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2—If you feel so inclined, send a contribution to keep a starving artist going. Any amount helps and can be sent to the Fearless Puppy account at Community Bank NA, 205 Main Street, Brattleboro, Vermont, 05301, USA. I otherwise have no income other than $445 a month of Social Security.

I hope you enjoy the book and help circulate it as a personal favor to your friendly author as well as a favor to those who will receive it from you.

Questions? If so, jahbuddha13@hotmail.com is the address. I will answer as many emails as possible.

Thanks very much for your kindness and attention. Have a good reading ride around the world with the guy doctors said would die over four years ago, was actually pronounced dead at a hospital fifty years ago, and has been predicted to die many times in between. I hope you find this unique, real-life travel experience of an Undead to be just as unique and exciting a true adventure story for the living.

Thank you for reading and for passing it on.

Please stay well, Tenzin (Doug Ten Rose)

TITLE: Alive and Well on Earth

The Volunteer Crew Is:

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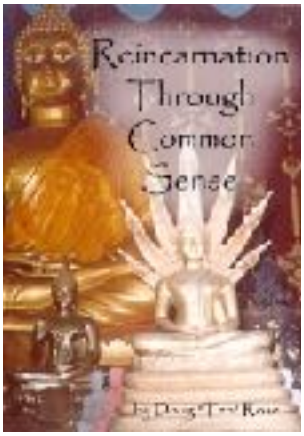
Please excuse the occasional bit of unusual spacing between words. This document was a tricky design but thanks to our volunteer tech wizards, the book is now comfortably readable for almost everyone!

PREVIOUS BOOKS BY THIS AUTHOR

"Once you accept the universe as being something expanding into an infinite nothing which is something, wearing stripes with plaid is easy." Albert Einstein



Reincarnation Through Common Sense is a book of stripes and plaid in the most entertaining sense of Einstein's words. Westerners have written many books about living in Asian temples. None are like this true story.

The rural Buddhist Monks and Nuns of a forest temple in Asia adopt a very troubled soul from Brooklyn, New York. He can't speak the language. No one there speaks English. He is penniless, has no intention of studying spiritual discipline, and is amusingly psychotic. This author is not a theology student! He nonetheless gains access to the ancient roots and spiritual wings that define the Wisdom Professionals who have rescued him. He redefines life and reports the details in a manner so intimate and natural that you'll think you are having coffee on a barstool in the temple with him. You may laugh a lot on your way to Nirvana! You may say "Ouch!" a few times, too.

Magic is redefined as objective reality and common sense. Spirit is presented as a functional friend, without the fairy dust. Moods run from adventurous psychosis

through enlightened bliss as writing styles run through ancient prose to sharp modern internal rhyme. The main character's life runs through death into reincarnation without ever leaving his body—and he describes this process in vivid terms and living color.

This down-to-earth treatment gives a clear view in simple terms of truths that we more often find fossilized within concretized symbols beneath rusting metaphor. For an experience unique in comedic drama, spirituality, adventure, and sheer creativity, buy and read **Reincarnation Through Common Sense**.

$21 in print e-book $5.75

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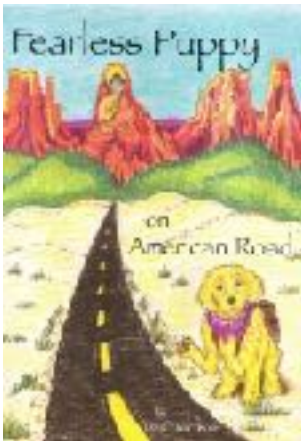

www.fearlesspuppy.info

Fearless Puppy on American Road This amazing (mostly) true story reads like a fantasy. Fearless Puppy is a transfictional self-help book. It is both comedic and dramatic—a butt kicking, page-turning adventure story that makes deep spiritual impressions.

Within this book you will meet saintly Tibetan Lamas. You will also meet a man who is his own uncle, specialists in smoke, mirrors, and invisibility, spirited sex, oxygen orgasms, heavenly Hell's Angels, phony preachers, domestic violence/domestic solutions, racist

killers in America, Canadian race wars, Native American wisemen, a bit of Christian ethics and Jewish ritual, angelic witches, benevolent heroin addicts, magical birds, an all-lesbian band playing a rock concert for the deaf, the musician raised by multi-ethnic golden-hearted prostitutes, martial artists battling neo-Nazis, a modern-day Robin Hood, and many other strangely wonderful people.

Buckle your seatbelt tightly, take a deep breath, and enjoy the ride. Fearless Puppy runs on rocket fuel!

$21 in print e-book $5.75 ISBN#978--0615781181

Doug "Ten" Rose may be the biggest smart-ass as well as one of the most entertaining survivors of the many hitchhiking adventurers that used to cover America's highways. He is the author of the books *Fearless Puppy on American Road* and *Reincarnation Through Common Sense*, has survived heroin addiction and death, and is also a graduate of many thousand miles of land travel without ever driving a car, owning a phone, or having a bank account. Tenzin Rose and his work are a vibrant part of the present and future as well as an essential remnant of a vanishing breed.

This book will seem strange in spots. It contains live links to some unusual and exotic photos as well as containing some unusual and exotic information in the text. Single photos will load instantly from my Google Drive to this document. Photo collections may take just a few minutes. Have patience. The photos are worth it! Here is an example. I bet you've never before seen a swastika depicted in the center of a Jewish star painted on the front of a school. Click on this live link and you will! Both of these symbols have been part of Asian culture for many thousands of years. They are unrelated to the Jewish faith and totally unrelated to Nazis.

The ancient, original, and more positively oriented Asian meanings of these symbols are:

1—The hexagram represents wisdom. The joining of masculine and feminine energies is symbolized by the two joined and inverted triangles.

2—What we know as the dread Nazi swastika is really an ancient and innocent symbol of prosperity. It was so in Asia long before Nazis co-opted it.

Welcome to a different world, same planet!

Enjoy the ride!

This is a very true story. A few names, times, and other minor details have been changed to protect the guilty.

"Fix reason firmly in her seat and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear." **Thomas Jefferson**

"The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion all rolled into one." **John Ruskin**

"The only devils in the world are the ones running around in our hearts, and that's where all our battles should be fought." **Mahatma Gandhi**

"When obstacles are used as inspiration instead of being suffered as intimidation, the odds of success increase drastically." **Tenzin Kharma Trinley**

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THEN

Beginnings

My name is Tenzin Kharma Trinley. That translates from Tibetan to English as “The Activity of the Buddha Teaching.”

There are two reasons why I haven't already killed you or several people just like you: hallucinogenic drugs and a collection of thirteen songs.

I wasn't always Tenzin. I grew up as Doug Rose, the lone Jewish maniac in a Sicilian Mafia neighborhood. At the age of fourteen I became the only person to ever take Killer Tortello’s best punch and stay conscious as well as the only one to ever back down a half-dozen mafia kids my own age at knifepoint. This earned me the nickname “The Crazy Jew,” and enough respect for me to survive the rest of my childhood. The neighborhood folks thought of me as an emanation of Benjamin “Bugsy" Siegel, the legendary Jewish gangster famous for violent insanity, altruism, and the idea that became Las Vegas. By the time puberty kicked into high gear, I was well on my way to becoming a killer.

I steered clear of the mob whenever possible. Non-Sicilians didn’t do well with them in the long run. Even the organization's best friends, if not full-blood Sicilian, could count on eventually being used as a fall guy to take the rap for a Sicilian “family” member.

That possibility never caught my attention. I had a bigger problem than being an independent teenage drug

dealer who was working discreetly within mob territory and without their blessing. I was much more dangerous to myself than the Mafia, police, or rip-offs ever were to me. As neighborhood violence and mayhem were happening all around me, I was busily trying to kill myself.

At one point, friends that assumed me to be already dead from a drug overdose brought me to Coney Island Hospital. One doctor put a shot of adrenaline into my heart. It didn't work. That doctor pronounced me dead. Another doctor said no. The second doctor gave me a second shot. That one worked.

A bizarre shift happened shortly after that incident. Its result has endured for well over a half-century and is still building.

My methamphetamine and tranquilizer-addled parents listened for years to their unstable child whine about getting a dog. They finally gave in with a promise that within two weeks we would drive from our home in Brooklyn to Long Island's Bide-A-Wee animal shelter and adopt one. They had no clue about my plan to name the animal Assassin and teach it to kill people. I built a training dummy of old clothes stuffed with newspapers and impatiently waited for the day Assassin's training could begin.

As my plans were taking shape, fate kicked their ass. I guess it would be more accurate to say that fate

knocked me into a whole new world where plans like mine were simply no longer relevant. *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* musical album was released and I began a decades-long love affair with LSD during the two weeks of waiting to adopt the dog that would have become Assassin.

The dog was instead named Sergeant Pepper and became the gentlest, kindest dog in the neighborhood. She was a big hit with all the neighbors because in the 1960s, my German Shepherd/Boxer mix was the only female sergeant in existence. She was especially popular with the old folks that were unaware of The Beatles, LSD, or the future of the military. The old folks in the neighborhood laughed themselves silly at the concept of a female soldier. They would cross the street through heavy traffic to place a hand near Sargie's head. Sargie would bump her head up into that hand to beg for some petting. The neighbors obliged with a short laugh and a long smile.

The dummy built for Assassin's training was used in an almost harmless Halloween prank. It was thrown out of a fourth floor window accompanied by my blood-curdling scream in an attempt to scare the balls off that old pain in the ass, Mr. Perlmutter, as he walked below. It did. He peed himself.

I have been spending the rest of life as a wannabe do-gooder instead of a short-lived hitman. It hasn't all

been easy. Decades of mental work done on the edge of sanity were invested in an effort to convert the violent and crazy tendencies into kind and considerate habits. At times those efforts got a little too strenuous, slipped away from me, and fell over sanity's edge.

Now, over fifty years later, I've almost completely dissolved the dangerous personality of that deranged teenager. It took decades of cross-country hitchhiking, a lot of study without classrooms, and determination. I had no phone full of friends' numbers, no home base, and no bank account for backup. Mistakes were made. Mishaps, traumas, and even disasters happened. There still are some, but they are a lot fewer and milder than they used to be.

The best explanation of how I turned myself, and how anyone can turn themselves, from a semi-crazed animal into a semi-decent human is within this old Cherokee legend.

A boy asked his grandmother, "Why are some of the people so good and some people are so bad?"

The eighty-year-old Cherokee woman answered, "There are two wolves living inside every person. One is good and one is evil. These wolves constantly fight with each other for possession of the person's spirit. They may occasionally compromise out of necessity but they are always at war with each other."

The puzzled grandson asked, "Which wolf wins, Grandma?"

Grandmother smiled. She lovingly stroked the boy's face and gazed right through her grandson's eyes into his heart as she answered, "Whichever you feed, my love. Whichever one you feed."

MDisclaimer

I stopped doing hallucinogens in 1981 after about five hundred trips. Any former hardcore *experiencers* that are still alive and coherent have quit completely or, at the least, lightened up drastically.

No part of this book is an endorsement of hard drugs or a suggestion that anyone take a Transcendental Medication route. I strongly advise against excess. The psychedelic/narcotic experience can be as dangerous as rocket fuel in a moped. It is surely more dangerous than it is worth for most folks. Some of the roads get very bumpy. People have died on them. People are still dying on them. I died of a narcotic overdose and needed two shots of adrenaline to revive in the hospital. A lot of my friends were not that lucky.

I'm also luckier than many in that all those bumpy roads eventually led me to a more stable mental home base. Not everyone that survived the landing did so with both feet on the ground.

Transcendental Medication experiences were not always the smartest directions to take, but they allowed me an initial entrance that led to eventual residence in a state of mind where most folks do not even get to be tourists. I wish all my dead friends could have gotten here with me. I wish all the surviving damaged ones, the walking wounded, had gotten where they wanted to go.

New York Was/New York Is

Coney Island may be the world's most famous playground. To me it was just The Neighborhood. I grew up within a five-minute walk of the ocean, roller coasters, and Nathan's famous hot dog emporium. Nathan's has since gone the way of the chain/franchise. Back then it was the one and only Nathan's in existence.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, just before corporatemania and God-as-economics took over the world, the franchising of Nathan's could not have taken place. Any attempt to minimize the sacred nature of an institution as beloved and unique as Nathan's would have resulted in a solid beating for the Madison Avenue weasel that came up with the idea.

Times have changed with and since the tragic series of mind-numbing assassinations and hostile takeovers that erased the America we knew. Now that the inmates run the asylum, that same Madison Avenue weasel is a glorified hero instead of a despicable villain. In the America

of my youth it certainly would have been much different. Now that a manufactured fear of the Russians has been replaced by a very justifiable fear of ourselves, the "American Dream" has gone further astray.

A half-century ago, the USA was both figuratively and literally an open road.

Coney Island is at the southernmost part of New York City—the feet of the metropolis, if you will. All the city's nerve endings originate and end, as they do in any body, in its feet. The New York City subway system was the most spectacular and efficient mass transit system in the mid-1960s world. All the West End lines originated then, as they still do, in Coney Island's transit terminal across the street from Nathan's. From Brooklyn's ocean playground anyone could get anywhere in the city and make connections to any location in the world. Several million miracles of educational outreach were accessible for the same price as a Nathan's hot dog.

Why would a fifteen-year-old boy with a native New Yorker's travel experience and knowledge shun both public and private transport to spend the next thirty-five years hitchhiking throughout North America?

Why would anyone bypass the relative ease and safety of bus, train, or personal car and open himself to all manner of possible disasters by braving the whims of fate and the moods of passersby?

I'll tell you why.

I have attended eight colleges and universities. I've learned more in other people's cars.

My very first voyage began as a child sticking his thumb out on a Brooklyn highway. It became a ride that lasted for decades and traveled through some strange dimensions, as well as the one we are all familiar with.

My current voyage starts fifty-five years later and will also begin on the American east coast. It will take us to the west across the nation and then entirely around the world. That is an ambitious plan at any age, under any circumstance. Under my bizarre circumstance, even more so. Causes and conditions are near-perfectly aligned to invite strange dimensions and even stranger experiences to the party.

NOW

I Start From Here

Many friends tell me that I am one of the happiest people they've ever met. I had a nightmare childhood and as an adult have been diagnosed with many chronic disabilities and a few terminal illnesses. Several of the doctors that told me I would be dead by now have died themselves. It seems that formal institutional education is not always the most important thing.

A century ago, when medicine was still a profession instead of an industry, I may have believed the doctors. I might have been more polite and died of respect for them. By the mid-1960s it had become painfully obvious that polite and compliant were not always a right course of action to take when dealing with American institutions, including the medical industry.

Things have become even worse during this past half century. By now, many American doctors and other formerly respected professionals have shown a diseased integrity that was once reserved for used-car salesmen and high-level politicians.

I rarely show up at their hospitals or offices. Better results come from taking care of myself. There are, of course, some very good doctors and many great nurses. I love nurses! Doctors deal with diseases. Nurses deal with people. Nurses can fix certain things that doctors screw up.

I recently made a serious mistake that no nurse could fix. I trusted the wrong doctor. A long-term liquid medication was prescribed by a Naturopath who did not know his ass from a hole in the ground. It resulted in what appeared to be a fatal aggravation to an already problematic liver. Three doctors diagnosed liver cancer. The one called "specialist" said I had six months or so to live. That was in October of 2018. Do the math.

The pharmaceutical industry's vampire pimps didn't put this smile on my face. I wasn't about to let them take it off. After a half-year of heavy meditation with highly focused breathing and other assorted spiritual practices, Rick Simpson oil, apricot seeds (laetrile/B17), Chaga mushrooms, steam rooms and hot tubs, high potency Milk Thistle, potent vitamins, herbs, raw juices, and of course the essential dietary adjustments and lifestyle changes, I'm still here and having fun. I give reverent thanks to The Great Universal Whatever for all those natural remedies.

Conquered diseases notwithstanding, I must still admit to being an old man. There are over a hundred thousand hard road miles on my rapidly aging bones. Logic dictates that I be put out to pasture to enjoy the better memories.

If you have read my first two books, you know that the out-to-pasture thing is not going to happen.

I will travel completely around the world or die while trying. Everyone says that no one my age, most especially no one my age with a disintegrating skeletal structure and diagnosed terminal illness, should make such a journey. But we all have to die sooner or later and I have a mission to accomplish before I do.

Several good friends who have been abroad lately tell me there is no place else on Earth that is as morally bankrupt, sadly lacking in integrity, crumbling apart from the inside, as intimidating and repulsive to its neighbors, or as violent and divided internally as the United States of America. There is evidence to support their claims. I still do not like or want to believe them.

I have to go see for myself.

If it is true that no other place sucks quite as badly as America does, I want to find out why. What are other countries doing that we would benefit from doing ourselves? Why are we not doing those things?

I'm also curious about what other places are doing that is not working for them! Why aren't they fixing their own messes?

More importantly, how come there are so very many reports of people in other countries facing much greater physical and economic hardships than Americans do but living happier lives? What are the ways folks keep on smiling, laughing, and loving life while fighting to repair a world that is mentally and physically ill, often quite disgusting, and may likely have a more

severe terminal illness than I do? How can people keep fun happening in the midst of all the tragedy?

I will look for the answers to these questions and report back to you. I often have several brain cells on vacation, so there will be subjective as well as objective observations. A little mental wandering will no doubt happen in these reports.

There may also be several situations, some people, and a little information that you will think is crazy.

Don't let crazy scare you.

Being a bit crazy in the eyes of your culture often just means that you have a somewhat different way of seeing things than most folks do. That can be a good thing as easily as it can be a bad one! The only people that ever change big things are the ones crazy enough to think they can. Sure, Adolf Hitler and Idi Amin were crazy. But Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Copernicus, Madame Curie, Jesus Christ, and so many more of our heroes were also said to be crazy by people of their day. Those critics didn't realize just how wonderful so-called "crazy" can be if it is well-managed by altruistic motives and a loving intelligence.

The meditations and natural medications helped a lot in fixing my cancer but the real reason I am not dead yet is because I am constructively crazy.

Maybe I can explain that better with this little story from a brilliant Indian mystic. "One cow asked another,

'What is your opinion of the Mad Cow Disease?' The other cow responded, 'I don't give a hoot! I am just a helicopter anyway'!"

The ancient Chinese mystic Lao Tse put it another way. "There is no fear of tiger's tooth, there is no danger from rhino's horn. There is no place for death to enter."

Understand? If not, no problem. I'm pretty sure it will all make perfect sense to you by the time you finish reading this book.

THEN AND NOW

The Process

I do not know how to drive any type of motorized vehicle. I do know the best roads to take in order to get anywhere. Many things learned during my hitchhiking experience as a living American traveling through his own country will prove important to remember during this current trip as an internationally traveling corpse.

There is a process to hitchhiking. What holds true for the hitchhiking process holds true for other parts of life as well.

First, you have to decide that you want to get somewhere other than where you are. Then you have to raise enough energy and determination to actually leave your present location. All trips start with a determination that is serious enough to get you off your butt and moving. You might have a specific destination in mind or just a direction that you want to travel in. Regardless, it will be necessary to overcome some hard-wired behaviors and any lingering lethargy. Comfort-zone stability may be put at risk in order to get anywhere.

"Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible." Frank Zappa

After that, you have to pack what you'll need. It is always best to reach a balance in packing. The obvious

essentials such as flashlight, towel, toothbrush, toothpaste, emergency food, and water need to be included.

You may have to walk miles in rough weather from a place you get stuck in. The difference between a thirty-pound pack and an eighty-pound pack could possibly end up being the difference between comfort and heat stroke or frostbite, or even death. So could a sweatshirt that you thought unnecessary and left behind.

Pack wisely.

You'll also want a map. Other folks have traveled in the directions you want to go and been to the places you want to be. Maps exist for nearly every piece of road in the world. All use universal symbols. Wherever you are from, what language you speak, everyone knows that a big dot means a bigger city and a thicker line connotes a major highway.

You can journey uninformed in unfamiliar territory if you like. You can make your own trail or road through wilderness! Folks used to do it all the time in the olden days. Folks used to suffer greater hardships and die younger back then too. Luckily, many of those folks made maps of the roads they built or discovered. Reading maps can save us modern folk a lot of time, energy, and disaster. A map can help you stay alive longer and more comfortably than people did in the olden days.

It is best to start a hitchhiking trip from the on-ramp of a highway. Don't stand out on the highway itself. There are good reasons why this is illegal. It is very

dangerous for hitchhiker and highway traffic alike. The chance of getting crushed into eternity by a seventy mile per hour vehicle that is paying strict attention to its own process is a lot greater on the highway itself than on the entrance ramp. Drivers entering a ramp at twenty-five miles per hour will be immediately aware that you are on the shoulder looking for a ride. Those drivers have a much greater ability to pull over without killing you, their own passengers, or the folks in other vehicles than a seventy mile per hour highway car would.

Get yourself to the highway or main road as quickly and easily as possible. Standing out on a barely traveled road in a rural area where drivers are unfamiliar with you could last long enough for you to become vulture food. Hitchhiking on city streets is usually unproductive and can be dangerous. The highway or the main road is probably close enough to where you wake up so you can get a ride from a friend, take a bus, or even walk to it.

Once you are wisely packed and are standing on the entrance ramp to a main road, you are going to need a little patience. Being well prepared, in the right place, and then intelligently discriminating about which cars you do or don't get into is brilliant. It doesn't change the fact that on some days you will get passed by hundreds of cars and have to wait for several hours before anyone stops to pick you up. It will not change the fact that a driver who initially seems like fun may turn into a big downer or danger after a half hour.

More often than not, good luck will favor you. It is usually a kind-hearted person that will be pulling their car over to help a stranger. You still have to be vigilant, discriminating, and patient. That way you're prepared for anything.

Prepared does not mean paranoid. It means aware. Traveling should be fun! If you think every car pulling over for you will have a crazed axe-murderer driving it, you should take the bus. (Unfortunately, your odds of meeting that axe-murderer won't drop much on the bus.)

If you live through years of hitchhiking, you will eventually get what is called "a feel for the road." You will have better instincts for what times to be on which roads, how to pack, whose car to not get into, and so on. Rides will seem to come more easily. This is still no time to let your diligence fall asleep.

Whether novice or adept, neither human driver nor divine force owes you a ride—nor are either under your control. Always be pleasant and of course grateful to the person that finally stops for you. It isn't your benevolent host's fault if you have been standing in freezing rain for two hours.

