like to express them in the form of a poem or prayer.)

5. Did the exercise at (4) make you change your mind about your placing of your position for (1)? If you wish to make a change, do so. What are the reasons for your adjustment?

## Stages of Spiritual Growth

- **Stage One - Chaotic / Antisocial**
- **Stage Two - Formal / Institutional**
- **Stage Three - Sceptical / Individual**
- **Stage Four - Mystical / Communal**

In **Further Along The Road Less Travelled** (Simon & Schuster, 1993) M. Scott Peck developed further his ideas on spiritual growth and human nature. He realised that we are not all at the same place spiritually. He outlines four stages of spiritual growth or religious development. There is a need to be cautious and flexible when attempting to diagnose others or ourselves to see where they or we fit into this spectrum of spiritual growth. People can superficially appear to be in one stage when, in fact, they are someplace else entirely. These stages are more than just labels. It is important to understand them because of the sense of antagonism that exists between people at such different points on the spiritual journey. We may feel threatened by people still in the stage that we have just left, because we may not yet be secure in our new identity. But mainly the threat is the other way - we particularly feel threatened by the people in the stages ahead of us.

### **Stage One - Chaotic / Antisocial**

This is a stage of absent spirituality. People at this stage are utterly unprincipled. They can be called antisocial because while they are capable of pretending to love, actually all of their relationships with their fellow human beings are self-serving and covertly, if not overtly, manipulative. It is chaotic because, being unprincipled, they have no mechanism that might govern them other than their own will. Since the unharnessed will can go this way one day and that way the next, their being and living is consequently chaotic. People at this stage will frequently be found in trouble or difficulty. Their whole existence is a facade of coolness, yet they are invariably terrified of virtually everything and everyone.

People in stage one may occasionally get in touch with the chaos of their own being. When they do, it is perhaps the single most painful experience a person can have. Generally, they just ride it out; occasionally, they may convert to stage two. Such conversions are usually very sudden and dramatic. Something astonishing happens to the person, usually unconsciously or from

the prompting of the unconscious mind - recognising that the person is ready to change. That person may then say to themselves, "I am willing to do anything in order to free myself from this chaos, even to submit myself to something other than myself for my governance".

### **Stage Two - Formal / Institutional**

This is a stage where people in it are dependent on an institution for their governance. It may be a prison, a psychiatric unit, the military, a highly organised business organisation or a cult. But, for most people it is the church. Indeed, it could be said that most churchgoers fall into stage two. It is formal because they become attached to the forms of religion. They become upset if someone starts changing forms or rituals, altering their liturgy or introducing new hymns. No wonder! It is precisely those forms that they depend upon for their liberation from chaos. They tend to be threatened by the sceptics of stage three and, more than anything by the stage four people who seem to believe in the same things they do, yet do so with a kind of freedom that they find terrifying.

People's religious behaviour at this stage is characterised by a vision of God that is almost entirely an external being. They have little understanding of that of God that is within them, within each one of us, what theologians term immanent - the dwelling divinity within the human spirit. They think of God as almost totally up there, out there. They have a masculine model of God, and while they believe Him to be a loving being, they also ascribe to Him a certain kind of punitive power that He is not afraid to use on occasion. It is the vision of God as a giant benevolent policeman in the sky. Because, in many cases, this is exactly what people in stage two need.

### **Stage Three - Sceptical / Individual**

People in this stage will have become principled and self-governing, no longer dependent on an institution for their direction or control. In respect of church, they may have fallen away as agnostics or atheists. Nevertheless, they can be said to be ahead of people in stage two spiritually, even though they are not religious in the ordinary sense of the word. They are not in the least bit antisocial. Often they are deeply involved in society. They make committed and loving parents. Frequently, they are scientists or scientifically minded. They will be truth seekers; and, if they seek the truth deeply enough and widely enough, they begin to find what they are looking for. They get to fit enough pieces of truth together to catch glimpses of the big picture and see that it is very beautiful - strangely resembling some of the myths and superstitions common in stage two beliefs. They can dismiss the superstitions of stage two belief, but feel uncomfortable knowing that people in stage four can be scientifically minded like them, yet still believe in this God business!

## **Stage Four - Mystical / Communal**

Certain things can be said about mystics: They are people who have seen a web of cohesion beneath the surface of things. Throughout the ages, mystics have seen connections between men and women, between humans and other creatures, between people walking this earth and those who are not here. Sensing that kind of interconnectedness mystics of all cultures and religions have spoken in terms of unity and community. They have also always spoken in terms of paradox.

Mystical has at its root the word mystery. Mystics love mystery: They love to solve mysteries; and yet, at the same time, they know the more they solve, the more mystery they are going to encounter. They are very comfortable, nonetheless, living in the world of mystery. That is what distinguishes them from people in stage two, the people who are most uncomfortable when things are not cut and dried.