At its best, hitchhiking is a venture where you and your hosts benefit each other. Taking the ride can be a joy. If you are not grateful, or are arrogant and not fully aware of each situation, any ride can become a problem.

I hope it is obvious that many of these hitchhiking procedures can apply to many of life's processes besides hitchhiking.

Pick a place you want to get to or at least a direction you want to travel in.

Prepare wisely and diligently.

Read a map.

Hit the road comfortably but with eyes open.

Have fun. If you aren't having fun, it is likely that you are doing something wrong. Stop. Figure out what it is. Fix it. Get back on the road.

p.s. Everyone makes the occasional mistake. If you find yourself on the wrong road, go back.

No matter how far you have gone down that wrong road, turn back.

What Does Matter ?

It doesn't matter if your skin is black, brown, red, yellow, white, or if you are from Europe, Asia, Africa, or North America. It does not matter if you are awkward, agile, thin, fat, blond or brunette, redhead, short, or tall. Our modern definition of "attractive" was built from commercially inspired images invented by the cosmetic, fashion, and fabric industries. A commercially inspired image is not designed to help anyone become

more attractive. It is designed to coerce you into buying things you don't need.

It doesn't matter if you're on the first page of a book or the last; if you like pop, jazz, country, rock and roll, or classical music; or whether you watch the soap operas, dramas, sit-coms, reality shows, or news on TV. The media only presents you with what their owners want you to see and hear. Most of us pay too dearly with both money and brain cells for limited, biased, dumbed-down content while enjoying a delusion that we choose from the best of all possibilities. We do not. The Bullshit Programyou Package A and the Bullshit Programyou Package B are your options. They both contain hypnotic content that is designed to either shock or lull you into compliance.

It doesn't matter if you are a lion, rabbit, fish human, elephant, bird, or gecko lizard. One of your overlords, or cellmates, or your Father Time is going to eat you. The best you can hope for is that you are not caged up, sedated, and featured on a nature or news channel when it happens.

It doesn't matter if you and all your kinky friends (as stated by Mr. Carlin) "like to dress up in leather boy scout uniforms while you hit each other over the head with ball peen hammers and take turns blow-

ing the cat. Nothing wrong with that! It is a victimless hobby—and think of how good it makes the cat feel!"

It makes no difference whatsoever which brand of cigarettes you smoke, which side of any war you are on, whether your toxic wastes are chemical or nuclear, or whether you have been bitten by a scorpion or cobra. You are going to end up suffering too long or dead too soon, or both.

It makes very little difference which kind of drug you do. Whether your drugs come from a street corner or corner pharmacy, you will still enjoy a short fix and then deal with the side effects while you choose between hungover, dead, numb, addicted, or stupid. It also does not matter if you are a poor drug addict or a rich one who spends enough money on your cocaine habit to feed a small nation. It will not matter if you somehow land on your feet and ass at the same time right after coming out of rehab as a "cured," self-satisfied, self -righteous, and self-indulgent pain in the ass of a person that never again does anything that is more constructive or less restrictive than being on a program.

It doesn't matter at all whether people believe you, like you, lie about you, love you, leave you, bait or hate you, or rate you according to standards composed of stale, inherited, socially-dictated notions. Haters may never experience an original thought but they always

have opinions. If you are very strongly affected by those opinions, you may lack a confidence or a psychological structural integrity that is strong enough to defend itself.

So do I. We have a lot of company. Most of humanity shares these same vulnerabilities. This is not totally our fault. We have been weakened by a faulty education. We have been trained since birth to accept a corrupted reality as the norm.

After the poison is added,
it doesn't matter if you eat health food or cake.
Do you know what does matter?

No Misunderstandings, Please/
What Does Matter

Just so there are no misunderstandings, here is an official disclaimer. Although there will be certain names that you will recognize mentioned during this true story of a book, almost none of these famous people who are complimented here actually know me or ever knew me. (There are a few exceptions.) I'm not making believe that I am in some intimate buddies club with every well known genius on Earth, or that I have ever had social what-to-do with any of these people.

I go to lectures, classes, concerts, read the books, watch the HBO specials, YouTube, or PBS just like everyone else who has ever been smart enough to seek

out or lucky enough to stumble across these human lighthouses. I have an active imagination. Repetitive contact with videos affects me strongly, but that's where most of these "relationships" end.

A small number of people are a lot more famous than the rest of us. Ideally this happens because we admire a person's genius, talent, or merit.

But it often happens through no big accomplishment by the famous person. It often happens because shill marketing/media conglomerates are selling the public an image, and an artificial relationship to that image. The marketing and media folks collect a whole lot of money from these processes. Their methods reduce people to "consumers," then coerce them into bizarre purchasing habits.

The bizarre purchasing habits result from consumers becoming hypnotized by avalanches of cleverly designed commercial messages. These messages lead consumers to believe that imagined relationships with celebrities in commercials are not only real, but also have meaningful connection to the product for sale.

But even a real connection, even truly meeting or personally knowing an admirable celebrity, doesn't make anyone an improved or admirable individual. That happens when one is actually being, doing, or taking part in something admirable.

Why do folks make a big deal about this knowing famous people thing? Brag about meeting, say, Mother Teresa or the Dalai Lama? I don't think so! I might brag if I thought, spoke, and acted as nobly as Mother Teresa or the Dalai Lama.

No. On second thought, I guess I wouldn't.

I feel so strongly about this that the following true story is still, thirty-five years after the fact, one of my favorite memories.

It was a beautiful autumn day in the 1980s inside Hugo's bar on Pleasant Street in a lovely town called Northampton, Massachusetts. After an all day effort to deplete the world's beer supply, a sudden inspiration came to me. Over the following year, that inspiration became a successful local and then a statewide charity project. It got a lot of attention and press due to its eventual involvement with high-level politicians, well known musicians, major league sports teams, big labor unions, un-paid volunteers, and a serious issue. Above all, the project worked well because there was no money passed through me or our little volunteer group. It all went directly from the contributors to several very well established and reputable charities. This eliminated any possible question-of-trust factor. (Details are in the news articles at fearlesspuppy.info, if you're interested.)

Shortly after this project finished, I was back at Hugo's once again doing my part to help society drain

free of its alcohol content. I made this effort many times during the 1980s. A decent sort of guy who infrequently frequented our watering hole came through the back door. He was a friend of one of the regulars at our table. We invited him to join us. Decent-Sort-Mike was then introduced to several people well known for not being able to remember names.

After downing the better half of a beer, Decent Mike suddenly turned wide-eyed and stared at me for a long half-minute. It was the kind of stare that made me wonder if he was high on some powerful drug and I was showing up as a freshly tapped keg in his hallucination.

That was not it. The mad stare turned out to be his sudden recognition of a person that had experienced the proverbial fifteen minutes of fame.

"You're that guy in the newspapers. You're great!" said Mike.

I had to reply, "Don't be forking ridiculous. I'm a drunk from Hugo's, just like you are."

The light went on in Mike's bloodshot eyes. It was that deeper kind of understanding that rarely happens, even between people who know each other very well.

He *got it*. A big slow "Wooooow!" wandered out of his mouth.

Mike suddenly realized that he could easily have done that charity project himself and that he would have received the same attention from the media if he had. Instant insight told him that *anyone* could have done it. It

was all just about getting up and doing it. All I did was kick my own drunken ass into the process. That didn't make me any more of a superman than him. The only difference between Decent Mike and I was that I put the situation's potential to use.

We bought each other beers and talked for hours with no further misunderstandings.

All humans have the same potential to be incredible.
Who you've met or know doesn't matter.
Who you choose to be
and what you choose to do with your life
is what does matter.

A LAST LOOK AT AMERICA

Vermont

Vermont is America's way of apologizing for some of the other things it has produced. I've spent much of my adult life here. This is where the voyage starts.

Vermont was made the fourteenth US state in 1789, much against its will. It was happy to continue being the Independent Republic of Vermont, and it still is. When everyone else in America argued for Hillary or Trump, Vermont countered with Bernie. When so many other places were becoming crueler and more defensive, the state of Vermont grew kinder and more inclusive. There are many examples of of kind and inclusive action in Oregon, New Mexico, Ohio, and every other state in America as well as every country on Earth, but all my experience tells me that Vermont may be the kindest place within the American nation.

Rural Vermont

Helpfulness. Tribalism at its best. Everyone works together on everything. Lives depend upon each other in temperatures well below zero.

Hitchhiking is not just getting from here to there while barely knowing my host. Every ride establishes or increases a friendship.

There are more cows per square mile than people, more open space than cows, and more forest than open space. Pronounced seasons and cycles. Frozen white winters. Muddy springs. Vibrant green summers that

pulsate with a life that knows it only has a few months to do what needs to get done. Rainbow autumnal foliage so brilliant that guests come from continents far away to enjoy it. There are streams clean enough to drink from.

Eggs come from happy chickens, not from the cruelty of large "animal production" warehouses.

Everyone waves to anyone driving by.

There is always time to speak with anyone you meet at the General Store or Post Office. There's always time. No need to hurry. Life comes first. Being is more important than doing (after the doing gets done).

The only store in town is the size of five closets but it has everything: food, hardware, videos, clothing, beer, and more. A giant empty cable spool acts as table. Folks sit around it enjoying coffee, homemade donuts, and the company of neighbors. My best friend's maple syrup makes the coffee unique.

I have spent a lot of time with four other people and five beers staring into the open hood of a pickup truck that was not in need of repair.

Firewood keeps you warm three times—once when you chop it, again when you carry it into the house, and a third time when you burn it. Overflowing abundance lives here. There are some folks that want more. Few need more.

Theaters produce professional quality plays in vest-pocket villages.

The purity and clarity of omnipresent Nature rubs off on its human inhabitants. Crime, violence, and other assorted hatreds appear only in newspapers and on TV stations. No one here sees those things in person.

The Town Treasurer has a sign on his front door explaining, "It's hard to get away with anything in a town this small." Live and let live. If it hurts no one, it is legal.

Resourcefulness is a way of life. Anything can be built from leftover parts of the things that you don't need anymore. If you do not know how, someone will show you. They will be happy to help—even happier if you bring a beer to say hello and thank you.

Deer hunters and trout fishermen deny large slaughterhouses and big corporate supermarket chains their abuses and profits. Unprocessed foods, hard work for exercise, low stress, clean air, and clean water deny the medical industry profits from questionable surgeries and drugs.

Awe-inspiring natural beauty excludes selfish developers and their profit-over-people motives. Their concrete and steel are not welcome here. The industrial decay that would lead to big profits for unethical folks in fancy suits and ties is denied entry by conscious decision of simple, intelligent farmers in overalls.

There will never be a Walmart or crack house here. There are so many guns! They are never used for anything but hunting food. People constantly help each other to build a barn or house, dig out of snow and mud, care for the children, cook, clean, weed the gardens, and feed animals. Anything that can be done at all is usually done by a group, even if it is really a one person job. Folks enjoy each other's company. Except for extreme circumstances, everyone deserves inclusion.

Parties get thrown together spontaneously for no other reason than that someone feels like being host.

On a Tuesday, my friend Mike told me that he was having a party on the following Saturday.

"What's the occasion, Mike?"

"The occasion is that I suddenly got the bright idea of having a party. I will get out one side of venison and buy a keg of beer. Tell everyone that you see to tell everyone they see. If anyone wants to bring more food and drink, that's good. If not, we'll be fine with what we have, I figure."

"OK, Mike. I'll get everyone but the assholes informed."

"Inform the assholes too, buddy! Who knows? Maybe if they got invited to more parties, they'd figure out how to act right and wouldn't be such assholes."

It was difficult to argue with Mike's logic.

It is hard to argue with much of anything in a small, clean, friendly, peaceful town.

Truth or Consequences Is The Real Name Of A Town In New Mexico

To a boy from northern America, the Southwest looks like a Martian work of art. Breathtaking red clay buttes are spotted with sparse green, brown, and yellow vegetation. This vegetation would be confused if it lived in the Northeast. It seems to be neither tree nor bush but something in between.

Technicolor canyons and solitary rock formations look as if they'd been dropped onto the flat desert face from some far away galaxy.

Abandoned ghost towns are more eerie in person than any artificial backdrop-for-a-western-movie counterparts could ever hope to be. The shattered wooden shutters slap against their rotting clapboards even on windless days, as if propelled by the breath of the actual ghosts of this former frontier. The spirits that failed to make a life in this desert two hundred years ago seem to be warning newcomers of the difficulties they will face. These spirits had hoped that this place would be their heaven, their Camelot. Instead it became a cemetery for their dreams and in many cases for their families. They inhale their attachment and exhale despair. They never

get to move on.

Normal breezes do not have the otherworldly smell that air movement in a ghost town does. It is the fragrance of history. It is an odor of momentary hope, glory, and demise gone by so long ago that no one alive remembers the occasion. These scents rise from the ether to frighten a stagnant atmosphere into movement.

Despite the emotional gravity of ghost towns, they are really no more than a short misplayed note in the vast majestic symphony that is the Southwest's desert. Scenery too beautiful for humans to have possibly built was here long before these abandoned settlements were a twinkle in a wagon train's eye. It will be here a long time after the mini-malls and fast food troughs are gone.

Giant cacti are camels-as-vegetable-matter. They store a year's supply of liquid life while surrounded by rock and sand that long ago died of thirst.

The occasional ranch house stands all alone in the middle of several thousand acres of nothing, testifying to the great strength and sheer audacity of the human will —but for the most part this land looks like it did before humanity existed.

The Southwest is one of the few areas in North America where the continent's original human Native inhabitants are still readily available. These Natives have suffered a painful fortune that even the Marquis de Sade's heartless imagination would not have been able to fathom. In some places, they survive the harsh result

of the human cruelty inflicted upon them with the same grace and strength they employed to survive the harsh natural environment for millennia before suffering their holocaust. In other places, Native survival is much more reminiscent of the bone chilling decay of the ghost town's clapboards and the breeze of lost souls that moves the shutters of its former windows.

Nights are a little bit colder than days back in the northeastern states. It can get a lot colder at night in the southwestern desert. Moonlit cacti host lizards, rodents, and snakes on evening hunting trips. Coyotes in ruthless packs define clever and resourceful by their cooperative survival efforts.

The harsh majesty of the Southwest exacts a price, even from its survivors. It is a dog-eat-dog world. Serious danger and awesome beauty live together under the cruel sun, and often under the same rock.

One must master the truths of this environment or one will surely suffer the consequences.

Oahu, Hawaii

Hawaii As Hell In Wackywacky

Hawaii is said to be one of the most beautiful places in the world. The scenery is consistently magnificent. The island of Oahu, its major city of Honolulu, and Honolulu's famous Waikiki Beach are no exceptions. But popularity has led to problems that muddy Waikiki Beach's beauty and holiday atmosphere. Air pollution, overcrowding, and expenses that scare the wealthy are only the tip of the iceberg.

The beach stretches for several miles from the area just outside of downtown Honolulu into the even more upscale Diamond Head area. It includes many high-rise hotels, seaside restaurants, bars, stores, and boatyards. Much of it has the feel of yacht clubs, country clubs, and other rich kids' playgrounds.

Within this opulent paradise for tourists and their wallets, anguished Natives suffer the commercial rape of their formerly pristine paradise. A beautiful, dark-skinned woman on the street is covered in tribal tattoos and anger. She yells obscenities at what has become of her ancestral homeland. Her soulful indigenous language of only thirteen letters usually sounds more like song than speech. Not on this day.

This protestor shot verbal daggers at tourists and buildings alike. She screamed into the deaf concrete ears of the Starbucks, Burger Kings, Hyatts, Marriotts, and other commercial marauders that swallowed the fishing

village her family called home for a thousand years. Her flashing brown eyes showed tears behind the rage.

That happened in the fancier section of Waikiki. I wouldn't take a piss on the smaller downtown section of Waikiki if it was on fire. Then again, I might have to. No one lets you use the bathroom here unless you first make a purchase that would put a venture capitalist in debt. This is a crowded, scowling, noisy area. It seems permanently under a construction that does not yield improvement. People that spend hundreds of dollars per night for a hotel room wander without a second thought past the hungry folks living on the streets.

Rich, poor, bosses, employees, and many of the tourists in this area seem to be lacking a love of life as well as a love of the living. People bark at each other. I smiled and said hello to several folks that growled back. Many seem to wear rudeness, self-centeredness, and impatience as fashion statements. Like some pretentious caricature of the New York attitude, the locals make it impolitely obvious that they want your money in their town a lot more than they want you here.

Outside of WackyWacky, moving further into downtown Honolulu, is the only skid row Chinatown I have ever seen. Bars line the streets along with victims of the alcohol and drug induced psychosis that often accompanies the culturally disenfranchised. Some of them are Native Hawaiians whose historical reality suffers the same cancer that other Native “Americans” face in New

Mexico, Arizona, and elsewhere on the mainland. Many others are internationals who were aiming at paradise but found out that life does not always play out as advertised. A few were having loud, angry conversations with themselves. No one was listening.

Part of my negative experience in Honolulu was a result of bad housing. The eighty-two-year-old owner of the guesthouse I stayed in was a constant irritant. He spoke no English although he had relocated to Hawaii from Hong Kong decades ago. He was always yelling at people in Chinese.

His forty-year-old son was manager of the place. He had three other jobs besides the guesthouse and had already suffered a heart attack as well as a stroke. When I tried to talk with him about slowing down, he said to me, "Once you have the money, then you can afford to worry about health. But first I have to get the money." This dangerous attitude will surely kill him within a couple of years if he doesn't change it.

Chad

Some of the folks in Honolulu, especially those in the more suburban areas, are much more pleasant than my guesthouse's owners or the scowlers on downtown Waikiki's beach. Even the natives with ulterior motives can be pleasant while trying to hustle you. Those who aren't after what you have can be wonderful company.

Many of the foreigners here are having fun and can be good company as well.

There are also many opportunities to meet assholes.

I was trying to make friends of a few acquaintances at my neighborhood coffee bar. We were all feeling good after a strong dose of caffeine and a few laughs, so the loud, obnoxious man who suddenly appeared uninvited at our table didn't disturb us—at first. The problem was not that he invited himself to the table. Almost everyone in this little cafe is on holiday or working for those on holiday. All are made welcome wherever they sit.

There are exceptions.

Chad was one of them. There is no sense in telling you his place of birth. Assholes, just like saints, come from everywhere. His voice had a tone like fingernails being dragged across a blackboard. He knew everything and everyone who ever existed anywhere.

Chad actually said this. "Everybody wants to be like me. I am the only one who can make it work!" No one, especially not Chad, has the chops to be that cocky.

He knew that folks didn't appreciate his presence. Chad didn't care. Even his mean-spirited, racist, sexist, chronic slandering of nearly all his fellow humans was overshadowed by his total lack of humility. Chad only stomached other people in order to have more time to remind us of just how wonderful he was. It was hard to stomach him.

In Brooklyn, Chad would have gotten his arrogant ass kicked in five minutes or less, but places catering to tourists carry tolerance to a counterproductive level at times. We stayed polite out of respect for the cafe. Dogs do not have a human sense of protocol. Chad did not have to harass the cafe's resident dogs to get a bad reaction from them. They barked and snarled at him just for being Chad.

He rattled on about all he knew and was sure we didn't, and about the wonderfulness of "The Chadster" and the very few people like him. This annoying jackass was giving me a headache! I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and tried to maintain my composure.

When my eyes opened again, I was in bed. First daylight was coming through the window. Chad had been a dream.

Something was telling me to be very careful to never move in the direction of Chad-like behavior, and to get away from it as far and fast as possible if someone brings it around.

Hawaii As Heaven In Kailua

Redemption arrived on my second day in Oahu in the form of a beautiful half-hour bus ride to the Kailua Beach. Massive multi-trunked trees headlined the exotic vegetation lining the road. The jagged and deep green cloud-fringed hills were so lush that they rivaled those of Vermont in summer. They brushed the sky on one

side of the highway. The Pacific Ocean glistened on the other. The scene looked stolen from a Hobbit movie.

The small park by the bus stop in downtown Kailua hosted wild roosters that sang their wake-up cackle all day long. Egrets and seagulls were everywhere. These birds were enjoying the high life and a healthy natural ocean diet. They were pure white, much unlike their diseased-looking, badly stained cousins of downtown Waikiki whose main diet is air pollution and greasy french fries from a trash can.

The ocean at Kailua Beach was a gorgeous green, just a shade off from the emerald hills and small islands in and around it. Friendly, happy folks, both locals and vacationers, were enjoying a landscape that defied them to do otherwise. One of them was in a wheelchair. He had a hat on that said "Pearl Harbor Survivor." I said hello. We had the friendly conversation that one would expect of two happy seniors.

Paul was born and raised on Oahu. He was sixteen years old at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. Paul was a kind, gentle man. Even when he made direct eye contact he appeared to be staring into the distance. He was also a very odd sort of racist who spoke ill of all the Japanese folks that had ever lived in the past but then countered with a sincere admiration of many Japanese folks he knows now.

Paul told of childhood days when he and his family would pick lobsters right off the beach. "There are no

lobsters here anymore. The commercial boats overfished them. When you get greedy and try to take everything all at once instead of a bit at a time as you need it, after a while there is nothing left. That is what happened. Now there are no more lobsters. This same criminal tragedy has happened with so many things. I guess it happens everywhere. It just seems more evident here because this is my home. I still feel very lucky to have lived my life here. There isn't any place else I would rather be."

After our conversation, I had a cool, refreshing dip in the Hawaiian Pacific Ocean. It was as clean and beautiful as advertised in travel brochures. Kailua must be one of those places folks are talking about when they call Hawaii paradise.

The Bodhi Tree

The very sweet Bodhi Tree meditation hall was just a few blocks from my guesthouse. It was a welcome contrast to the more disappointing parts of Honolulu.

Most such places follow a single tradition. The Bodhi Tree was unusual in that it had a different form of meditation every night. A Thich Naht Hahn inspired walking meditation on Mondays, then various mantra meditations Tuesdays, Vipassana method Wednesdays, and so on. Different crews of people took part in each session. Each was smiling and friendly. This was all an incredibly positive change from the rude and unpleasant

economics-uber alles attitude of Waikiki and the nasty inhospitable attitude of my guesthouse's owners. Even though only a dozen or so folks attended each session, I met more nice people in the few hours spent there than I had among the many thousands of people in downtown Honolulu during the whole previous week. These friendly folks used different meditation methods but were all of the same mind in at least one respect. They had all made the decision that happiness is a valuable enough quality to make it worth the bother it takes to process it into a consistent personal reality.

Andy was a fifty-year-old Mr. Rogers type person. He was constantly telling jokes. The Venerable Fred, an actual Buddhist monk, said more worth listening to with his silent presence during a half-hour meditation than most people say during decades of running their mouths. Tatiana was a beautiful twenty-three-year-old Eastern European beginner meditator that seemed to glow with an authentic sweetness.

Being in this very lovely place with these wonderful people repaired and prepared my attitude. Evening trips to the meditation center allowed me to return to the much less friendly guesthouse with a smile, and sleep peacefully.

Goodbye Oahu

Honolulu is probably no worse than any major American city. It certainly has much better scenery and weather than most.

I like to think that most of Hawaii is more like Kailua than Honolulu, but Kailua also has problems.

It takes major money to live in paradise. Kailua is economically prohibitive enough to define the death of the middle class but it has people that smile and a view that would impress deities.

The island of Oahu is the richest and most scenic place I have ever been to. In spite of the nonstop beauty almost everywhere and the joy of days spent at Kailua Beach, I will be glad to get out of Oahu. Everything that is wrong with America is painfully obvious here. The original Natives are trivialized into a tourist attraction. The over-amped population rarely smiles back at any positive gesture. Folks are often surly. The gap between rich and poor is criminal. The attitude that money is more important than the people spending it is a way of life. It is crowded and overbuilt. Most disappointing of all, these problems sprout from the foundational notion that doing business is more important than the physical environment of Earth or the well-being of the planet's human and animal inhabitants.

I'd love to check out some other Hawaiian islands but I don't have enough money to piss it away like draft beer at a frat party.

After ten days of living with the family from hell it seemed time for a boost. My last night in Honolulu was booked online at a more expensive hotel with an airport shuttle. The idea was that upgraded accommodations would boost my spirits for the following day's long flight to Cambodia. It was another brilliant idea that Honolulu shat on.

Pacific Marina Airport Hotel was nowhere near the Pacific or a marina. The closet-sized filthy room cost a lot more but was no better than the one I had just left.

I was weaseled again by a venue that billed itself as paradise but turned out to be a dead-end dive in a dirty industrial neighborhood!

Throughout these travels I will try to find the proof that America is, comparatively speaking, not so bad as folks often make it out to be.

Downtown Honolulu is probably not the best place to start defending that position.

DIFFERENT WORLD, SAME PLANET

Welcome To Cambodia

Smooth Landing/Present Tense

It was a smooth ride on the large China Eastern Airbus from Honolulu to Shanghai. Flight attendants were happy and pleasant. There hasn't been edible food on an American airplane for years, so the spiced chicken and fish on this Asian flight were a nice surprise.

The puddle jumper flight going from Shanghai to Cambodia offered less. Part of the problem was a small, rickety, turbulent plane and bitchy flight attendants. Part of it was me. That first eleven hours to Shanghai were an exciting adventure, but the four-hour flight from Shanghai to Cambodia felt more like the end of a triple shift at the factory.

✻✻

I land in Siem Reap, Cambodia determined that life will be beautiful and that my mind will stay in the present tense from now on. So will the writing.

✻✻

The scene is as surreal to a boy from snow country as a Disney cartoon. It is 11 p.m. but still seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit on November 23rd. The air is so steamy that the palm leaves thirty feet in the air appear to be dancing in clouds. After traveling day and night through timeline after timeline, Cambodia seems like the

Twilight Zone. But people are smiling a lot more than they smiled where I just came from, so life in Southeast Asia is already good.

The Tanei

The Tanei Boutique Villa Hotel looks like it was a French governor's palace a hundred and fifty years ago. Marble floors, heavily sculpted woodwork, the interior fountains, and gardens are a bit worn but still beautiful. There is a sizable swimming pool of aged tile and the first cold water jacuzzi I have ever seen.

Bordering the east side of the pool is a row of a dozen thirty-foot tall palm trees. The tree nearest the jacuzzi has an incredible purple and white orchid growing out of it. The west side of the swimming pool has another row of a dozen palm trees. They grow through a shade awning with holes cut in it to accommodate the trees. There are lounge chairs beneath that awning to accommodate the guests.

Geckos are everywhere. None of them are selling insurance.

Behind the pool is a large restaurant surrounded by colorful live flowers. Guests enjoy a buffet breakfast that includes scrambled and hard boiled eggs, vegetable combo, stir-fried noodles, potatoes, sugared juice drinks, coffee, tea, several types of fruit, and other choices. This

breakfast might cost twenty dollars in Hawaii. In Cambodia it is included free in the twenty dollar room rent.

The Wi-Fi, electricity, and other such first world amenities work most of the time. "Hot water" means it is just a little bit less cold than the cold water. Things like TVs and telephones are moody. They fade in and out of function for no apparent reason. The Tanei does a good job of keeping things comfortable considering the very limited modern technology they have access to.

Living in Cambodia costs just a fraction of what it costs in the Western world but there's a Catch 22 about countries like this. Your money goes a long way but you cannot buy what they don't have. Regardless, at twenty dollars a night, the Tanei doesn't hear many complaints.

As classically pretty, inexpensive, and relatively upscale as this place is, the best part of the hotel is the smiling, friendly staff. I have spent too much time in American hotels that provide shit accommodations and snarling staffs at expensive prices but expect customers to be grateful for the screwing they are taking. So many hotels are Fawlty Towers without the laughs. The Tanei is a much welcomed change. They enjoy speaking with guests and seem as glad to know you as they are to take your money.

Food

Food in the tourist district is tasty but often heavily fried, salted, or sugared. It is a safe guess that they don't use the health food store kind of oil when frying. Oddly enough, food from street vendors may be the healthiest and tastiest. Much of it is grilled in front of the customer and uses no oil or additives.

There has to be a trustworthy salad in this country somewhere but I have yet to find it. I've found magically medicinal vegetable noodle soup but am not sure if it is the soup or the chef/owner herself, Mrs. Jeng, that is responsible for the magic!

Most of the bread in town is high school cafeteria style industrial white. It looks like cardboard and makes Wonder Bread seem like real food.

The diet, rural poverty, lack of the most modern medical and sanitation facilities, and constant hot wet weather that bacteria love are to blame for the minimal health risks in Cambodia. It's not as bad as it sounds. A little awareness, shade, hydration, and intelligent moderation will keep most folks healthy.

Mrs. Jeng's Magic Soup

Mrs. Jeng has a tin-roof shack restaurant. She serves up great noodles and soup. There's magic in Jeng

and whatever she cooks. It cures all from depression to croup.

If you're sad or you're sneezing or coughing or wheezing, no matter what is your malaise—she can fix up your heart or any body part and remove all your gout, doubt, and daze. It is partly the herbs and partly the spices, and other fine flavorings too. But it's mostly the glow that beams from Ms. Jeng that fixes a cold or the blues.

If I cannot recover from an errant lover or catch other chills in my chest, I quick hit the ground and beat feet into town. Mrs. J will take care of the rest. When I have hangovers that feel like the plague, one remedy keeps them in tow. Mrs. Jeng fixes up miracles in a cup so that I can get on with the show.

If you have the feeling you're rocking and reeling and things have gone out of control; if you're feeling sick, your problems are thick, and your life has become a black hole; then try this elixir, it is damn sure a fixer that will give your illness the chase. You'll smile back to the street and your fine dancing feet will surely be back on their pace.

I'm usually happy and do not get down but whenever I do start to droop, I get on the road and prevent an implode by drinking Ms. Jeng's magic soup.

The Esoteric Version/Mrs. Jeng's Magic Soup

Good wishes are pointed directly at everyone who walks into her shop. Good wishes also go out to passersby that don't stop.

Her cooking contains the essence of a prayer on your behalf. Spirit and substance blend in a bowl of blessings.

Mrs. Jeng is the embodiment of good nature. Hers is a strong and beneficent character. With concern for you that is as strong as her concern for her self, she floats her comforting demeanor into yours. Suddenly, everything is fine just the way it is.

A new customer comes in. While she remains entrained with all present, Jeng's empathy adjusts to take in and be taken in by the newcomer. That empathy is a jigsaw puzzle that keeps reconstructing its own pieces according to the ever-changing needs of its background. Jeng grasps new ones as she releases old pieces. She never ceases to amaze those present with a sweet iron stability and lack of surprise as so many life changes take place before her eyes. She never loses her unconditional love for the incredible variety of human emotions that can fit into one small dining room, or one individual person. She thrives on the process of coaxing anyone in need from the depths of those emotions to their heights. It is her oxygen.

Mrs. Jeng knows how to attach both roots and wings to flavor, nutrition, and food-as-medicine. What customers can't see, they can taste. What they can't taste, they can feel.

Her measuring cups hold a bottomless volume of joyful existence. Jeng's resistance to negative insistence doesn't run and needn't fight. Negativity dissolves as it approaches her. She holds her position while blessing opposition with a wish for a better tomorrow. From the great heart within her, she lets everyone borrow.

Jeng is usually so involved with and concerned for a customer or neighbor that her own existence takes a back seat. This makes her bliss indestructible. What donates its substance cannot be hurt. There is no place for harm to enter.

Describing Mrs. Jeng and her cooking holds the same limitations as speaking about silence.

Street Life

Many international tourists can be seen on the streets of Siem Reap. Camera-toting people of all races and national origins snap photos of naked Cambodian children that dance in the spray of garden hoses as their families tend shops.

A whirlwind of activity begins right outside of my hotel door. The Pub Street/Night Market area is the

Times Square of Siem Reap. It includes a few grocery markets, therapeutic massage parlors, bars, loud music simultaneously coming from many venues, travel agents, tour guides, clothing stores, restaurants, and more. The traffic is heavy. The dust and pollution are severe. Many locals wear surgical masks. I follow their lead.

The traffic is made up mostly of motorbikes and tuk-tuks. A tuk-tuk is a glorified motorbike taxi. It has a golf-cart-looking cab attached to the back of the motorbike that is capable of carrying four passengers. At least eight or ten tuk-tuk drivers will hit on you during any three-block walk. They offer rides, tours, girls, and brown weed.

Aggressive but legitimate massage girls, barkers in front of restaurants and tour places, and anyone else selling anything may get up in your face about buying their product. The more seriously determined ones will follow you down the street barking in your ear in hopes of coercing a purchase.

I find ganja quickly and easily. The twenty dollar bag from a tuk-tuk driver named Mr. Khompat works pretty well for brown stuff. It will take some research to find anything that is really good to smoke. No one seems to know what green seedless buds are, but buzzing in Cambodian style will be okay for a while. They have Happy Pizza here! The same decent-for-the-brown type weed that Mr. Khompat sells is a regular ingredient in Khmer (Cambodian) cooking. It is not an Acid tripping

type experience like the Green Mountain Monster Bud cookies of Vermont, but I'm certainly relaxed and happy right after eating half an apple pie sized pizza. Happy Pizza and its active ingredient are not technically legal here, but they are widely tolerated.

Just to give you an idea of what the prices are like here, that buzz costs three dollars and a full fish dinner after it costs two and a half. Living here for three months costs about as much as a month in New Mexico or two weeks in Vermont.

The fruit is fresh, delicious, and plentiful. High temperatures during the "cool season" of December through February are consistently eighty to ninety-plus degrees Fahrenheit with heavy humidity. Plant growth is not a problem at any time of year. The are familiar papayas, bananas, and coconuts growing here. There are also fruits so exotic they look manufactured to Westerners. The dragonfruit is a good example. It is about the size of a grapefruit and has jagged, layered, red skin that houses a white fruit containing thousands of tiny black dots resembling poppy seeds. It looks spooky but tastes good.

Does Anyone Ever Sleep?

Apparently not! Tourists are bending the clock into manic shapes while they try to see every sight available within the week or two they have in Cambodia. Locals

are up at the crack of dawn and heading to work, but will not be denied their evening party.

The Night Market and Pub Street is where everyone converges. The main part of the Siem Reap Night Market contains several rows of stores sitting under a single tin roof structure. These stores are separated by metal dividers. Items available include clothes, fabrics, watches, jewelry, food, preserved bug and bat skeletons, artwork, iconic Buddhist statues of all sizes, meditation beads, cigarettes, woven straw baskets, assorted crafts, stuffed animals, carved animals, and bottles of whiskey with a dead scorpion or cobra floating in each. I shit you not! The lady says, "It give energy."

From the main pavilion, the market spills over into outlying streets. The bars, restaurants, clothing stores, massage parlors, and food booths are everywhere. The two most interesting food booths are right next to each other. The first serves deep-fried snakes, ants, scorpions, worms, cockroaches, grasshoppers, and other crunchy critters. Those grasshoppers are pretty tasty! The booth next to it sells fried ice cream. They call it that but it is actually milk and fruit that is continually blended in a large baking pan with a refrigerator unit below it that must hold liquid nitrogen. After five to ten minutes of stirring, blending, flattening, rolling, and flipping it all, the fruit and milk become a blended frozen unit that is rolled into sheets and stuffed in a cup.

The Night Market blends seamlessly into Pub Street creating a very large, loud, lively entertainment district.

Massage Parlors

The only things that appear in Siem Reap almost as frequently as temples and restaurants are the massage parlors. Most offer what you might expect from a legit therapeutic practice, except for the tiny fish. Fish are the most popular massage therapists in town! Several places have giant fish tanks out front with room for a dozen or so folks to sit on the edge with legs dangling knee-deep in the water. Hundreds of small, grateful fish give a gentle foot and leg massage while nibbling away the client's dead skin.

Most parlors appear legit, with girls and massage tables right out front behind glass doors and windows. I go in one that gives this appearance but am immediately taken into a back room. I don't know that the advertised five dollar half-hour massage is just a precursor to being offered a twenty dollar hand job.

A pretty woman sits on my back. She grinds and bounces her fully clothed vagina into me while rubbing my neck and shoulders, but she is defeating her own purpose! The bouncing and grinding on my lower back is way too forceful. It causes the type of pain more likely to make someone lose an erection rather than get one.

She flips me over to massage my abdomen, occasionally letting her fingers wander into pubic hair. This is neither the therapeutic effort I was looking for nor a pleasant erotic experience. It is an unpleasant, clumsy attempt to give me a hard-on I can't argue with.

She asks if I want the more expensive stimulation. I have a back ache, no inspiration, and cannot see paying her to do something that I can do a lot less painfully by myself. I tell her so, give her five dollars, and leave.

I am told that most of these places actually focus on the massage itself. Some may also offer sexual services that don't involve pain. Right now I am more interested in the therapy. I will try a different massage parlor soon.

Sohk

Soon is now. I suffer severe full-body cramps from toes to crown. Hauling too many duffel bags through ninety-degree heat and intense humidity has aggravated chronic skeletal/muscular problems. A legit massage has become less of a passing fancy and more of a real need. I walk into a place so out in the open that it seems sure to not be another pain inducing hand job palace disguised as massage therapy.

Sohk is the name of my massage lady. She is thirty-nine years old, very cute, and gives me the best hour-long foot rub I have had since being reflexologized by

the legendary Shelby Shue of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico.

Sohk and I have a warm if wordless energy flowing between us. She cannot speak any English but the other two ladies in the establishment can. I call them both "sister." They like that. We have a friendly conversation. I make it clear to them, and they make it clear to Sohk, that I need my back, neck, and legs done after the feet. I cannot stop looking back at Sohk while talking to the sisters. You must've heard the expression, "she has a smile that would light up a room." Sohk has it. I cannot look away from it and it seems that she can't look away from me, either. The sisters notice it.

"You like her. She likes you. Take her back to your room for the back and legs massage! She be your girlfriend. You take care of her and she take care of you. Massage you every day!"

They say something to Sohk in Cambodian that makes her giggle like a schoolgirl and give me a little pinch. I smile and nod, and we're off to my room.

The romance is there but our techniques are from two different planets. I don't think she ever heard of what I was trying to do for her. We realize this and go back to standard massage.

It seems so bizarre that in a country with such comfortably relaxed, relatively liberal sexual customs (and occupied for a century or two by the French, no

less!), what I propose to Sohk is not one of the most commonly accepted customs.

I'll just have to keep knocking at that door until I find someone who enjoys my walking through it.

This experience has reinforced a bit of knowledge about relationship essentials that I already knew. The ability to communicate is a necessity. Certain things just need to be spoken about. Mutual respect, undeniable chemistry, and a warm loving smile can become the backbone of intimacy even on a first date. But fluid communication is the muscle structure that holds that backbone in place.

Yet, I feel strangely satisfied for someone that has just been left unsatisfied. Mutual feelings of affection are responsible. Sohk and I certainly have those feelings for each other even though we are sexually mismatched.

Affection sometimes seems even more important than sex, sun, food, or water.

Southeast Asia's Buddhism

Different types of Buddhism are practiced in each different part of the world. Southeast Asia's Buddhism differs from Tibetan, which differs from Japanese Zen and Chinese Chan, and other types. Similarities between schools of Buddhism are greater than the differences.

All Buddhists are pointed toward enlightenment. The term "enlightenment" has developed a lot of nuance over the years. The dictionary definition of the Buddhist version of enlightenment is "the final blessed state marked by absence of desire or suffering." A definition I've heard more often is "to see things as they really are." This means eliminating all conditioned perceptions and prejudices that we have developed during life and seeing all things objectively with equanimity and without judgement.

The motivation for Tibetan Buddhists to reach an enlightened state is to be able to use the advantages to best serve all living things. Southeast Asia's Buddhists are just motivated by a desire to be enlightened. These turn out to be minimally important differences in that once one reaches enlightenment, the desire to help other living things becomes the major motivation anyway.

Buddhist temples are almost everywhere throughout Cambodia. Most contain the area's schools. The grounds of a temple complex can cover a square block or a square acre. The central feature is always the main temple itself. I go into several of them to see the artwork and icons, and to feel the vibe.

The masterfully painted interior artwork in nearly every temple depicts episodes in the life of the historical Buddha. These stories are thought to be literal by some, spiritually metaphorical by others. The museum-quality images show the historical Buddha's birth, the Buddha

climbing down from a heavenly realm to help in lower realms, and so on.

Many temple grounds contain incredible pieces of architecture and art outside of the main temple. Ancient carved stone columns depicting deities of compassion are plentiful. Sculpture is on nearly everything. There are also ornate, boldly colored wooden buildings curved and carved into shapes that resemble waves rising and falling in an ocean.

Several other buildings, especially the schools and monks' quarters, are usually more ordinary concrete and wood structures.

Buddha was an enlightened man, not a god. Folks with their finger on the pulse of Buddhism don't actually pray to him so much as learn from him and aspire to be like him.

The Buddha was, among other things, a master of psychology. Buddhism is not the type of religion where a God or Messiah is going to save everyone from their suffering. According to Buddhism, it is up to each of us to alleviate suffering, starting with our own. It could be said that Buddhism is not a religion so much as it is a spiritual practice or school of thought.

Buddha was famous for saying that no one should blindly believe him but should rather carefully examine his words to determine if they are gold or bullshit. That is my paraphrased wording of course. There isn't any

historical evidence as to whether The Awakened One ever actually used the word "bullshit" or not. I have to guess he did, but there is no proof.

There are many statues of the historical Buddha in each temple. These are designed to be a focal point of concentration and to work as an inspiration for people to instill Buddha-like qualities within themselves.

One manner of Buddhist practice is the repetition of mantras. In a constructive form of self-programming, constant repetition of and focused meditation on mantra phrases referring to positive qualities (love, compassion, wisdom, health, etc.) eventually instill those qualities in the person that is focusing on them. Those qualities can then be passed on to the world. The word "meditation" literally translates to "familiarize with." If we do enough meditating on ideal directions and qualities, the neurons in our brains start to become more consistently wired up to those ideal directions and qualities. This will happen in the same manner that a person who practices playing a musical instrument daily will eventually get entrained with their instrument. They will be able to hit the notes they want to hit without needing a map to tell them where their fingers should go.

This is just one form of meditation. There are many.

Anyone with any sensitivity can immediately feel the difference in atmosphere as soon as they walk on to

temple grounds from the outside world. The feeling may be best described by the animals. Many of the dogs and cats living on downtown Asian streets get less respect than Rodney Dangerfield. They scurry nervously away from most humans. Dogs and cats that live on temple grounds lie down or saunter around comfortably wherever they damn well please. They lounge around as if reading a book while on vacation at a resort. Some seem to be in a meditative state. They often pay no attention at all to human passers by.

There is a reason why temple animals get to act like they own the place. In theory, as fellow living beings, it is considered that to some extent they do own the place as much as anyone else!

Feeding Chilis to Dogs

Buddhism is very kind to animals. The dogs at Asian temples get treated better than most humans do in any country. The monks and nuns comb through their fur to pick tics and burdocks off of them. The animals get petted, played with, and loved about as often as they want to be.

At noon, when the monks and nuns are finished eating for the day, the dogs get a lot of tasty leftovers. They eat the same white rice soaked in assorted delicacies as the people eat. More often than not, this food contains

meat or seafood. These delicious dishes are prepared daily by the local people for the monks and nuns, but the locals know full well that the dogs are a part of the temple community and will be finishing these offerings.

Many of these dishes are spicy enough to scare even hardcore lovers of hot food. The dogs get it all, with the chili peppers included. That brought this little tune to mind. I picture it being harmonized barbershop quartet style by four dogs ranging from puppy to old age. It can be performed in any rhythm. Pick one you like.

You comb us and feed us, you love and debreed us if we have the worms in our stool
You let us roam 'round as we damn well please. You pet us and think that we're cool

Your kindness unbounded keeps us hounds unhounded
We're comfy as bumps upon logs
But for the canine life of me, I just can't see why you feed forking chilis to dogs

CHORUS
Chili peppers to dogs, chili peppers to dogs
You know we eat a fast bowl
It tears us a new asshole
Buddha answer our prayer or an ulcer we'll share
'Cause you feed chili peppers to dogs

Our coats are all shiny, they glow as if waxed
There are bones in the meat and we love you for that
Our whole lives are blessings, we never get taxed
You give us fine pork, never trimming the fat

Weeeeeee Looooooove Faaaaaaaaaaaaat !!!

We're gratefully not in the streets getting kicked,
Or born in a desert to abusive lepers
But our butts always bleed, and we're dizzy and sick
Please give us the food, but hold out the peppers

Chili peppers to dogs, chili peppers to dogs
You know we eat a fast bowl
It tears us a new asshole
Buddha answer our prayer or an ulcer we'll share
When you feed chili peppers to dogs

Note: This song is only a joke. Truthfully, the dogs are fine. They are well adapted to their lifelong consumption of these chilis. The spiciness of the food does not bother them at all. If the peppers were disturbing to the dogs, the monks and nuns would pick them all out before feeding time.

Sarath Delivers Me To The Dragon

I don't know if everyone here has a favorite tuk-tuk driver, but I do. Sarath is about an inch or two below five feet tall and might weigh a hundred pounds soaking wet while holding a few bricks. Nonetheless, he slings my awkward fifty pound duffel bag on to the cab of his tuk-tuk as if it weighed nothing at all. Sarath speaks English very well and enjoys doing so.

I ask the hotel desk to call him whenever I need a ride because Sarath always brings a smile, good stories, information about Siem Reap, and a fair price.

On today's trip, Sarath tells me about how his leg got crushed by a car and he can't stand on it much. This is why he became a tuk-tuk driver. He also shares some observations about the Cambodian government. They seem to have a lot of the same problems the American government has, including questionable elections. Many tourists from different nations tell me that questionable elections are a problem in their countries as well.

The Tanei hotel is great but in the middle of way too much traffic and pollution. Today's tuk-tuk trip is about finding an apartment that is a little bit outside of the main downtown area. Sarath, as always, is a great help. He knows a place. It turns out to be a good place. I will move there within a few days. The price is two hundred and fifty dollars a month for a one-bedroom

apartment with air conditioner, Wi-Fi, TV, all the furniture, a large combination kitchen/living room, and hot water. Drinking water and gas for the stove cost a few dollars extra.

There is a large swimming pool, gorgeous view, small gym with weight lifting equipment, and a large furnished lounge area on the roof. There is an eccentric tendency here to have luxuries come before basics. You may move into a place that has a Beverly Hills-looking swimming pool but no hot water in your room. You may get a bed that feels like concrete and has only a bottom sheet, walls and floors with stained tiles everywhere, but a marble fountain in the lobby to rival The Ritz.

This apartment building is on a comparatively quiet street facing a small urban river that is not very pretty, but a river nonetheless. The place is far enough out of downtown to be considered almost suburban, but close enough so that a three dollar tuk-tuk ride gets you right back into the middle of the action.

The Dragon Royal Apartments are in the process of being renamed La Lune Angkor Condominiums. The management thinks it is an upscale idea but folks in the 'hood won't stand for it. Locals still and always will call the seven-story building "The Dragon."

I am The Dragon's newest resident in Room 310.

Dragonworld

The Dragon

The Dragon apartments are in Treang village. There are small villages throughout the countryside of Cambodia. The term “village” does not mean the same thing here. Many so-called villages are within the city limits of Siem Reap. We’d call them neighborhoods.

Electricity, Wi-Fi, appliances, and everything else functions more consistently in The Dragon district than it does in the short-term-stay tourist area. Folks here rent by the month. Some stay for years. They are less likely to be satisfied with modern amenities that aren't amenities than the short-term tourists in a hurry to see all the attractions before rushing back to Europe.

There is less traffic, noise, and air pollution here than in downtown. What there is of it has a chance to dissipate a little before it gets to the third floor. Treang Village has a very narrow river running through it that contains enough water to foster tree growth. Trees are a great complement to human respiratory systems. They eat carbon dioxide and release oxygen. Rising hot air brings that oxygen from the second floor where some of the tree canopy ends up to my third-floor window. A full view from the roof shows more trees growing in this neighborhood than downtown has seen in fifty years.

Thousands of dragonflies zip around helter-skelter. Flight patterns look schizophrenic to a casual observer but these dragons of the insect world know exactly where they are going and what they are doing as they snap small bugs out of the air. Their organized chaos reminds me of Grand Central Station. It may look like a soccer riot, but everyone knows where and when their train will come in and is headed in the right direction. There are no hungry dragonflies.

A Full Day In Dragon Neighborhood

Early morning smoking, scenery watching, and stretching on The Dragon's roof are a nice way to start the day. The breeze is cool enough to send the dragonflies scurrying for sunny spots. Days will average eighty to ninety-five degrees for the next three months of the Cambodian "cool" season. Night temperatures get down to what seems like a chilly sixty.

The bustling city seven stories below rises before the sun does. From this bird's eye view, trees ten to fifty feet high seem to make much of the city disappear under dense jungle. A few pagoda-shaped roofs manage to poke their curved tiles and pointy spires through the lush vegetation. Some are houses. Some are schools. Others are businesses or temples. A few radio towers join them. A loudspeaker to the left blares lilting Asian

music at festival volume. It begins way too early in the morning. Straight ahead, the voices of fifty young school children chant a recitation. Noise and grey clouds of smoke from traffic and trash fires rise from the street.

Trash trucks are few and far between. I have to guess this is a service that most folks can't afford. Most trash is burned by individual households that do not separate plastics, rubber, or styrofoam. Fumes that would get a home garbage arsonist arrested in most of the Western world run rampant across the atmosphere in early mornings and evenings—the traditional trash burning times.

Main Street

The new neighborhood's main street is called River Road and aptly runs on either side of the Siem Reap River. The 'hood is mostly residential with a good mix of restaurants, stores, temples, schools, occasional hotels, and a couple of outdoor fruit and vegetable markets spaced a half-mile apart.

The river is narrow, shallow, and muddy. Stone bridges thirty yards in length run across it. Seventeen bridges placed a third of a mile apart from each other cover the full length of River Road. Most of the bridges are painted red and ornately sculpted into the shape of a singular cobra or dragon that runs the entire length of

the bridge. Cambodia enjoys being artistic as much as it enjoys being functional!

The Peace Cafe

One of the cleanest and most beautiful sections of jungle in the neighborhood is the Peace Café. It sits a half-mile north and across the river from the Dragon Apartments. The restaurant is set back off the street a bit and composed of seating areas on either side of a concrete walkway that runs through it. The walkway is defined, as so many things in Cambodia are, by a row of thirty-foot tall palm trees on either side.

On the right side of the walkway, seating is Asian style. Elevated platforms host four comfortable cushions placed around a centered table rising a few feet above them. Seating on the left side of the walkway offers comfortable Western tables and chairs. Fresh jungle flowers of various purples and oranges grace the tables. The place is spotless and the servers are in uniforms. As soon as a customer sits down, a server arrives with a smiling face and a cold, wet, refreshing mentholated towel for that customer.

The food is among the best in Southeast Asia or anywhere else. Peace Café is strictly vegetarian but they can make a vegetable dish taste like almost anything. Their vegan version of the nationally famous Amok fish

rivals the original. The Peace Cafe also offers meditation and language classes.

If this sounds more like a fancy uptown restaurant than an ordinary mom-and-pop place, you are right. The prices reflect it. That only means that a two-dollar meal in downtown that would cost fifteen dollars in America costs four dollars at The Peace Cafe. It is worth it. Their atmosphere and food reflect the value of the place.

There is a card that displays a wisdom saying on each table at the Peace Café. Here is a sampling.

If you are depressed, you are a living in the past. If you are anxious, you are living in the future. If you are at peace, you are living in the present.

There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.

If you want peace, stop fighting. If you want peace of mind, stop fighting with your thought.

Death-Defying Dragon Drivers

I grew up in New York City and have since been in major metropolitan areas all over the world. The Cambodian drivers are by far and away the craziest and bravest I have ever seen. It is a miracle that half the population does not die daily in severe traffic accidents.

Tuk-tuks, motorbikes, some cars, and the occasional truck weave in and out of each other's way with reckless abandon. It is not uncommon to see someone driving on the wrong side of the road as if it is their personal one-way street and the opposing traffic is part of a video game obstacle course. Like Grand Theft Auto, folks seem to treat the driving process as a semi-serious form of entertainment rather than a potentially dangerous and perhaps even deadly form of transportation. Rules are fluid. Folks have no trouble bending them. I have seen tuk-tuks going north while motorbikes go south in the same lane as a car tries to use the same space to go from east to west.

Downtown is flat-out batshit crazy. Looking both ways before crossing may not be enough. The situation is a little tamer but still Western-illegal in the Dragon neighborhood.

Laughing Girl

A few blocks from the Peace Café is a freestanding hut restaurant with seventy-five cent coconuts. Miss Ika chops the top off one, sticks a straw in it, and gives it to me along with a big smile and a "Have goo-day!"

A few blocks past that and down a side street is a stand with a dozen kinds of natural juices. Half of these are made from fruits I have never heard of before. I get Aloe Vera and Black Seed. Cambodians add monstrous

amounts of sugar to everything including juices, but they are glad to leave it out if you request they do so.

Downing both juices gives a good vitamin rush. I have been taking heavy vitamins and supplements and am concerned about not being able to continue them. They only have the most basic vitamins here. The best multiples available wouldn't get a fly high. It is again third-world-obvious that having enough cash doesn't help if you are in a place that does not stock what you want to buy.

But it has also become obvious that there's no reason for concern. Much of the food here is medicine, and the traditional natural healing and nutrition practices are effective. There is a lot of turmeric to substitute for my usual curcumin. This stuff is essential to retard joint and liver inflammation. Today's juice has giant chunks of aloe vera plant in it that not only substitute for but improve upon the spoonfuls of aloe juice I was taking daily in America from plastic bottles. Many mushrooms, fruits, herbs, teas, and vegetables with medicinal effects are a regular part of the Khmer diet. Growing season is year-round so freshness is not a problem.

On that same side street, a block past the juice place, is a thirty-foot tall, ornately carved stone gate. There is usually a temple and most likely an elementary school behind such gateways. The gate is an incredible piece of art that contains finely crafted scrollwork and images of goddesses, elephants, and crocodiles. A single

craftsman of his day may have taken a whole lifetime to finish this masterpiece.

Past the gate, three monks can be seen walking in the distance behind a hundred screaming children at play. My juice buzz and I wander through the hectic schoolyard past a sweet, noisy chaos of happy children and into the serene silence of the temple/monk-residence section. Wandering into one of the smaller side temple buildings gives a big surprise. Most of the interior is cordoned off into sections of orange robes hung over rope lines acting as room dividers. Three or four monks are actually living in this shrine! I apologize to the one visible monk for my accidental trespass. He returns a benevolent smile and friendly nod.

The main temple is much bigger. It is spotless and beautiful, as most of them are. It is considered a blessing to clean the temple. Monks and locals alike take care of the area.

After a half hour of meditating and daydreaming in the temple, I go back to the school area to write up some notes. I sit on a few stone steps behind a woman selling ice cream from a cart by the schoolyard. Her crying three-year-old daughter is perched in a basket hanging from the handlebars of the bicycle that hauls the ice cream cart around.

If crying children are distracted from their crying for just a minute, they often forget what all their fuss is about. (This often works with whining adults too.) I

stroke the child's hand while giggling and smiling at her. She starts giggling back. Giggles turn into uproarious laughter and the kid is on a roll! I'm ready to play. I start laughing louder and smiling deeper right back at her. A half-dozen kids waiting for ice cream think this is hilarious. They begin laughing along with us. Mother starts laughing too. The baby is having big fun and goes on laughing for twenty minutes. She takes a short break now and then, but starts to laugh again as soon as she catches her breath. I give her a big smile and laugh in return every time she restarts. Then everyone waiting in line for ice cream breaks into laughter as well.

At six feet and two inches tall, I may be the biggest, whitest thing this kid has ever seen in her short life. She may be the sweetest and most fun-loving person I have ever met in mine.

Local Market

The local market is a smaller version of the downtown Night Market except for a very noticeable lack of bars and massage parlors. Most of the merchandise for sale is food, clothing, or cosmetics. Cosmetics are a big thing in Cambodia.

This is a neighborhood venue that caters to a few long-term tourists but mostly to locals with families. Fresh produce, meat, and live fish are available. The live fish sit on wet tables until someone buys them. At one of

these fish tables, two live ones jump off the table on to the floor right in front of me—and start walking! I shit you not! The fish have feet. There are no toes but where a dog or cat's front legs would be there are flipper/feet type appendages that allow the fish to actually walk.

After my short trip through the market for some footless fish, noodles, and greens, a tuk-tuk takes me back to The Dragon.

Evening On The Roof

I have been sitting next to the swimming pool on the roof, looking out over the jungle and can't believe how beautiful everything is! This is the Third World. It can be dirty and polluted, strange, savage in spots, hotter than the devil's nutsack everywhere, and certainly not for the faint of heart—but it is beautiful.

I am drinking my first pumpkin juice. It's not a part of Harry Potter's imagination but a real thing here. I'm on the roof watching a beautiful red sunset. Crimson spreads through the trees on one side of the sky as the full moon glows on the already darker side. The sun is losing ground to the city lights below.

It is understandably tired.

It shed a lot of light today.

Temple And School

Monk Chat

I finally have my first good therapeutic massage without complications. It costs eight dollars for a full hour and is nearly professional quality. It's nice to finally have someone paying attention to what actually needs attention instead of just using a shallow deception to manipulate me sexually in order to reach personal goals.

Anyone else ever had that problem?

I am refreshed and ready for Monk Chat.

Monk Chat means something different here than it did when I attended a few in Northern Thailand. Chats there were held at the temple. The monks were anxious to learn English. Most of the chatting revolved around that. We conversed and made friends. We went places together outside of class.

Here it is more like a lecture and takes place at the Peace Café on Mondays at 3 p.m. The monks are from the Wat Angkosar temple just a few blocks away. Two of them sit up front. They explain what monks do, then answer questions from the group. The group I am part of totals thirteen people from around the world.

Venerable Ura is the young monk center stage. He is sharp as a tack and speaks English nearly as well as I

do. The first thing he explains are the main activities carried out every day by a Cambodian monk. They are:
1—The most important activity for the community is the monks' morning walk around the neighborhood. They collect food while they give blessings to all the people who donate it. The Southeast Asian people often get up well before daybreak to start cooking rice for the monks. They consider the donating of food to them and receiving blessings from them as essential beginnings to their day. The monks survive on this food, share it with the needy, and give leftovers to the temple's resident dogs and cats.
2—Morning chanting is supposed to happen at sunrise but timing can be adjusted by decision of the head monk at each temple. The head monk at Ura's temple prefers to have morning chant after breakfast. Chants consist of monks collectively repeating phrases that remind them to act as much like a Buddha as possible.
3—Evening chanting happens every sunset. A different set of phrases are used in the evening than are used in the morning but all chants are directed toward the same purpose.
4—Night Dhamma study entails reading scriptures and discussion of Buddhist texts.

Venerable Ura next explains that the system is age-related. Under twenty years old, you are a novice. Over twenty years old, you are a monk.

Monks and novices can only eat between sunrise and noon. The monks train themselves in this way so that once they get used to that schedule the desire for food never enters their minds after noon as it does with almost everyone else in the world. In this way, such cravings do not distract them from maintaining purity of thought throughout most of the day and night.

Among the wonderfully sensible things that the Venerable Ura has to say is that hate, greed, fear, and jealousy are the main enemies. Eliminate these to find happiness. He then directs the group to say, "I want happiness." We say it out loud. He follows with, "Cut out the 'want' and cut out the 'I.' You will have nothing left but happiness."

Introduction To The After-School Sessions

The rumor around town is that nearly every school needs volunteer after-school English teachers. I go to a temple/public school that is a few blocks away from where I live. These rumors are true. The head volunteer teacher invites me to stay for an observation session.

Being a half hour early for the 5 to 6 p.m. session gives me time to join the kids playing basketball on the court next to the open-air classroom. I have been in parts of the world as the only white man the kids have ever seen. In those places, the game stops as bewildered faces stare at you for several minutes. Such is not the

case in Siem Reap. Many tourists pass through here to see the famous ruins of Angkor Wat, the largest temple ever built on Earth. Even in the outlying neighborhoods such as this one, school-age children are familiar with people from all over the world. We pass the ball around, trade shots, and laugh. They treat me with friendliness and familiarity but also with all the respect offered to a visiting dignitary.

The after-school English classes are held in a large outside space containing eight long rows of desks and benches. There are three blackboards spaced twenty feet apart up front. Beginner, medium, and advanced level classes are held simultaneously. There is a tin roof but no walls. I head back to this space to speak with my host. Albert is sixty-three years old. He resembles Santa Claus without the beard. He also acts like Santa. Albert is never without a smile.

His English is clearly understandable although colored somewhat by a South African accent. This former motor mechanic from a small village near Cape Town is completely dedicated to what he does. His tone of voice has an obvious joy riding through it as he says to me, “It's all about the kids. What they need and want is what it is all about. What you think, what you have planned, or what you want to do doesn't mean fork-all! Make it fun for them. Get these kids involved, get them interested. I see some local teachers writing out words in English with the Khmer translation under those

words. Then they just have the kids repeat like parrots over and over. They try to teach long sentences and complex grammatical structures to children who don't know what the forking words in the sentences mean! The kids will understand almost nothing of what they are being told. When they leave here, they don't know shite. They forget whatever little bit they have learned by the time they get home.

"Bring the kids into the process! Give them something they can relate to instead of just throwing words at them that don't mean anything in their world. Do that and they will end up retaining the material!"

Albert teaches both the 5 to 6 p.m. and the 6 to 7 p.m. after-school classes five days a week. He has been doing it as an unpaid volunteer for five years. Albert considers it a privilege, not an obligation. When the children come in, he lights up and so do they. I watch him write vocabulary words on the board and then have the kids match those words to the pictures in the book they are working from. He tells interesting one or two-sentence stories around each word so that the students have a context to wrap the new word around. The kids are inspired to pay seriously focused attention and learn.

Then Albert writes out a series of words and has the children pick out the one that is in some way different. "Wanted, waited, lived, ended." It brings a yell from most of the dozen children. "Lived is only one syllable!

The rest are two!" This advanced class nailed it. Albert gives them a big smile and an enthusiastic compliment.

What I see is inspiring. It gives me confidence. In spite of my lack of experience, maybe I can do this. It should be a lot like playing basketball with the children except we'll be passing nouns and verbs around instead of a basketball. The only thing left to do before I start to teach is to find the after-school program's director and get my official appointment. He's a twenty-five-year-old monk with many other obligations. He is a hard man to locate. Albert is working on it.

On the walk back to my house from the school I stop at what is called the Skybar. It is in the fancy Jaya House hotel. Alcohol is out of the question considering my medical condition. My liver has had all the abuse it can stand for one lifetime. A juice or tea on the second floor with some fellow English speakers seems like a good idea—but I do miss the alcohol. It is not because of the buzz. It is the socialization. A few drinks in a friendly atmosphere often lubricates the communication between people. It can turn strangers into friends.

The Jaya House is beautiful but is not really my kind of place. The view from the second-floor bar is nice but not as nice as the view from my fifth-floor swimming pool rooftop. Their apple juice is delicious but costs the unheard of sum of five American dollars. This is a full ten times the price on the street and twice as much as it

costs even in the expensive downtown district. But in truth, neither the cost nor the view is the real problem.

The Jaya House is an upscale, trendy, gentrified place. Extreme opulence makes me as uncomfortable as extreme poverty does. People who frequent such places can be harder to get to know than the folks you meet in a regular bar. They often seem to be protecting instead of sharing themselves.

No one here seems lubricated enough to be sociable tonight. Maybe I am not lubricated enough either.

School Daze

My first days of teaching are an altogether baffling experience for myself, the children, and my Cambodian co-teacher, Monk Chheang.

I mentioned to the after-school program director that I'd do better teaching students that are advanced enough to know what "use that word in a sentence" means. My attempted communication with the director didn't travel well. Most volunteer Cambodian nationals that teach English are local monks. They are patient, wonderful teachers but only a short step ahead of the kids in pursuing the English language. The director is no exception. He puts me with the beginner class.

Within twenty minutes another problem becomes apparent. There is no beginner textbook. My kids are at

a first-grade level working with an eighth-grade-text. I might as well try to teach them the Martian language!

Having knowledge of something doesn't always equate to having the ability to pass that knowledge on to someone else. I know English well enough but seem to suck at teaching it to elementary level students.

Unable to effectively communicate with my co-teacher or students, I decide to quit. I have a great deal of experience quitting things and have gotten very good at it. I will stick with writing books. Writing in English is my thing. Folks tell me that I do it well enough most of the time and very well sometimes.

I arrive early on the second day figuring to give one last frustrating try and then say goodbye. Albert usually arrives earlier than anyone else. He is surprised to find me there before him. We trade laughs and hellos before I tell him that this will be the last day of my teaching career.

"No, you can't do that! You are good at this. I looked over a few times yesterday and saw how well the students reacted to you." I thank him for those false compliments and explain the situation. Albert asks to see the book. He goes haywire when he sees it.

"What the fork are they thinking, giving you this book for those kids!?!? My advanced kids couldn't do this shite! Look, you can do this job and you can do it well. I've been at it for a long time and I know by now who will be good at this and who won't. You are right!

Those kids are getting taught material that is way over their heads. Here's what you have to do. Just pick a category like shapes, or colors, or whatever. Take three or four examples from the category. So let's say your category is shapes. Draw a triangle, square, circle, and rectangle on the board. Ask them to tell you what each one is. Write the English word under the shape so they visually associate the word with the shape. Then write out 'This is a_____.' on the board. Have them repeat several times, jumping back and forth between shapes as you point to them. They say 'This is a square' as you point to the square shape on the board. Do the same thing with the other shapes. Then tell them 'Together these are all shapes.' Point out the appearance of the "s" at the end of the word "shapes" and get a singular/plural practice going. Draw more circles next to the original one and have them add an "s" onto the word "circle" to make "circles." Draw the word they already know and then make the plural out of it—and explain the one/more-than-one difference between singular and plural. The kids may not have enough English vocabulary to completely understand your explanation, but your co-teacher will. He will be able to explain it to them. All this time you are making them say everything in full sentences. 'This is a circle.' 'This is a square.' Then you can get into teaching them 'These are…' for the plural instead of 'This is a…' for the singular.

"Holy shite! I still can't believe they gave you that forking advanced book to use! Okay, give this new way a try. Work in little baby steps with them. If they learn a few words, singular/plural, and get practice with these while making short complete sentences around them, that's a great accomplishment. You can do it! You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. These kids teach me more about life than I ever knew, and certainly more than I teach them! Do yourself a favor. Stick around for a while."

Albert has not completely convinced me to stay, but his enthusiasm is contagious. I decide to give this last day a serious try.

I return my textbook to Monk Chheang and try to explain the problem. He understands just a part of the explanation. He gives a benevolent smile and nod. Then, except for a few personal creative variations, I do what Albert told me to do.

It clicks! When something sparks enough interest in children to wake up a little extra brain circuitry, their eyes take on a certain glow. It is as obvious as having the electric lights in the room turn on.

Every eye in the student body is lit.

Quitting doesn't seem like as good an idea now as it did several hours ago. Days like this are worth showing up for.

I will, however, miss tomorrow's school session in order to move apartments. My current digs on the third floor are a little smoky, hot, and noisy. A move to the fourth floor will help. Apartment 401 is a bigger place than I need. Three bedrooms, four bathrooms, a large kitchen, an even larger living room, and a private balcony facing the river are admittedly overkill for just one person. But cleaner air, quieter nights, and the cooler temperatures that reach the apartment make it worth paying three hundred and seventy dollars a month rather than the the two hundred and fifty that the one-bedroom cost.

Imagine My Surprise—Part One

Imagine my surprise when that beautiful, kind, intelligent old man, my teaching mentor Albert, tells me over dinner that he would like to kill all the world's cats, taxi drivers, and black people!

He tells me stories of him and his South African mates stacking old truck tires, pouring gasoline all over and within them, and then putting a bound and gagged human being inside. Then they lit the tires and human being on fire. Albert says that as well as murdering some humans he has probably killed over a thousand cats and dogs in his life. He regrets killing humans and dogs but still looks forward to killing the next cat.

This kind, warmhearted, wonderful person, this master teacher of children, was a very cruel bigot and murderer. He is still a person capable of killing a living creature simply because it was born a cat. This proves once again that if there is a God, he is very obviously schizophrenic.

But…!

I cannot imagine what Albert endured as a child that made him a cold-hearted murderer in his younger years. Maybe he was raised by bigoted, ignorant, hateful folks and blindly inherited some of those traits? Perhaps he was badly beaten or otherwise abused himself?

Some of us have been so severely screwed over that we feel we have the right to not recover from it and to stay isolated from, bitter toward, and even hateful or afraid of our fellow humans. Many folks become defensive in brutal fashion. Others distance themselves from any concern for, or from taking any action on behalf of, what has shown itself to be a cruel and untrustworthy humanity. Anyone who is familiar with our species knows that whether we are dealing with human beings one at a time or humanity as a whole, the outcome can occasionally be disappointing and at times an emotional or even physical danger.

But there is a major problem with our attempts to strike back in anger or isolate ourselves from the rest of humanity. They just do not work. Homo sapiens are a

very interdependent species. Disrespecting an inevitable connection with others always results in more pain than pleasure—especially when the trespass is sponsored by anger or fear.

Everyone has goodness in them. Even those who initially appear evil can turn saintly once they get past the programming and traumas that fuel their cynicism, ignorance, and the cruelty that is so often manufactured by neurotic self-concern. Cultivating good intentions and putting them into action can provide a quick fix. When a person does something nice for other living creatures, neurotic self-concern begins to dissolve. The roots of evil begin to pass away.

Everyone benefits.

I am horrified to learn of Albert's past but it doesn't negate all the progress he's made as a human being, the goodness he generates in the present, or the potential he has for positively influencing young lives in the future.

Monk CharleKym

I want to be there when the monks are chanting in the main temple. I ask my Cambodian teaching partner about it. He introduces me to the only monk on the grounds that is a native English speaker.

Monk "CharleKym" is a seventy-year-old Australian native with colon cancer. He is completely covered from top to bottom in sacred tattoos, including his face, head, and feet. A bag attaches to the side of his body and

catches what would ordinarily run out the bottom of a person. In true monk fashion, CharleKym stays sociable and anxious to help. It is a joy to speak with him.

Monk CharleKym lived among the natives in Papua New Guinea for forty years before becoming a Buddhist monk. Charles (pre-monk name) is the only white man to ever be considered a blood member of that culture and be privy to their rituals, initiations, and secrets. Part of that accomplishment hinged on the fact that, inspired by the very popular 1961 book *Black Like Me*, Charles took a chemical to help darken his skin.

I would like to hang out with this guy for a hundred years but see that he is tiring rapidly. Vowing to myself to return to hear more of his story, I get right to my question about the possibility of joining in with temple chants. He replies that there is a 10:30 chant every morning.

Monk CharleKym tells me, "You will hear the big bell ring. Then one of the monks will unlock the temple and other monks will start filing in. The chanting lasts about thirty minutes, then the Head Monk talks to them a bit, then they file out. If you ever want to get into the temple to meditate by yourself, come see me. I am one of the people with the key."

I thank him sincerely. Meeting him and being given private temple access are both serious privileges.

I am very grateful.

The Head Monk—Ratna Ti

More than thirty orange-robed monks and one large American wearing overalls in ninety degree heat are sitting in the temple. One monk sits up front with a microphone. He faces the Buddha images in front with his back to me and his fellow monks. No one has to tell me that this is the Head Monk. A benevolent authority radiates from him. When he starts chanting, so does everyone else in the room.

I listen for the nearly half hour that it lasts—but to say "I listen" doesn't tell the whole story. It is more accurate to say "feel" or even "absorb" than "listen." The monks generate a lot of pure, powerful, positive energy. Everyone involved is of the same mind. There is no interference from the usual diversions of regular-people life. No one here is thinking about the bills they have to pay, how to make life work better with the spouse and kids, what band is playing at the club tonight, the walk home, or what they are going to eat tomorrow. Each individual in the group gives a totally focused attention to the same resonance. They are so much on the same wavelength that it seems the chant is the product of a single voice, and this is actually true in a very real way! Not only does each individual within the group share the desire to reach spiritual heights and help humanity, they are each pronouncing the same very familiar sets of words that have been used for millennia.

These same words have been chanted by untold millions of monks throughout uncountable generations. The monks all eat the same food and live together. They also share similar schedules and attitudes as well as common motivations. They have a gigantic head start on the road to what is often called Unity Consciousness. The energy is so intense that, much more than just listening to it, I have the feeling of *being* it. That may sound weird but it is an accurate description.

Beautiful, other-worldly, clean, pure, joyful, strange, transcendent, and perfect are words that come to mind—as soon as I remember that I actually have an individual mind for words to come to. But my individual mind feels like a joke. It is just a silly distraction from holding on to the bigger truth of the Collective Mind that now seems like the only reality. This is not any sort of hocus-pocus New Age bullshit. Ancient seers, great psychologists like Carl Jung, modern mystics, and every quantum physics professor shares the same view on this subject. Even the walrus invented by the Beatles knew that "I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together."

When the chanting ends, the head monk up front turns around to face the rest of the monks. He talks to them. It is again obvious that this man is in a position of authority. He speaks to the monks in a very firm tone. It is of course in Cambodian. I don't under-

stand a word of it but by this point am somewhat tuned into the beyond-language part of what is going on. It feels like he might be reminding them of how important discipline becomes when pursuing a deep experience of what the Buddha or the Beatles were talking about.

He then addresses the individual monks. The authoritative tone turns to honey. There are still a few serious-sounding sentences but all the conversations are gentle and contain laughter on both sides. This man obviously has deep concern for his students. It is just as obvious that the student monks have a real respect and affection for this teacher. The air is as thick with these sentiments, as it had been with the power and purity of the chanting a few minutes earlier.

On my way out, I go up front to put ten thousand Cambodian riel (two dollars and fifty cents US) in the voluntary collection box. I bow to the head monk and thank him. He gets up, shakes my hand, and holds it for several minutes as we talk and walk out of the temple. He is a few decades younger than I am, but holds on to my hand as a grandfather might hold a grandson's hand.

His English language skills are very good. He asks about me. We exchange names, hometowns, and ages. He is named Ratna Ti, is forty-five years old, and seems impressed that I made it to sixty-eight! Perhaps reaching that age is a big accomplishment in Cambodia.

Ratna Ti says, "You can come to chanting anytime. Visit and have lunch some time! And thanks for doing volunteer teaching in the after-school program."

Ratna Ti tells me that he has just come back from Viet Nam where he was studying. I ask, "What kind of Buddhism were you studying in Vietnam? How does it vary from Cambodian Buddhism?"

His answer surprises me. "No, I'm studying for a doctorate in public administration."

I didn't know monks do that!

We say goodbye as I walk towards the gate. While stepping outside of the school and temple grounds, an immense wave of gratitude washes over me. It touches me deeply. I am, at times, not as grateful as would be appropriate. I laugh at the thought that drowning in gratitude would be a good way to die—but living in it is a much better idea.

Imagine My Surprise! Part Two

Imagine my surprise when I found out later from Monk CharleKym that Ratna Ti was caught stealing money from the congregation—a lot of money. He then repented, cried, and begged to them. The congregation forgave him and allowed him to retain his position.

Apparently he still abuses power. Ratna Ti's good friend and assistant head monk lives in a house within

the monastery. He runs a personal business from it, has a car of his own, and drives it. These are all definite no-nos for Southeast Asian monks. It is very rare that this type of blatant deviance from all the traditionally strict disciplinary and behavioral codes is witnessed, much less tolerated, in monks of any order.

When the congregation complained to Ratna Ti, he refused to take action against his friend. The trespasses continue to this day. It seems that head monks get to call all the shots within their individual temples, at least temporarily, even if those shots ignore traditional ethics.

So it turns out that Ratna Ti is not the total saint that he appears to be. I guess no one is. This kind, warmhearted, wonderful religious leader of his community loves teaching people how to become holy. He is said to be a kind, compassionate expert at comforting the souls in his flock. He is also arrogant and corrupt, proving yet again that if there is a God, he is obviously schizophrenic. Luckily, priests with Ratna Ti's damaged ethics are very much a rarity.

The New Year

Holiday Flu

Coughing, sneezing, and respiratory congestion are not as much fun as holiday celebrations would have been. I won't bring my germs around monks, children, or the general public so, except for short food runs to local markets, I stay home. Two weeks of very sudden isolation after two solid months of whirlwind activity immersed in a strange culture provides some interesting insights. Laying around with only my own company has invited a lot of thought to rise to the surface. Not every car on this deeper train of thought is firmly on its tracks. It feels like a few pieces are missing from my puzzle but I'm not sure what they are.

The singular obvious missing piece is gratitude for being alive. I don't have much of it. Many things other people would regard as miraculous good luck are things that I have not given proper appreciation. The fatal overdose in early life and the recent bout with cancer pushed the envelope of death far enough to tear its seams open a little bit. What I experienced through the cracks was beautiful enough to make verbal description impossible. The Beyond was so indescribably awesome that I have had some trouble falling completely back in love with life on Earth ever since.

This must be remedied! Regardless of what is on the other side of this incarnation, I am going to be in a body for a while. A stronger appreciation of what "alive" can mean needs to be rebuilt. I must stop thinking of my body as a meat prison.

Rebuilding an appreciation of life has to include a gratitude for all of life's little things as well as generic appreciation for simply being alive. All the real friends, all the good people, the nice places seen and great things done, the plentiful supply of food, comfortable places to live, and so many other things are not being given as many thank yous as they deserve.

I feel like just a bit of a jackass around this lack of gratitude. I am also feeling a little healthier after two weeks of rest. It is time to right a few wrongs.

The New Year's Day Gratitude Walk

A good first step seems to be a walk around the Dragon neighborhood on New Year's Day—a walk with a much greater awareness of and appreciation for things that deserve it.

I start the day buying a coconut from the coconut lady a quarter mile down the road. She smiles as she chops the top off with a machete, then sticks a straw in the coconut. She speaks to me in her language and I speak to her in mine. Neither of us understands a word of what the other one says but we both have fun as we

laugh at ourselves and each other. When I leave her today, I add a "thank you for the kindness and coconuts" to the end of our conversation.

Next stop on my New Year's tour to reestablish a grateful state of mind is the Peace Café to meet my friend Neill and his family. This bit isn't much different today than it is on any other day. I am always thanking the Peace Cafe people for who they are, what they do, and how they do it. The place is a good example of how to do something well.

So is Neill De Kort. He is a young Dutch man whose family relocated to Canada when Neill was in his teens. We met at the bank.

I never had a bank account in America or anywhere else until I was over fifty years old. To this day I've never had a telephone or driven a car. I have spent the past forty-five years without receiving a bill in my name. Friends tell me to expect technical trouble in the twenty-first century due to the fact that I never adapted to the twentieth.

The Cambodian bank requires me to have a valid telephone number in order to open an account. A bank account in Cambodia is required in order to get money from an American account. My funds are running low. The ironic possibility of beating cancer and a few other impending fatalities only to die homeless and hungry on the steaming Asian streets makes me giggle. The fact that it could happen because I don't like telephones and

while still having several thousand dollars in an American bank makes me laugh out loud—for a minute. Then it makes me argue with the bank officer. Neill walks by while that discussion is going on.

He enters the conversation out of nowhere and gives the bank officer his phone number. The bank sees fit to allow me the use of Neill's number in order to open my account. Neill and his Cambodian partner owned coconut farms here for years. He recently sold them and is now into Cambodian real estate, although his main and more global business is textiles. Neill's father was also in the textile business, so the younger De Kort has two generations of related business connections all over the world and some obvious influence in the bank. My account opened without any further hitch. Neill and I had never met before that moment. He just saw someone having a problem and became the solution.

Neill is six feet five inches tall. He is a twenty-year student of boxing with arms that are nearly the length of a giraffe's neck. I'm guessing he has won more fights than he's lost. This is an intelligent, resourceful, and very accomplished guy.

I thank him. We hang out a bit in the bank and get along well. I invite him and his family to a thank-you lunch at the Peace Cafe.

We meet on schedule. Neill's gorgeous Dutch wife is named Bo. The legendary Bo Derek in her prime was

no lovelier than Mrs. De Kort. She is graced with blond hair, green eyes, two beautiful pre-school-aged children, and is a decade younger than her husband.

My conversation with the De Korts lasts several hours. It is the best one I have had, with the most like-minded folks I've met since leaving the state of New Mexico months ago. Mister and Mrs. De Kort have both used Rick Simpson Oil, as I did for the cancer. He used it for asthma, she for Lyme disease. Both of them had positive outcomes. Both have gone through health and attitude changes similar to the ones I have gone through. We also share many other common ideas and attitudes as well.

Sometimes you don't realize how much you miss something until you get a little taste of it again. I do well by myself. My activities are mostly solitary. They are usually productive, or at least harmless. Some are really interesting. Some are even exciting. There is rarely a sense that anything important is missing, but folks like the De Korts help me remember that a real connection with other humans is part of being human yourself. I appreciate the differences in people—but it is a booster shot for the psyche and a strengthening of the heart to find someone else who is on the same wavelength. It adds just a bit of concrete credence to that "we are all one" thing. That phrase gets a lot more lip service than

validation in everyday life. Folks who make it blatantly real for you don't seem to come along every day.

The De Korts will be leaving Cambodia for Holland soon. Loneliness is a feeling that does not visit me often but I feel it lurking nearby.

Fedex isn't going to deliver this solution to me! I'll have to get out more often to the places where people congregate. That will increase the odds of meeting more people like the De Kort family. Cheap living, beautiful surroundings, and adventurous experiences are wonderful, but the company of kindred spirits is like water in the desert. Kindred spirits make gratitude easy.

Next stop on the New Year's Day gratitude walk is the Domo Café. The Domo is a three-block walk down River Road from Peace Café. I silently thank the sun for light and heat, and the folks passing by for being so beautiful. There are some good-looking people here! I thank the folks who built this sidewalk under my feet, and the river for giving life to all the trees on either side of it.

At this point I am starting to feel a little syrupy and have to wonder if all this over-the-top gratitude is just a lot of pretentious bullshit running through my head. I think not! Gratitude, even the most basic gratitude for being alive, has been away too long. A little overkill may be necessary to bring a proper appreciation of life back to balance. I thank the crippled dog a few

yards away for using the riverbank instead of the street or sidewalk as his toilet, then head to the Domo for my muffin. They are sold out. I thank them for saving me from the sugar consumption and move on.

The next stop is the White Rose massage parlor. It is a strictly legit place where they always give good rubs and don't offer clients back-breaking or disappointing semi-sexual extras. At six dollars for a therapeutic full hour massage without my needing to either limp away or explain my sexual tastes in sign language to a non-English speaking stranger, there is no problem feeling gratitude here.

It still feels like authentic gratitude is not covering all the ground it should. More practice is necessary! "Gratitude" goes on the permanent to-do list.

The Other Side Of The Coin

As is true of nearly everything on this two-headed planet, Cambodia has some less inviting aspects. As grateful as I am to be here, I can't help but notice that there are a few seriously tarnished spots that accompany some minor difficulties.

1— Most of my Buddhist study has been done with the Tibetans. Entering the Tibetan Buddhist monastic order usually requires a very serious commitment. In South-east Asia, the system is different. An advantage of the Southeast Asian system is that it allows a much broader

access to both foreigners and natives. Kids go to temple and become monks for a month as if in summer camp. Most folks routinely spend a month as a monk in the temple after a close relative dies. I was able to live in a Thai Temple for a half-year (see the book Reincarnation Through Common Sense). In Tibetan, Zen, or many other monasteries, that wonderful, life-altering exposure would not have been possible for a person with my lack of commitment.

One disadvantage to the Southeast Asian system is that with the mesh in the net being loosely woven, more bad fish can slip into the organization. There are a few monks with un-monk-like qualities.

As is true in most religions, most Southeast Asian Buddhist priests are well-motivated, morally admirable, wonderfully kind-hearted, and highly dedicated people. A few of them don't measure up to the rest. A few enter monastic life to avoid homelessness, debt, bad relationships, enemies, or prosecution. I've never heard about any pedophilia, homosexual or otherwise, within the Buddhist system. Instances of Southeast Asian monks using their position of spiritual influence to take sexual advantage of women happen very infrequently.

The majority of these sparse monastic trespasses involve money and business. Learning that you have a spiritual guide that is as corrupt as a politician isn't fun.
2—This place is almost exactly on the other side of the world from East Coast America. This is true figuratively

as well as literally. Many differences are wonderful. Some seem berserk. Communication is difficult. A lot of problems stem from misinterpretations of language but many are due to conflicting interpretations of reality! This can be hell on a visitor. Time and space are looked at differently here. A meeting arranged at a certain time has a very slim chance of actually happening at that time. Cambodians would be right at home in Latin America. They also operate on *manana time*.

Locals that speak English very well have told me such things as, "We'll do it each Sunday, twice a month" and "I can do that thing but I cannot do it." Either/or questions often get answered with "yes." Folks here do not have a concept of north, south, east, or west. For real! That's not a joke!

3—Even during winter it can be ninety degrees with high humidity.

4—There are bags of garbage all over the residential neighborhoods. This garbage is eventually burned in the street. It includes materials that should be recycled but instead release toxic gasses into consistently smokey air.

5—Much of the food is deep-fried and heavily sugared or salted. Most of Cambodia is still a generation away from practicing the nutritional information that would increase both health and life span.

6—Many locals look at a foreigner and see only money, not human. Charging foreigners more than locals is standard in many markets.

Southeast Asia may be safer, friendlier, and saner in many ways than most of the world. It is warmer during winter than almost anyplace else on Earth. It is much less expensive to live comfortably here than it is to live at all in the Western world. But some of the things that make up a paradise are blatantly missing.

One of my least favorite parts of life on Earth is also one of my least favorite parts of life in Cambodia. The second class status of fifty percent of our population fosters a lot of suffering. Gender equality has further to go in Southeast Asia than it does in the West.

On the brighter side, about sixty-one percent of this nation's businesses are owned by women. That doesn't really compensate for the less agreeable facts. One in five women aged 15-49 suffer violence. Domestic violence is not considered a criminal offense so it very often goes unreported. There are 260,000 human/sexual trafficking victims in Cambodia. This includes 20,000 prostitutes in the capitol city alone. A woman's virginity sells for $800. Non-virgins sell for a lot less. Some of the police are in cahoots with some of the whorehouses and so the law's obligation to protect society's victims dissolves at times.

Behind these abhorrent circumstances stand the sad truths that make them possible.

Our Global Sexual Misconduct Problem

There are sexual misconduct and rape problems in Cambodia. They are probably no worse than in America and not as severe as in some other parts of the world—but they exist. Most of Earth's cultures and countries have suffered and condoned this tragedy since the beginning of people. The criminal sexuality problem has been more strongly brought to our attention in recent years by the advances in technology that now circulate information instantaneously across the globe. That is, of course, a good thing but this very same technology also fosters a commercial manipulation that aggravates the problem. Commercial manipulation is one of several reasons why so many folks are ruled as much or more by their genitals as they are by their minds and hearts.

It is certainly necessary to hold individual perverts accountable for their actions, but isn't our reaction to all the sensationalist exposures of recent sexual deviance by celebrities just a bit short-sighted? Where is the much more important indictment of our culture? Our religions? Our advertising?

Nature's hardwiring of human reproductive drives is so much to deal with all by itself that it makes most folks' heads explode during puberty. Having the male equipment makes the job even more difficult. It takes a lot of effort, willpower, and education to ensure that harmlessly out-of-control boys don't grow up to become

harmfully out-of-control men. Do we get that training? No! Instead we get a dangerous, religiously-mandated sexual repression that often leads to criminally explosive behavior.

Commercial advertising adds fuel to the fire. It uses an insidious sexual hypnosis designed to sell products. Madison Avenue miscreants use sexual references and images to push buttons within us that are beyond our conscious control. Many salesmen use this approach powerfully enough to convince people to do some pretty bizarre things and purchase some very bizarre products. The effects of constant battering by the sexual nuance within advertising, religious sexual repression, and our no-longer-relevant gender role assignments have led us into social disaster.

So what do we do? Do we try to cut the problem off at its source? Do we attempt to uproot this systemic manipulation of our population by prosecuting or at least making changes within the institutions responsible for this negative brainwashing? No, we prefer a gross sensationalist scapegoat approach that allows us to stay in denial about our systemic shortcomings. We like to deny collective responsibility for malfunctions by heaping rage upon a few degenerates that are clumsy, evil, and unfortunate enough to get picked out of the crowd. This allows us to feel good about being on "the right side" without having to take any action that may wobble the status quo. It allows us to enjoy a delusional moral

superiority while still being complicit in systems that foster a real moral degeneracy.

Of course, everyone is responsible for their actions and, again, individual perverts are not excusable. But from another angle and in a deeper sense, doesn't their prosecution equate to a war on individual illegal drug users as opposed to addressing the fact that our drug culture has been spawned and fostered by the pharmaceutical/medical industry? Doesn't it also bear a strong resemblance to the war on poor people that we engage in as opposed to the war on poverty that we should be engaging?

These systemic malfunctions are global problems but as is so often true, America gets the lion's share of media coverage and so seems to lead the way. Do we want to be known as the nation that leads the world in prosecuting sexual deviants while at the same time leading the world in perpetuating the degenerate systems that produced those sick individuals?

Humanity has reached a "by-any-means-necessary" need for changing religious sexual repression, our culturally accepted norms based on gender role anachronisms, and the diseased hypnosis that is modern commercial advertising. As is true of so many global problems, there is a lot of talk about these things but not enough action. Essential messages from activists, comedians, and even politicians continue to fall on deaf ears

in spite of their importance. We willfully ignore difficult problems and even more difficult solutions in favor of our manageable scapegoats and excuses.

You can hang everyone you want to hang, from the most severe Cosbys to the mildest Frankens. You can string them up in public from the highest trees. It isn't a compassionate reaction. It is an understandable one.

But treating a symptom never cured a disease.

A Steam Bath With Gay Dudes

It is time for a medical adventure! I have to get the clog out of my chest. The flu is pretty much gone but a deep lingering congestion still hampers my breathing. A steam room is needed. It is one of the best things that a person can do for clogged lungs. Taking care of the lungs is even more important than usual in this city where most citizens publicly burn industrial-caliber waste while thousands of motorbikes pump additional toxins into the air. I tear up Google looking for a hotel, spa, or health club with a steam room.

My research shows that the only option for a steam room in Siem Reap is the lone gay bathhouse. That is understandable. The whole city feels like a steam room! Folks might pay to sit in a walk-in freezer for a while but under ordinary circumstances no one would pay to sit in a steam room.

Gotta think about this one.

Within a minute I realize that this is a no-brainer. It is no problem for me—and shouldn't be one for the guys frequenting the place. I have no interest in sitting on a dick myself but I'm glad folks are having fun with it, if that's what they want to do. Who has the right to tell anyone else how they should enjoy themselves, if that anyone else isn't doing harm? Many of us New York City basketball playing folks carry a "no harm, no foul" attitude as a way of life. It may be the best notion that Brooklyn gave me. If everyone on the planet shared this attitude, many other problems would solve themselves. If other clientele in the bathhouse are as unconcerned about my thing as I am about theirs, my experience there will be pleasant and medically helpful.

It also seems logical that I am too old, wrinkled, and unattractive for any gay guy in his right mind to hit on.

I go, and am right. The Men's Resort and Spa is on a backstreet flanked by apartment buildings, a couple of temples, and a theater company's office. The folks here are young enough to be my grandkids and are looking for someone in their own age range. It seems peculiar how they walk around wrapped in towels, just staring at each other. There is no audible conversation or visible participation. They all seem to be waiting for something. That something must happen somewhere but I see no interaction at all.

The steam room has eucalyptus. It does great things for my lungs. After three ten-minute shifts, I silently

thank the steam and the gay dudes, then catch a tuk-tuk back to The Dragon.

Country Bus To The Capital City

Time for a six-hour bus trip through the countryside. This will allow for some sight-seeing and will bring me from Siem Reap to Phnom Penh, capital city of Cambodia. The American Embassy is in Phnom Penh. That is where US passports get renewed. Passport renewal is this week's mission. Most countries require a passport to have at least six months left before the expiration date or they won't let you into their country. Mine is close to that six-month line.

Stop Smoking Weed For Breakfast!

I may have to stop smoking weed for breakfast, at least until I get away from this foggy brown stuff and back to more clarifying green weed. Maybe some good green will improve the odds of making some more lucid observations and the better decisions that come with them. Want to hear a funny and related story? It won't seem funny for a few pages but the punchline at the end is hilarious!

The trip to Phnom Penh starts with the usual Southeast Asian tweaks. I schedule a ride on a big bus with a bathroom in it. I take a tuk-tuk to the station and

am told by the friendly desk lady that the bus will arrive within forty minutes. Over an hour later, a van shows up. It turns out that we are at an auxiliary bus station. The van takes me three miles to the main bus station where another van is waiting. I am told that the big bus with the bathroom is broken. This van will replace it. The bus lady's voice, face, and body language tell me she is lying. There are exactly eleven passengers waiting and exactly eleven passenger seats in the van. There is no crowd of travelers waiting disappointedly for a big bus. It seems I have been sold a ticket for passage on a vehicle that never existed.

I get packed into the van like a sardine along with eleven other full-sized passengers and the driver. The only option is to wait twelve hours for the next fully equipped bus, which is certainly not guaranteed to be one. I hop on board while giving the customer service person a ration of shit and immediately feel bad about that. Snapping at folks on the job is rarely a good idea. No matter how badly screwed you get by a company, getting nasty with employees doesn't help and usually isn't appropriate. Random employees are rarely the ones screwing you.

Within twenty minutes of leaving town, things start to improve. There are more bicycles than motorbikes outside of the heavily populated city. The air quality is better and there is less visible trash.

The landscape is mostly rice paddies and savannah. Most houses are built on stilts as protection against the flooding that often results from monsoon rains. A lot of open fields, cows, horned bulls, and water buffalo are surrounded by bushes and trees. The animals graze in the wide open fields where rice must grow at certain times of year. There is no apparent cultivation going on. Cambodia has a massive amount of good food growing in the wild so there is no desperate need for at-home cultivation of crops.

There are no tractors or other mechanized farm equipment. If there is any plowing to be done, water buffalo do it. Cattle are everywhere! They are in the front and back yards of houses, in the fields, and on the road. They act like they own the place. My van has to make several stops to allow horned behemoths to shuffle across the road at their own pace.

More shops than logic would dictate a need for line both sides of the road, but they aren't "shops" as any Westerners know them. They are makeshift, hand-built tables and shelves constructed of tree branches that are tied together with twine. These are shielded from the sun by giant beach umbrellas. The tables and shelves hold everything from fruit and clothing to gasoline for motorbikes that is sold in old quart whiskey bottles.

There are a few temples scattered throughout the countryside but rural Cambodia is nowhere near as thick with them as Siem Reap.

There is an international group of travelers in the van. No Cambodians. Germany, Ireland, Japan, and Australia are among the countries represented. I sit next to a lovely couple in their fifties from Denmark. They have reasonable questions to ask an American.

"What is with all the guns?"

"How can such intelligent people be so bigoted and violent?"

"What is going to happen there?"

Susanna and Kurt voice more concern than scorn for the US. They are kind-hearted and sincerely worried about American people as well as being worried about how America affects the rest of the world.

In The Big City

We arrive in Phnom Penh on schedule. The US embassy is already closed for the day. After check-in at the hotel there is still time to find the vitamin store I had researched. As is the custom, I give the tuk-tuk driver the address and phone number of our target destination. He gets us lost for two hours in a city that is bigger and more polluted than Siem Reap. He drives around one block five times and calls the vitamin store four times. In spite of getting instructions from them during all four of the phone calls, the search continues. We finally find the place only to discover that it was falsely advertised as a

vitamin store and only carries protein powders for weightlifters.

The next day's embassy procedure is even more frustrating than the vitamin trip. No US passports are renewed here in country. They are sent to America for processing and then mailed back to Cambodia. This process could take two weeks or much longer. For me, it would include another unpleasant, expensive round-trip into a city that is way too big for my liking. It is now February. My passport expires in October. I can linger in Cambodia for another month or two and still have the six months of passport left that is required to get into another country. It seems smarter to abort the mission and deal with the passport renewal in a place where the process is simpler and things are more organized. I walk out of the embassy carrying all my paperwork as well as an unfamiliar and unpleasantly frustrated irritability.

Other tweaks, too many and minor to mention, also happen in Phnom Penh. Siem Reap has some problems but there are no folks standing on the main street in downtown sporting their pants around their ankles with a fully extended hard-on and sagging booty hanging out in the breeze for all to see. Whatever happened to this poor guy staring blankly into space seems to have also happened in part to the entire city.

I have had enough of this place and figure to treat myself to a plane ride back to Siem Reap. My last night

in the big city is used for boring rest time and an on line plane reservation.

The Plane Truth

But the SNAFUs aren't over yet! In the morning I go to the check-in counter at the airport and discover that someone on the other end of the computer screwed up my reservation last night. I don't have one, and they don't sell tickets at the check-in counter. The check-in counter folks direct me to the purchase counter at the other end of the airport. I haul my heavy bags over there to discover that the one person on that desk is out to lunch and won't be back until after my flight leaves. At this point, pissed-off replaces logic. I start loudly complaining to and with the several other travelers who are having similar problems.

When I react badly to any temporary external shit instead of dwelling in the eternal internal Shinola, it does not usually end well—but in this case irritability pays off. An innocent bystander overhears the tirade and tells me of a flight leaving in one hour on a different airline. I go to that airline's sales counter.

That ticket costs three times as much as the other ticket would have. Buying close to flight time always has that disadvantage. The guy I buy the ticket from takes a half-hour to put it together. He listens to me go between barking at him and apologizing for my attitude. Finally,

he gives me a typed piece of paper with nothing but a flight number and time on it. There is no receipt to show proof of ticket purchase nor any other information on the paper. Luckily, there is a plastic window between us. It protects me from having yet another bad reaction and protects him from me. I glare through him and strongly request an actual receipt, ticket, and some clear further instructions. He is shaken. He gives them to me.

Here's The Punch Line

Everyone has to show their passport at the gate in order to board the plane. My eyes haphazardly drop into focus on the information in mine as I hand it to the gate-side boarding crew. I rub my eyes, blink several times, and look again as I walk past the checkpoint.

I start laughing too loudly. Luckily, I am already in the tunnel going to the plane. If anyone in authority had seen me, it would appear that a lunatic was laughing like a hyena at nothing and they would have called the men in the white coats to take me away.

The expiration date on the passport is indeed October, but not the October I thought it was. There is over a year and a half left until expiration, not just the half year I imagined. That October expiration date is for next year, not this one.

This is funny but also embarrassing. I am always telling people how important paying real attention is. I

suffered expensive, aggravating malfunctions due to not paying attention to a simple, clearly printed detail. My eyes had seen that detail several times during the past week but my brain didn't register it.

It is even more embarrassing for me as the guy who is always telling people that anger is pointless and that it accomplishes nothing. I snapped at a few people and made an asshole of myself more than once during the past few days. Whether some of those people deserved it or not is no excuse for doing it.

The heat, pollution, humidity, diet, and lack of any ability to communicate are taking an obvious mental toll. Now that it is over, my brain-fart provides a good laugh—but certainly not a good enough laugh to ever want to repeat such mental clumsiness or the ordeals that result from it.

Earth's Largest Temple Ever

Siem Reap's Angkor Wat is the largest temple ever built on Earth. It is, more accurately, an ancient city tied together by a complex of temples. It was built by the Emperor Suryavarman The Second almost a thousand years ago as the state temple and political center of his empire. "Angkor" translates from the Cambodian into English as "capital city." "Wat" translates as "temple." It was rediscovered in the 1840s by French explorer Henri

Mouhot. He said the site was "grander than anything left to us by Greece or Rome." I agree.

Chhum Chhaiya is my guide for this tour. He is also my waiter at the organic restaurant in town, an English language student, and my friend. He also does volunteer work as a tour guide for high school students that come from all over Cambodia to see their national treasure.

The temple design represents Mount Meru, home of the gods according to many Hindus and Buddhists. There is a Buddhist/Hindu fusion throughout Angkor Wat that pays the two schools of thought equal respect. Shiva lingas and Buddha images are often seen within the same building. Angkor Wat's five towers were designed to recreate the five peaks of Mount Meru. The big tower above the main shrine is Angkor Wat's highest point at nearly seventy feet.

A fifteen-foot high wall and a wide moat protected the city. Much of that wall still stands. Inside the wall, Angkor Wat covers two hundred acres that include not only the city and temple structures but also contain the emperor's palace just north of the main temple.

The libraries, temples, and other buildings are all decorated with thousands of stone figures carved into their rock walls. The figures depict deities and heroic figures from the Hindu and Buddhist religions as well as soldiers, gods, and demons at war.

Angkor Wat was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1992.

Chhum tells me that the whole complex was built entirely by free labor—but not slave labor. Forcing his best effort at the English language, he explains that it was "believe labor." Thousands of folks worked without pay for decades in the belief that the most noble way to spend their life was in dedication and service to Buddha and Vishnu, their king, countrymen, and their city.

According to Chhum, giant stones laid on bamboo rollers were hauled by elephants from quarries many miles away. Do you know how to; make bamboo rollers hold up to a several ton stone? pick that stone up and put it perfectly in place on the bamboo rollers? pick it up again and put it in place once it gets to where it is going? Neither do I. Apparently, the ancients did.

The Angkor Wat area is way too big to walk around even if it isn't ninety-six degrees with high humidity as it is today. Tourists hire a tuk-tuk for the day to drive them from site to site within the complex. Tuk-tuks wait outside each site while their passengers climb through the ancient structures.

This two hundred acres is very different from its cosmopolitan host city of Siem Reap. There is almost no trash by the side of the road. There are lakes, monkeys, and pristine, aboriginal jungle. Even the air here has a consecrated freshness about it. Angkor Wat's complex is

considered sacred ground. It is treated as such by locals and tourists alike.

If this reverent attitude was carried over into the city, nation, and planet, life on Earth would be much better for us all. Unfortunately, very little of Earth is treated with the respect that the ruins of Angkor Wat enjoy. The best chance of averting what currently seems like an inevitable collapse of humanity and the demise of a habitable planet is a large-scale awakening that would sponsor such a reverence. The most historically successful method to peacefully fuel an awakening in human consciousness that inspires social progress is nonviolent non-cooperation with oppressive forces. It is what Gandhi made work in India and what Martin Luther King Jr. did in America. This tactic requires generous, altruistic and, in places, sacrificially heroic character strength on the part of millions of individuals—not only all at once, but also one at a time.

Widespread efforts on behalf of personal mental health or the public good seem an unlikely miracle for our largely "selfie" oriented culture to produce. Of course, it is often when things look bleakest that the miracles show up.

But few people have stopped buying inexpensive products in order to nonviolently non-cooperate with the slave labor systems that produce them. Very few will stop watching the manufactured trauma and violence on TV that they are habituated to although these are a well

known cause of the adrenaline and cortisol rushes that shock the mind and central nervous system into a fear-based, defensive way of life. Very few people risk even the inconvenience, much less the suffering, that it might take to buck the status quo.

I don't mean to be pessimistic but unless some massive change in thought and emotion is reached by millions of individual humans within the next few years, it seems we are in a "smoke ‘em if you got ‘em" situation.

It will not be the first time! The silent ruins of Angkor Wat, the pyramids of Egypt, and the remains of so many other defunct civilizations testify to that. Even our present day’s brightest minds and learned scholars can't figure out how ancient technology accomplished much of what it accomplished. Many civilizations that enjoyed a deeper intelligence, saner technologies, and a stronger congruence with the rest of life on Earth than we do have disappeared. They have taken most of their wisdom with them.

There are many empty libraries in Angkor Wat.

Photos Of Angkor Wat Here

As Relates To America

America is much more technologically and materially advanced than Cambodia. Its citizens have a much greater choice of and access to food, clothing, shelter, and most other commodities than the Cambodians. Folks here work harder and put in longer hours, yet many get paid so much less that their families don't have enough food every day. Many parents cannot afford to send their children to elementary school to learn basic literacy. There is no free schooling here. There are many other factors including the brutal heat, humidity, and air quality that make life in Southeast Asia difficult. Nonetheless, Cambodians are happier, kinder, friendlier, often healthier, and seem to enjoy life more than the average American. If I had to choose between spending the rest of my life in Cambodia or America, I'd be tempted to try to make Cambodia work.

Why?

There is a feeling of camaraderie among all the people here. Individual families are close and the entire nation is something of a loosely knit extended family. Americans pull this off at times but it always seems to spring from an aggressive or defensive motivation in war, or the need to clean up and rebuild after a disaster.

Cambodians are not as angry, or scared, or divided as Americans. Their motivations are usually more constructive than destructive. This nation is on the way

up, not the way down. It sometimes seems as if the country is stumbling in the dark, bumping into things while trying to find its way—but it is always moving forward. Cambodians are like I imagine Americans to have been during the pioneer days before we became such spoiled little people.

Cambodians have no animosity toward a specific group of people. They may get a bit irritable with a few foreigners on occasion and overcharge tourists regularly but they do not have any prejudices against Muslims, Africans, Americans, Jews, Chinese, or whoever. The bit of animosity that I hear directed toward foreigners is either directed toward all of them or more often directed at an individual tourist who acts like enough of a jackass to earn an irritable response.

Cambodians work very seriously at living well but don't take themselves seriously in a way that makes life a trial or burden. They do have a sense of the tragic but know that life is to be celebrated, not mourned. Southeast Asians have a much better sense of perspective as far as knowing that the world doesn't revolve around their individual desires. The misguided sense of entitlement that Americans suffer from, and makes the rest of the world suffer for, is not present here.

We Americans often take our little thoughts and emotions too seriously. Relatively meaningless episodes sometimes become dramatic events. Cambodians know that shit happens and is temporary. They do not allow

too many things to upset them. More importantly, they know that getting upset under any circumstance usually results in more harm than good.

As the great Professor Joseph Campbell said, we humans are all symbolically hanging on the cross where life meets time. Everyone alive must deal with troubles caused by the journey through time—illness, loss, trauma, suffering, and eventual death. When we embrace the inevitable processes of life-and-time and do it courageously with a smile on our faces and eyes wide open, we accomplish the clarity and grace spoken of by the spiritual messengers. When we realize that in spite of all the bumps in the road we can hit that road with a good attitude, the life we live takes on a dimension that is heroic. We become capable of joyful participation in our world while being fully aware of the inevitable suffering and death it entails.

"When the ego is capable of taking part in this crucifixion, then you…have achieved, I would say, the goal of the Christian message."

Joseph Campbell spent almost his whole life in America. There are very few people in Cambodia who are familiar with him, or with the bleak history or even the definition of crucifixion. Yet many people in Southeast Asia have a better grasp of Campbell's message than Americans do.

Why?

Is it the severe living conditions that color the Southeast Asian attitude? The Buddhism?

Maybe both. But there is more. The quality of the attention paid by a student is in many ways a lot more important than who the teacher is, and it may be more important than any other aspect of learning. Maybe as Americans we just have way too many distractions available to draw our quality attention away from our better teachers. Many brilliant minds with readily available wisdom and valuable knowledge are ignored. Even the obvious wisdom of Mother Nature herself often takes a back seat to some very meaningless, and in some cases very unnatural, human habits and hobbies.

Technology and material advantage have helped humanity to accomplish some very wonderful things, but unfortunately they have in many cases become fatal attractions. The addiction to and frequent overdoses of technology often negate their potential advantage. We Americans love to watch other folks living, laughing, and loving in movies and TV shows without doing much of that living, laughing, or loving ourselves. We may recognize life as a fine restaurant but we often eat the menu instead of the food. Recent technology that was designed to enhance our lives has in too many cases kidnapped and restrained them.

We are also distracted from our ability to focus on and enjoy a meaningful life by more than technology.

Multitasking and stress are not historically accepted parts of life in Southeast Asia. Many people in the so-called developed world think that if a person is not all stressed out, they probably aren't doing anything that is important. If a person is stressed out all the time in Cambodia they are thought to be mentally ill, or just an asshole, or they need a nap. People here work hard, sleep well, and smile often. Neither the sedentary nor the pressure-based lifestyles that often foster mental as well as physical disease in the West have taken hold here yet. Folks in America are big on "managing stress." This concept is an absurdity here. No one would keep stress as such a regular part of their lives that it would necessitate management.

There is more natural and less of the artificially manufactured phenomena in these materially deprived countries than in materially developed ones. In the more developed countries, Nature gives way to concrete and steel in a psychological as well as a literal sense. Both concrete and steel are hard, sharp-edged, cold, and dead. Nature is usually soft, curved, warm, and alive. If you think hardened concrete and steel are soft and warm, try diving into a swimming pool before Nature's water fills it.

Maybe we Americans are too materially affluent and carnally happy to pay attention to much else besides being materially affluent and carnally happy? Does all that attention we pay to the trivial byproducts of our

material affluence draw quality attention away from our emotional, psychological, and spiritual affluence? Has this all happened at the expense of the happiness we thought it would buy?

I wish I could see the look on the face of that first person who unearths a cell phone, TV, or computer in an archaeological dig in the year 4022. Will they ever figure out how our gadgets were used and misused, or how dearly we paid for them?

Just a little reminder here that any help you can be in circulating this book to others is greatly appreciated by me, and will be greatly appreciated by them too.
THANKS VERY MUCH.
Read on. The best true stories are yet to come.
The Nepal section is just ahead!

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Actually, the reviews aren't in yet. Since my first two books got dozens of five-star reviews on Amazon and this one is a much better offering, I am guessing it will also receive a solid five stars.

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trust these other venues. So here you have it, a possible masterpiece at no charge.

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2—If you feel so inclined, send a contribution to keep a starving artist going. Any amount helps and can be sent to the Fearless Puppy account at Community Bank NA, 205 Main Street, Brattleboro, Vermont, 05301, USA. I otherwise have no income other than $445 a month of Social Security.

I hope you enjoy the book and will help circulate it as a personal favor to your friendly author as well as a personal favor to those who will receive it from you.

Questions? If so, jahbuddha13@hotmail.com is the address. I will answer as many emails as possible.

Thanks very much for your kindness and attention. Have a good reading ride around the world. I hope you find this unique, real-life travel experience of an Undead to be just as unique and exciting as a story for the living.

Thank you for reading and for passing it on.

Please stay well, Tenzin (Doug Ten Rose)

NEPAL

Moving On

In spite of the beauty, history, friendliness, and what may be the most inexpensive cost of living on Earth, it is time to leave Cambodia.

The plan is to spend a week or maybe two in Nepal in order to break up the long trip to Spain where I can speak the language well enough to carry on some basic conversations.

The frustration of having conversations end with a first smile instead of begin with one can cause devastating loneliness, even in a strong-minded traveler. A sixty-eight year old person is already isolated enough when tripping around the world alone. Most foreign travelers are decades younger. They are zip-lining and night-clubbing until the wee hours of the morning. Older folks most often travel in tightly knit tour groups or family units. Not being able to speak the local language hammers an extra nail into communication's coffin and can bring down an otherwise joyful trip.

On To Nepal

Before leaving for home, Neill DeKort offered help with getting me through customs and security quickly at the Siem Reap airport. I send him an email. Neill sets things up quickly with his connections in Cambodia by telephone from Holland. I get a ride to the

airport in a fancy car from Neill's Cambodian business partner, and am guided through check-in and customs by one of his friends that works at the airport. Mr. DeKort continues to be a godsend, even from several thousand miles away.

It is a great first leg of the trip with a wonderful crew on the Silk/Singapore airlines flight.

The second leg of the trip goes from Singapore to Kathmandu. A very sociable Nepali couple fill the two seats next to me. We speak for hours as if we have known each other for years. Dayal and his wife Orina live in Pokhara, six hours outside of Kathmandu. Their city was highly recommended by a friend in America with Nepali travel experience. She says that considering my health concerns, I should leave Kathmandu as quickly as possible and get to the lakeside Himalayan beauty of Pokhara. Dayal and Orina invite me to see them there. I tell them we will see each other again in one week. They are happy about that and look forward to my arrival.

I have made local friends even before landing in country! Nepal already seems great.

Bad Start

Kathmandu, Nepal has the certified worst air quality on the planet Earth. Oxygen has color, texture, and even flavor here. Smoking cigarettes is redundant. The

temperature is currently running between thirty and fifty-five degrees colder than Cambodia. I have reserved a room near the famous Boudhanath Stupa and was guaranteed three times in three separate emails from the hotel's manager that it has efficient heat. It is necessary to get this kind of confirmation. Most of the housing in Nepal, whether private or commercial, has no heating system, AC, or hot water. Heating concerns amplify in Kathmandu where most buildings are totally concrete. Concrete absorbs and holds the cold. It can be colder inside than out.

I step off the plane near midnight after the very long trip from Cambodia by way of Singapore. A hotel representative and driver are waiting with a sign saying "Mr. Tenzin/Mandala Hotel." So far, so good. Arriving at the hotel, I find no heat in the rooms. The manager is gone for the night so there is no way to confront him. It is too late to get anywhere else. Being out of options, I crawl into the bed figuring I may die but at least my exit will be peaceful. Death ignores my invitation and sends suffering to replace it. Shivers replace sleep. I stay fully clothed under an insufficient blanket. It doesn't help. It is dangerously cold. Anger with the dishonest manager is bubbling in my cauldron. Anger is usually poison but in this case it may have raised my blood pressure and body temperature enough to save me from illness.

There are good reasons why this situation is serious. Forty-two-hundred-foot altitude and thirty-some-degree

low temperatures with high humidity would be a shocking change to anyone's system compared with sea level altitude and low temperatures of seventy-plus degrees that I just came from hours ago. These problems are piled on top of jet lag, my age, and the ever-present fact that doctors had already labeled me as a walking corpse more than a year before starting this trip. Home heating that most Americans take for granted is a rare luxury here in the Third World. The concern for my body is not being relaxed at all by my mind. For the first time in over forty years, I haven't smoked ganja for three days in a row. This makes my brain's windshield wipers more than a little streaky.

When the manager that sent me the "we definitely have heat" emails comes in the next morning, I give him a massive tirade of shit and feel no guilt about it. Even in New York this would be considered an extraordinary display of venom. Nepali folks are quiet and reserved as compared with Americans. To them, I must look like a thousand-pound gorilla throwing fistfuls of feces in the zookeeper's face while screaming ape curses at the top of my simian lungs. Employees stare around corners to watch. Folks look in from neighboring shops to see the show. The word "fuck" is used more times in this five minutes than I have used it in any other five minutes since my early teenage years in Brooklyn. I tell the nervous manager that if I die from this episode, well-armed and ill-tempered Italians from New York are going to

visit him. To his credit he apologizes, finds me a hotel with heating, and has his people help carry my heavy bags to it.

Pema To The Rescue!

The heating situation and many other concerns are quickly fixed in the next venue. The Pema Boutique Hotel is what I pictured the Mandala would be like. It is heated and clean. They are about the same price but the Mandala has cost a lot more in terms of health problems and aggravation. It takes several days and gallons of hot tea to get rid of the residual anger in my brain and the chill in my chest.

If you ever travel to Kathmandu, Nepal do yourself a favor. Stay at The Pema Boutique Hotel on Phulbari Street. The place is as nice as any in the Stupa area and the staff is incredible. I've been in hundreds of hotels, motels, and hostels during my life but never at one staffed with better people than those working here. Nikky, the owner/manager, does everything possible to ensure the well-being and comfort of his guests. Power went out in the whole ten block Stupa area and Nikky spent a half hour rigging up heat in my room with a few extension cords and batteries.

Wangmo, Nikky's sister, is the hotel's administrator. I immediately take her presence as a good omen for sev-

eral reasons. She is a strong, kind, honest, smart woman with a giant Beatles sticker on her computer.

The food here is great and so is the service. This is due to a fine cook and wonderful staff that is fronted by two special people. Bishnu is the young lady usually at the front desk. She is lovely, efficient, patient, speaks English fluently, and has a smile that never fades. Passang is the twenty-five-year-old go-to guy. He is the main waiter in the restaurant and the main room service person as well as the main housekeeping person. He knows how to do whatever needs to get done. Things seem to work like that in Asia. In America, a person's specific job description is often the only thing they know how to do. If you are on the clock in Nepal, you know how to do almost everything that needs doing at that job site.

Passang works fifteen hours per day, six days per week, without ever losing his happy, personable, and pleasant attitude. The staff is rounded out by several young ladies that are each as beautiful in character as they are in physical appearance.

Daytime In Magicville

Photos from "Magicville" (The Stupa area)

With the preliminary disaster behind me, I step out into a spiritual wonderland. Most of Nepal is Hindu.

The Stupa neighborhood is largely inhabited by Tibetan Buddhists who found safe haven from Chinese oppression in Nepal. The Boudhanath Stupa is considered to be hallowed ground. It is visited by devout members of both religions.

A Stupa can be very loosely described as a dome-shaped monument that contains holy relics. The word Stupa is literally translated from the Sanskrit language into English as "heap." Stupa structures pre-date Buddhism as burial mounds for relics as well as people. A lot of symbolism is associated with the Stupa structure. All of Earth's elements are represented. The building's solid square base represents earth. A large dome symbolizes water. A cone shaped spire above the dome represents fire. A lotus parasol and crescent moon at the top of the structure represent air. Giant eyes painted around the dome symbolize the all-seeing wisdom ability of the Buddha. The nose represents nirvana, the liberation from suffering. It is in the shape of a Sanskrit character for the number one, signifying universal unity. A whole book could easily be written about representations and interpretations of the Stupa's symbolism! Perhaps most important of these is that Stupas are considered to be a representation of the enlightened mind.

There are thousands of Stupas in the world. The Boudhanath Stupa is thought to be the mother of them all. Many folks feel that there is a magic in the structure

itself. Others feel that the building's power comes from generations of human energy being fed into and around it. Reverence, deep devotion, prayers, and aspirations have been inspired by and directed toward the Stupa for over a dozen centuries—and not just by visitors, and pilgrims, and local passersby. Over a thousand monks, nuns, lamas, and assorted spiritual professionals live in the surrounding monasteries. Many have been involved in rigorous training for most of their lives. The point of this training is to become of greater benefit to any and every living thing on Earth.

There is no denying the intensity of the structure itself, the energy that radiates between the building and its devotees, or the affect that permeates the adjoining residential area and everyone in it.

This morning, over a hundred people are on the Stupa grounds. Nearly a third of them are monks and nuns. Everyone walks around the structure in a clockwise direction. Many work prayer beads while reciting mantras as they walk. A mantra is a short phrase that is associated with a particular deity. Each deity represents a specific admirable quality. The continuous repetition of this phrase instills its qualities in the person chanting it as that person directs the mantra's intent toward the benefit of everything alive. That "everything alive" does include but is certainly not limited to oneself.

For example, "Om Mani Padme Hung" is the most popular mantra phrase. It is associated with Chenrezig,

the main deity of compassion in Tibetan Buddhism. The continuous repetition of this mantra fosters compassionate tendencies in the person who is pronouncing the phrase as that person projects their energetic wish to increase compassionate tendencies throughout the world. Opinions differ about which end of this equation is in play. Some think that by chanting the positive message of the mantra with a strong intent to benefit all living things, a compassionate energy that fosters universally positive affects is projected into the atmosphere. Others feel that a person chanting and absorbing these positive thoughts passes the benefits on to the world through their actions, which are upgraded due to a strengthened association with the mantra's message. The evidence I've seen says that both opinions are somewhat true. To what extent these factors are true in each case likely depends on the length and depth of experience as well as the strength of motivation within the person chanting.

I join the walk around the structure.

The sound of monks chanting, the giant ceremonial trumpets, and beating drums comes from everywhere. There are temples in all directions. The air is thick with what feels like electrically charged vibrations of elevated consciousness and compassion that I physically feel as a swelling in my heart. It feels as if blood vessels in my chest are getting larger and allowing more flow. It also feels like my walk is taking place in slow motion, as if through deep water but with lightness and lack of labor.

This otherworldly experience is out of my control. It is overpowering enough to draw tears.

A child brushes against me. According to his watch, I have been walking around the Stupa in a trance for an hour. The crowd has tripled in size since I began. A sea of people from around the world has arrived, many clothed in outfits that match the red-wine colored robes of the monks and nuns walking with them. Each person is engulfed in and also creating vibrations of good will. A massive energy flows around the Stupa like the current within a river. It carries everyone with it. It is physically invisible but mentally obvious.

The river of people surrounding the Stupa is itself surrounded by an outer ring of shops that sit just past the Stupa's circular walking path. Most of these shops are restaurants or deal in Buddhist artifacts, masks, paintings, and Nepali souvenirs. Several city streets feed into this ring of shops from every direction. Like spokes of a wheel these streets branch out in all directions to create the square half-mile Stupa neighborhood, which I now affectionately think of as "Stupaville."

I float up to one of the rooftop Stupa-view cafés in the primary ring of shops. It appears to be the same one filmed in the *Little Buddha* movie. Strong coffee helps bring me back to Earth a bit—but not altogether.

Love, Medicine, and Breakfast

I will try to describe the Kathmandu experience in terms that are as grounded as possible. I don't want to sound like a person whose LSD never wore off, but the feeling I get in this neighborhood holds a few similarities to that condition.

The baffling energy of the Stupa and the folks that frequent it spreads throughout the whole neighborhood. It doesn't ever fade or weaken. Pema Boutique Hotel is only a few blocks up one of the main adjoining streets that acts as a spoke in the neighborhood wheel with the Stupa as its central hub. If you are anywhere within that wheel, you are offered the opportunity to become part of its motion. It seems that I have.

The next morning starts with the breakfast that is included in the price of the room. Hotel guests have a choice of English, Chinese, American, or Himalayan breakfast sets. I decide to go with the flow and pick the Himalayan set. It contains more food than a person can possibly eat and includes porridge (oatmeal) topped with honey, nuts, and raisins, Tsampa (the traditional Himalayan barley flour dough), a scrambled egg, a bit of well flavored spinach, Indian bread, curried potato soup, fruit juice, and a choice of coffee or tea.

I eat at the front window counter of the hotel with a full view of the action on the street. The folks passing

by are a very beautiful collection of people. Besides physical beauty, many seem to have a sort of radiance about them. Many work prayer beads and are reciting mantras on the way to the Stupa. An old lady walks by with a limp. I imagine myself mentally sending a healing energy to her. As a relatively rational Westerner, I figure there is little chance that she feels it but the process somehow makes me feel so good that I continue to do it toward everyone walking by on the street. Halfway through breakfast I realize that most of the people out there already look healthy. They do not need my healing intent. I'd been listening to the Beatles singing "All You Need Is Love" on the computer in my room while getting ready to come down for breakfast. Without even thinking about it, I switch my mantra to the "Love, love, love" phrase from the song. It figures that everyone can use a little more of that, even if they already have some.

Yes, folks, I realize that a rapidly aging ex-junkie from Brooklyn who very recently tore a hotel manager an entirely new asshole, sitting in a window in mid-Asia casting love spells on everybody passing by in the street, sounds a little forking nuts—but that's what Stupaville can do to a person! The more you think about it, the less strange it sounds. Being in a war zone can turn anyone defensively violent and keep them in a constant state of fear. The nicest of people can turn into a raging beast when life-threatening danger is in the air. Being in this neighborhood fosters the opposite attitude of projecting

positive energy at any and everything that is alive. The people here soak in the area's energy and can't help but absorb some compassion and altruism in the same manner as they might absorb and react in kind to fear and defensiveness in a war zone. This sort of thing sounds weird to most of us only because we haven't spent much time aware of our own feelings or what psychological soil they may be rooted in.

The positivity in the atmosphere is influenced by all the monks and nuns but everyone here, not just spiritual professionals, is warm, friendly, and helpful—even if it doesn't involve a profit for them.

It is also apparent that the girls and women seem less nervous around white men than they seemed to be in Cambodia. This may be because within the Stupa neighborhood they have seen more of the Western world's spiritually oriented gentlemen and less of our bombs falling from the air and sex tourists slithering on the ground.

Unfortunately, Nepal is very chilly and wet at this time of year, the concrete buildings radiate the cold, the electricity cuts out often and takes even the rare heating systems with it. It isn't safe to eat everything, the air quality is dangerous, and there's no access to the dietary needs, vitamins, and other resources that are necessary for an old ailing Westerner to stay alive. Spain, on the other hand, has near-constant sunshine, much warmer

temperatures, more reliable electricity, healthier Mediterranean food options, and a language I can speak and understand. I will certainly miss what, in only one week and in spite of its material shortcomings, has now become one of my favorite places on Earth. It would be great to return in the warmer season, but for now it seems like this old man's survival depends upon getting to sunshine and greater resources. Had I discovered Nepal when eighteen-years-old, my last fifty years might have been spent right here, but old age brings with it a physical fragility and restriction as well as the wisdom to recognize and obey it.

On the Other Hand

There is a very distinct line between courage and stupidity. I am busy erasing that line. The two common-sensible paragraphs above about leaving immediately for Spain were written last night. They still make a lot of sense, but I can't bring myself to go. Every time I walk out on the street my brain has a joyful explosion. I start laughing at nothing just from being around the people and in the atmosphere here.

This neighborhood is likely unique within Nepal as well as being unique on Earth. The Stupa is regarded as an international treasure, is a certified UNESCO World

Heritage site, and is considered one of the holiest places in the world for Buddhists and Hindus alike.

It is now Losar (Tibetan New Year) week, so the vibe is stepped up even a notch further than usual!

Whenever the thought of leaving pops up, I tear up like an abandoned baby. Part of that sad feeling, and the rest of my personal emotional circus, is no doubt the result of not smoking ganja for an entire week. Culture shock and other complications also must be dealt with.

Powerful, if mysterious, forces are fueling my rapidly growing attachment to this area. Every day I go out and kiss the sky like Jimi Hendrix. Every night I punch up plane and hotel reservations for Spain but cannot bring myself to push that last button to finalize them. I will be here a bit longer. Conditions are much less supportive of healthy living here in Nepal than they are in Spain. It seems that courage and what may be a reckless stupidity both gather strength here in heaven.

Losar Day

Today is Losar Day, (Photos Here) the Tibetan new year. Traditional activities include visiting family and going to temple with them. There are some public festivities as well. Celebrations will continue for several days.

Nikky, Wangmo, the staff, and several of their family members are gathered in the lobby dressed like

royalty. Everyone is happier and sweeter than usual, if that is possible.

The streets are filled with people dressed in their finest and most colorful holiday outfits. Even Disney would have been in awe of the spectacle.

My positive-energy-projection-toward-the-street shtick is now being done daily from the front window counter of the hotel. I don't even think about it. It just happens on automatic pilot during breakfast.

After breakfast, I head toward the Stupa to watch as the entire massive structure gets freshly painted in honor of the holiday.

It has been cold, cloudy, and raw since my arrival in Kathmandu but today the sun has come out in force to honor this festive occasion, as have folks from all over Nepal and the world. A twenty-year-old named Mila-buddha sits next to me on a bench by the Stupa. Mila lives in a small village a hundred miles away. He starts up a conversation with me, then takes a selfie of us on his phone. The friendliness of the people here continues to astound me. I have to wonder if folks elsewhere in Nepal hold this friendliness as a national habit. Being in the Stupa area is somewhat like being in church. The visitors here usually practice their most noble behavior. For the residents, noble behavior is a way of life.

Many of the animals are as amazing as the humans! A few dozen dogs surround the Stupa. Most (certainly not all) are among the most conscious, mellowest,

sweetest animals in the world. They seem to belong to no one and everyone. These canines sometimes act more human than many humans do. They seem to have an intelligent sense of intuition and premonition.

A white one sits himself in front of the bench that me and Milabuddha are seated on. A man walks in our direction and approaches a woman two benches away with his hand out. The man looks more hungover than hungry. He has an air of snarling surliness about him that I can feel from a distance. He isn't doing anything loud or crazy, but he seems to have aggravation and stale alcohol radiating from him. He stands out like a sore thumb in this otherwise serene atmosphere. The white dog feels it too. The dog pops up and darts himself between that man and the woman sitting on the bench. White dog barks as if his master's house is on fire! The man backs off and walks away quickly. The white dog continues to bark at the man's heels for twenty yards or so until both are well out of range of the benches. White dog saunters back to the Stupa and casually lays down in silence. This creature seems to spend most of its time in a meditation, as do most of the canines in this area. These animals lay around as if they are reincarnated saints that have earned the right to relax in heaven for a lifetime—unless a situation calls them to action guarding the area's good energy.

A few hundred of the most well-fed pigeons in the world have their own corner of the Stupa grounds. The

locals sell grain to people that spread it around for the birds to eat. Caring for any form of life is considered a blessing here. Many folks see the opportunity to feed the Stupa birds as a privileged source of good karma.

On the way home, I stop at Thar Lam Monastery to visit the temple on Phulbari Street that sits halfway between the Stupa and the Pema Boutique Hotel. The monks are playing New Year's badminton and volleyball! The young adult monks are playing as the elder and child monks cheer from the sidelines. I sit on a curb with my legs in the street, close to a few elders in chairs. I am immediately visited by a young black dog with markings resembling a white necktie. The dog jumps on me and licks my face until I fall off my narrow seat on the curb! She keeps licking as I lay in the street. The monks are laughing at me as hard as I am laughing at myself. The dog seems to be laughing too.

Midway through the volleyball game, I go into the temple. It is a beautiful structure with an ornate interior. There are several giant iconic Buddhist statues. As is true in many temples, the walls are painted with scenes from the historical Buddha's life. There are offerings of yak cheese, cookies, fruit, and other goodies stacked everywhere in obvious preparation for a later ceremony. After enjoying a few hundred breaths in the temple, I head back to the Pema Boutique Hotel with a big smile on my face and the love of fearless puppies in my heart.

Much of Western humanity thinks that a power beyond itself will drop from the sky to save our species. Few people are coherently concerned, or consciously aware and common sensible enough, to realize that the only way our planet will become a better planet is if we each, individually, do away with some of the nonsense we are addicted to and put in the mental work necessary to become better people. Right now, I may be in the ten-square-block area of Earth that contains the highest concentration of people that are aware of this fact. The deep and very obvious density of love and goodwill here is fostered internally by individuals. This individually accomplished internal mental work, this fostering of goodwill, is not a self-serving mechanism. It is motivated by a love for everything alive. The all-inclusive target of this concern is usually translated into English as "all sentient beings." The Tibetan "sem chen" can be more literally translated into English as "mind possessor." Taking into account that all animals, fish, plants, and insects as well as humans are thought to have a consciousness, this sweet motivation covers a lot of ground. It is a powerful force in the lives of nuns and monks. It plays an obvious part in the lives of this neighborhood's residents as well. Even the area's dogs seem to be involved.

My experience of being here is akin to that of a thirteen-year-old baseball fanatic who suddenly finds himself living next to the Cooperstown Hall of Fame.

I have spent most of the past seventy years in America. In America, many people that meet soldiers in uniform say, "Thank you for your service." Soldiers are considered heroes worthy of respect and admiration.

My heroes are not professional killers. My heroes are professional altruists dedicated to producing a self, and a world, that is saner, kinder, and more compassionate for all living creatures. My heroes are walking in robes on the streets of Kathmandu—and I have a guest room planted right in the middle of them.

Improvement

Physical conditions are shaping up. Temperatures are increasing. By the mid-afternoon, clouds that were previously enemies become friends as they shade people from the intense sun. The electricity has not gone out since the construction site next door to the hotel put a circuit box in. Watching the Nepalis doing construction projects is amazing! Barefoot hundred-pound men walk bricks and cinder blocks across a single bamboo pole five stories above the street. These folks do more with bamboo and a sledgehammer than most city dwelling Americans can do with full Craftsman tool collections!

The result is sometimes pretty and is almost always functional.

It is amazing that the city's power doesn't go out more often. My father was an electrical inspector in Brooklyn. He would flat-out shit himself if he ever saw the setup here. Then he would close the whole damn city down, give it a pile of summonses to pay, and present it with a list of things to fix before being allowed to reopen.

Wires run from pole to pole here, as they do on most of Earth, but they do so in tangled webs and bunches that each contain several dozen narrow strands. There are segments of exposed wiring that dangle everywhere with a total disrespect for insulation. Oddly enough, the power seems to function most of the time and I haven't heard any reports of electrocution.

Flag Day (photo link)

Clouds of devotional smoke offerings melt into the overcast sky. Monks distribute blessings at the Stupa. This is Day Three of Losar week. Thousands of prayer flags hang from the Stupa. They are all being replaced today. The past year's flags will be burned in ceremonial fashion or restrung elsewhere after the new ones go up.

These flags are of different sizes ranging from a few inches square to gigantic. Most have a deity pictured on them. Each has a prayer printed on it that is associated with that deity, often in the form of a mantra or a little

story. “Prayer,” as we define it in the West, isn’t really the right word to use here. “Aspiration” is probably more accurate. Again, Buddhism doesn't look for any materially-existent god living in the sky to accomplish magical feats for humans. No big god of compassion is going to drop a thunderbolt from the sky into some evil jackass and turn him into a saint. Flying these flags is done with the same intent as chanting the mantras. By focusing on the symbolic deity and the mantra or story on each flag, a person can familiarize themselves with and absorb that quality. A person doing so for long enough and with strong enough motivation can actually become the message to some extent, and is often able to pass on any benefits associated with that message to the world.

In Western commercial terms, mantras and prayer flags are like adverts for goodness and compassion. These are products everyone here wants to buy anyway. Mantras and prayer flags are reminders that the store is always open if you choose to go there, pick up what you want, and share it with the rest of humanity. Mantras and prayer flags are tools to help those acquisition and distribution processes succeed.

In addition to the usual reverence practiced on the grounds, people are singing and dancing in circular groups on and around the Stupa itself today. Men climb precarious steps to the upper levels where the public is

forbidden to go. They carry piles of multicolored prayer flags on their backs. These are strung from the top of the structure to points all around the lower levels as the singing, dancing, blessing and celebrating goes on all day. Garlands of bright orange flowers are strung around the entire girth of the Stupa structure at different levels. The few spots left unpainted on Day One are covered with whitewash and saffron. Monks chant, drum, and trumpet from the temple facing the Stupa as well as from the second tier of the structure itself.

What The Fork Just Happened?

As all this goes on, I become involved in some very strange happenings. Actually, I'm not sure just how much *I* am involved. I am physically present but it feels more like something else is directing my participation in these incidents. Similar things must have happened to you at some point in your life, yes? Have you ever done something and when it was over felt more like you were carried through part of the process as opposed to having walked through it all by yourself? Have you ever used the expression, "I was on automatic pilot?" Have you ever worked on something, then sort of found it completed instead of having the solid feeling that you had personally been toiling on it for hours? Many folks have similar experiences, so maybe such incidents are not as weird as they may seem at first glance!

I take two herbal muscle relaxer capsules (Passion Flower) and a 600 mg. ibuprofen for my back problems before going to the Stupa on this Losar Day Three.

An unusually crazed guy is ranting by the benches of the pigeon section as I approach it. Several people are scared from the benches by him. A half-dozen dogs bark wildly and approach him. Staying away from lunatics is usually an on-automatic-pilot thing for me, but for some bizarre reason I go sit down on the bench right in front of him. It seems the herbal muscle relaxers are working better than I thought they would.

I wave off the dogs and tell them out loud to calm down and that everything is alright. The dogs back off for a minute or two. I've always been a lot better with animals than people. Many folks are.

I start a second shift of my morning "Love, love, love" meditation/mantra that I stole from the Beatles song and project it at the guy who is screaming in my face in the Nepali language. He keeps screaming. The dogs go back to barking and approaching. I keep on smiling with a glazed stare while silently throwing love in the form of hijacked Beatles' lyrics at the man and gently waving the dogs back a few more times while all this is going on.

After several minutes the man calms down, smiles at me while pointing to the Stupa and says in broken English, "Guess should walk around." He wanders off to circle the Stupa, the dogs relax, and I snap out of my

meditation. All I can say to myself about it is "What the fork just happened?!?!" Locals are staring at me as if they are thinking the same thing. The only explanation I can come up with is that the energy of the monks, nuns, and Stupa used me for a few minutes to do what needed to be done. As this thought crosses my mind, one of the dogs winks at me. I shit you not! It wasn't a two-eyed blink. It was a one-eyed wink.The wink sends a blissful shiver up my spine. I don't mind admitting that I was more than a little spooked. Folks in my old Brooklyn neighborhood had a crudely colorful saying they used when faced with a situation so baffling that there was nothing sensible to relate about it. I can still hear Angelo saying, "I didn't know whether to shit or turn purple."

Before I have a chance to get up and walk off, two boys, each about ten years old and both on one bicycle, start riding around the benches. They look as if they haven't bathed or washed their clothes in a month. They are boisterous enough to shake up the dogs. The Stupa is not a place where loud beggar kids riding rusted old bicycles usually hang out. Kids like these are usually on the street where I live, and other "spokes of the wheel" streets that branch off from the central hub that is the Stupa itself. This hub is usually a serene area. It rarely sees the kind of action that is happening here today.

The kids are fun to be around. They remind me of the wiseass I used to be as a young street hustler. We

play and talk. One at a time, they pop wheelies for me. I applaud them.

The dogs continue to be excited by the rowdiness. I again seem to calm them for short periods but they come back to bark at the loud kids every few minutes. After ten minutes of play, I give the kids two hundred rupees (@ $1.70 US), a grandfatherly smack on the ass, and tell them to bug off and go get some food—reminding them to not disturb the dogs in the Stupa area or anywhere else again. Very much to my surprise, they listen and leave the grounds. Again I'm left with the thought, "What the fork just happened?"

Again, locals are staring.

I head out of the Stupa grounds, but the fun isn't over yet! Thinking maybe some food will level me off, I stop into a noodle shop that sits between the Stupa and the Pema Hotel.

I walk into the noodle shop and find one available table. It is backed against the front wall too tightly for a big guy like me to fit into the chairs jammed under it. I'm disoriented and have a little trouble pulling the very light-weight table further away from the wall. A stocky woman yells at me in a rough voice, "It is simple!" Miss Dolma is the owner. Dolma is fierce. She is obviously tired and overworked. She goes to sit down at the far end employees' table for twenty seconds, yawns, rubs her eyes, then gets up to go to work again. Without any

thought, again on some kind of automatic pilot, I do a "love, love, love you" meditation and direct it at her. It is a similar situation to the one involving the ranting guy at the Stupa. In a few minutes, she seems to calm down a bit. She perks up her smile. As a rational Westerner, I again have to figure that this makes regular sense. She was just ready to calm down whether I was there or not. I'm no forking hypnotist!

A monk that has just finished eating goes over to Dolma to pay for his noodles. Catching her eye from the other end of the restaurant, I wave, make a no-no sign with a wagging index finger, and then point at myself to indicate that I will pay for him. She says "Good!" loud enough for me to hear it and then explains to the monk. Paying for a monk's meals is not an uncommon thing in Asian restaurants, so no one in the crowd takes much notice. The monk thanks me as he leaves.

By the time I'm on my way out, the lunch rush is over and the place has calmed down a bit. As I go to pay and leave, Dolma invites me to sit at the employee table with her and the other workers. She gives me some free and very tasty tea. We talk for a while about life, about America, and about a few other things before I go.

Heading out toward The Pema, I notice that my new mantra has become "What the fork just happened?"

Dancing With Baby Sasquatch

The Yeti/Abominable Snowman/Bigfoot/Sasquatch is as big a part of Nepali culture as the famous Loch Ness monster is in Scottish culture. Like the Loch Ness monster, no one has verified proof of a yeti's existence. That didn't stop the Nepali tourist department from erecting a ten-foot tall statue of the beast right near the pigeon section of the Stupa area, and it doesn't stop the locals from talking about yeti as if it will show up for tea later in the day. The locals might be able to recruit me into the yeti-believers club because I am dancing with Bigfoot in the middle of Phulbari Street! It is actually a four-year-old girl that moves very much like a yeti. She is a gorgeous child. She is very sturdily, solidly built, and ferociously courageous for a small child. As I walk down the street, she jumps off the curb, blocks my path and starts to do a Sumo wrestler gorilla-like shuffle from one leg to the other while making growling noises. She has a fierce look on her face as if thinking, "You will have to mow me down or give me a cookie if you want to get by!" I start mimicking her motions and sounds. We are facing each other about three feet apart. I have a smile so wide that it would qualify as a laugh to most observers—and there are plenty. Many adults, including several nuns and monks, stop to laugh at us. After ten minutes or so of this yeti dancing, I move my face a bit closer to hers. She shows no fear but decides she has

had enough of dancing with the big white guy and moves back to her laughing mother on the curb. I give them a namaste bow and move on toward my hotel. I'm still laughing when no more than a minute later I see a sign hanging from the gate of the Thar Lam Monastery announcing a benefit concert tonight for a monastery in the northern Mustang region that has been damaged by earthquake. After dancing with Baby Sasquatch, even a live concert for a worthy cause might be anti-climactic.

Great Tunes And Much More

I'm wrong about that anticlimactic thing!

The guy selling tickets at the gate tells me there were no people killed by the earthquake but many of the Mustang area's buildings went down, including the monastery. The Boudha Thar Lam monastery is hosting this benefit event for its sister institution. The well-known Kutumba band will be playing without pay to help the cause.

The Kutumba band is a unique musical group that consists of drums of every size and tone, very large wooden flutes with a deep resonance, and many stringed instruments resembling various crossbreeds between lute, guitar, sitar, violin, and banjo. Mustang region's own native cultural dance group will also be performing.

Large, beautiful, full-color booklets about the high-altitude Mustang region, the monastery, earthquake

damage, plans for repair, and Mustang's monks and nuns are given to supporters as thank-you gifts. They contain several pages of prayers and aspirations as well as information about the benefit itself. Either printing costs are a lot cheaper in Nepal than in the West or the cost of production was donated. These books would run at least thirty dollars each in retail USA.

The show is being held in the giant front yard of the temple. The yard is about the size of half a football field. I am early and so throw my book bag on a chair in the already assembled fifteenth row in order to save a seat for myself before helping the crew set up the back thirty rows of chairs. The crew seems surprised that a tourist would get any further involved than a donation. We nod and smile at each other.

After all the chairs are set up, I go to sit in mine. As I arrive, a group of seven folks comes into the row. There are just seven seats left. I notice a small block of seats available about half way towards the stage, then offer my seat to the seven newbies so they can be seated together. Amidst many thank-yous, I grab my pack and move down to the eighth row.

I start to get comfortable there but the same thing happens again! Two couples come into the row hoping for the four remaining seats that are together. I nod a "no problem," they give me big thanks, and I move down to a single available chair in the second row. My seat is now prime center, right behind two big comfy

couches that were hauled into the yard for the occasion. The couches seat the head monk, elder monks, a couple of city officials, and visiting dignitaries.

The show starts nearly an hour after the advertised starting time and begins with another hour's worth of speeches in Nepali by various monks and officials. I'm grateful for the delay. It gives me a chance to run back to my room for a coat. When the sun drops below Kathmandu's horizon, temperatures drop rapidly along with it. I leave my little pack on the second row seat to save it and dash to the hotel. No one will steal anything within this venue.

I get back before the first act starts, in time for a slideshow of the damaged monastery.

The entertainment finally begins with a dozen lovely dancing women in vibrantly colored blouses buttoned atop equally colorful oversized robes with sleeves that extend way past their hands. That extra sleeve material waves as part of their dance. The skirt section of each dancer's robe has an additional apron fastened to it. This piece adds several three-inch stripes of different colors to each ensemble. Each dancer's outfit is topped off by a massive necklace of coral and turquoise stones ranging in size from marble to golfball. As these women move in a graceful union, monks place white welcome scarves around each dancer's neck.

As this goes on, several more colorfully dressed women and some monks walk through the crowd. They distribute cookies and traditional Tibetan butter tea to everyone. The heat of the tea and its heavy fat content are good buffers against the graduating cold. This tea has kept Tibetans alive for millennia, bolstering them against the harsh winds and temperatures in the "Land Of Snows" on the roof of the world.

After the delay, the announcements, speeches and dancing, the band finally takes the stage. The music is otherworldly and hard-rocking! The band plays a few American and British rock 'n' roll standards as well as traditional Nepali music. A Beatles song can take on a whole different and exotic feel when played by these Asian instruments! A Lennon/McCartney tune sounds like George Harrison and Michael Franti live in it.

One of Kutumba's stringed instruments has a sitar/guitar fusion sound. This traditional Tibetan instrument is called a Tanyin, which translates to English as "Sweet Sound." It is accurately named. Honey drips off of every note coming from this instrument. It has a long neck with strings that can be strummed or plucked. Another stringed instrument I have never seen before has a much wider body and shorter neck. It is played with a violin style bow. There is another unusual stringed instrument that looks and sounds like a miniature banjo. Joining all the strings and the vast collection of drums are cymbals

and bells of many sizes and tones as well as a standard guitar and piano.

Adding to the spectacle is a breathtaking view of the temple's front entrance that acts as a backdrop for the stage. Paintings of Buddhist deities in enough color to rival a rainbow are highlighted in gold relief. Stage lights give the scene a transcendent glow. So does the exceptionally talented band.

I have to guess that the large crowd, many of them affluent Nepalis and Western Buddhists, donated quite a serious amount of funding to the project and that this benefit show was a huge success.

Party With Teenage Girls

Don't get all excited! It wasn't *that* kind of party. It is the day after the concert and I am at the Taragaon Museum and Center for Arts and Culture.

Sitting just a few blocks away from the Stupa, the main part of the museum is housed in a few revamped buildings that were formerly the old Taragaon Hotel. It, and the several modern buildings around it, house many photos and paintings depicting various periods of Nepali architecture, history, and culture as well as maps, and artwork in many different mediums. It shows that just a

generation or two ago, Kathmandu was more farmland than city.

The venue is set on a half-acre of lawns and trees that give it a Shangri-La feeling compared to the nasty main road right outside its gates. The museum is joined on its grounds by the Lumbini College of Buddhist and Himalayan Studies. A Hyatt hotel is its neighbor.

The museum is very interesting and educational, but gets a lot more exciting in the café. While strolling the café to admire the artwork on its walls, I run into five nineteen-year-old social work students from the University of Nepal with a big birthday cake on their table. I love singing happy birthday!

A young lady wearing a tiara is the obvious guest of honor. I give her my best rendition of the birthday song. The girls invite me for some cake and conversation.

All of the young ladies are Nepali natives. Several have connections to America. The birthday girl's name is Arjuna. She has a boyfriend attending college in Texas. The young woman next to her has a brother studying in New York.

Nahani sits closest to me. She is the most talkative and giggly woman in the group. Everyone at the table is sweet, smart, and very obviously privileged. They wear fancy new clothes and a very well-taken-care-of look. To their credit, they all study social work with the desire to give something back.

After a half-hour of fun, I thank the young ladies for their kindness and cake and move on to explore more museum. They offer some cake for the road along with beautiful smiles and good wishes. The Nepali friendliness continues to deserve its legendary status. So does this museum. The exhibits give a well-documented history of the area in very artistic form.

One of the more interesting exhibits on the grounds is the earthquake-proof house. Much of it was built, as several other structures in Nepal are, from the rubble of previous buildings that were not earthquake-proof! Nepal has had more than its share of devastating earthquakes.

Forrest Stumbles Into Another Miracle

On the way back from the museum I sit on a Stupa bench in the strong sunshine. It is a much sweeter world when near-freezing heavy humidity is replaced by a benevolent sun.

Young monks are hurriedly filing into a monastery near the Stupa. They look to be between kindergarten and late teen age. I follow them to see what is going on. Some monasteries are more private than others and not regularly opened to the public. This place feels like it might be one of them. I hope that isn't true while taking my shoes off at the front door.

Wow! There are over a hundred of them. Fifteen or twenty are seated in each of a half-dozen rows. There

are three rows of monks on either side of a central aisle. The innermost row holds an older group than the one I followed inside. These look to be between eighteen and twenty five years old. They have yellow wraps over their maroon robes. These wraps likely accent the status of their age and advanced education. The middle row of monks on either side of the aisle looks to be between ten and fifteen years old. I sit at the end of the outer row on the right side with the five to ten-year-old group. The monks are involved in their process. They are not at all distracted by the presence of a lone large Caucasian non-monk in street clothes. They notice me but seem to have the attitude that if I am here, I must belong here.

The ceremony is hours long and powerful! There are drums, cymbals, and trumpets being played by a few older monks. Everyone is chanting. Additional reading, chanting, and throat singing is done by the most senior monks. They sit in front of the whole group. These half-dozen elders range between thirty and seventy years old. They also have yellow wraps over their maroon robes. They are obviously orchestrating and directing the ceremony but even these elders sacrifice a degree of their authority to a representation of their leader. There is a life-size cut out of the Dalai Lama occupying the central and biggest seat at the front of the hall.

A half-hour into the ceremony, a symbolic blessing of saffron water is given into the cupped hands of each monk. They swallow some and then rub the rest on their

heads. They give me some too. I am grateful to be included. I do what they do. About an hour further into the ceremony we have a tea and donut break.

I soon have to use the bathroom but don't want to leave and risk missing anything. I scurry quickly outside to the bathroom and back. The path to the bathroom is visible to everyone within through the temple's north side windows. Seeing the big foreigner hurrying to the facilities and back gives the monks, especially the younger ones, a good laugh. I am glad to make them a little happier in any way I can. Compared with what they are giving me, it is a very small contribution to the energy of the room.

After another hour, we have an apple juice break. Whether these breaks are a standard part of these long ceremonies or held for benefit of the younger children isn't clear. This ceremony is lengthy enough for my back to start feeling the pain of sitting on a hard wooden bench but I am so druglessly stoned, so elevated from the power of the proceedings, that I can't bring myself to leave.

Further into the service, a young monk in front of me starts playfully distracting a few of the boys around him. Child monks are as much child as they are monk. I forget my place for a minute, "shush" the mischievous kid, and point to the book he should be chanting along with. Within seconds a glowing monk about thirty five years old appears. He puts a gentle hand on a shoulder

of the distracted child monk. I have to marvel at the stark difference between my harsh “shush!” and the way this monk touches the child's shoulder. It is gentler than a mother's kiss yet still firmly establishes discipline. The errant child monk gives his elder a look of respect and admiration, then gets his attention back into the book and the business at hand.

Hours after the ceremony began, the last page of the text is read and the final chant is sung. The younger monks bolt out of the temple as if they left ice cream waiting somewhere.

I approach the saintly monk that had enchanted the child and myself to ask a few questions. He turns out to be the manager of the monastery. His name is Lobsang Jinpa. I ask about the ceremony. Lama Jinpa says it is called Monlam.

The Monlam festival was established in 1409 by a great Buddhist teacher, Lama Tsongkhapa. Monlam Great Prayer Festival goes on for several days near the beginning of the Lunar New Year. It consists of several sessions. Each session contains different activities that can include spiritual debates, processions, and chanting.

A quote from monastery literature says, "The main purpose of the Great Prayer Festival is to pray for the long life of all the holy Gurus of all traditions, for the survival and spreading of the Dharma within the minds of all sentient beings, and for world peace. Communal prayers, offered with strong faith and devotion, help to

overcome obstacles to peace and generate the conducive conditions for everyone to live in harmony."

I don't know any other details about Monlam. I do know that it hit me like three tabs of acid (LSD, not sulfuric).

As slowly as a human can move, and with feet barely hitting the ground, I wander out of the temple gate. I am starting to feel like Forrest Gump in this town! Every time I stumble down a street, I fall into another miracle.

Pundarika Cozy Apartments

Odds of my going to bed at night and not waking up in the morning are greater than those of your average Joe. I'm barely recovered from what was supposed to be a fatal disease. Recovery is unconfirmed by anything but my continuing presence in a body, and I'm in a place where my go-to nutrients and medicines are unavailable. There is no sense in saving money for a rainy day. This is that rainy day. No matter how much I like the Pema Hotel people or how much it will cost to rent a full apartment, finding a place with a kitchen is a necessity. I have to improvise strong nutrition and there's no way to do that without finding a juicer as well as a kitchen to put it in.

Across the street from the Thar Lam monastery where the benefit concert was held is a new building housing a large high-class store. It sells the ornate and expensive statues of Buddhist deities that one would see in a very affluent temple. The store's street-level sign says Om Ah Hung, an important phrase in Buddhism. It refers, among other things, to purification of body, speech, and mind. The store takes up the basement and most of the first and second floors of the building it is in. A big sign hanging above those floors says Pundarika Cozy Apartments. Pundarika translates into English as "White Lotus," another important symbol in Buddhist culture. The lotus flower's rise from the dirty bottom of the lake that spawns it, and its very difficult passage through murky water to the daylight above the water's surface, represent the rise of the enlightened state.

I walk into Om Ah Hung. The first statue visible is an intricately crafted bronze image of the iconic teacher Padmasambhava. It is seven-feet tall, four-feet square, is embedded with coral and turquoise, and costs $35,000 US here. It would easily cost $100,000 in America. The shop contains over a thousand statues between the three floors. Most of these statues are much smaller than Padmasambhava, but some are even larger!

A fifty-year-old man greets me with the traditional pose of palms joined together in front of the heart and the Tibetan greeting "Tashi Delek." He is wearing a massive smile. This is not some butter-up-the-customer

artificial appearance. He is genuinely and obviously in the middle of a very happy life.

I respond with my palms joined in front of my heart. “Hello! My name is Tenzin. I'd like to find out what cozy apartments are like. Are you the boss?”

“No. My name is Thubten. I’m just hanging out with my sons,” he answers. He points at the other side of the store as he says “That is Sugat. He’s the manager.”

Three brothers run the businesses in the building. Sugat is the manager of the main shop. The main shop’s giant windows stick out well above its basement location making the statues and entrance visible from the street. Sugat’s brothers are on the first and second floor. There is a tea shop covering half of the first floor. It also has a few of the beautiful statues within.

Sugat also manages the few apartments on the two upper floors of the building and lives in one of them. The apartment he shows me would be considered high-end in any location. In downtown Nepal, it is considered luxurious. It has modern conveniences and lives up to its “cozy apartment” billing.

It is as big as several average hotel rooms. While actually being just one long room, the space appears to contain more. A partial wall divides the bedroom/desk area from a small living room containing a couch, big screen TV, and glass table. Next to the living room is a large, well-equipped kitchen with a five-foot-long black marble counter island.

Sliding glass doors to the left of the living room open onto a small balcony with a handsome wrought-iron table and chair set on it. The balcony looks directly into the back of an upscale-ish outdoor restaurant full of trees, flowers, bushes, and plants. This garden setting is a valuable rarity in the middle of downtown. The birds know that. There are a lot of them hanging out in the trees that rise past the third floor of the Pundarika. The balcony includes a nearly full-blown view of the Stupa that everyone comes here to see. Those massive, magical wisdom eyes of Buddha painted on the Stupa dome seem to be looking straight up Phulbari Street.

The Pundarika building is surrounded on three sides by monasteries housing over a thousand lamas, monks, and nuns, all within a three-block area.

The price per month is double that of The Pema, but I'm not figuring to be here for long. Why not splurge for what will likely be only a month at the most before heading off to Spain?!

I move right in. It seems a great place to spend a little more time exploring Kathmandu while planning the next leg of the journey.

As it turns out, the timing for this little move is perfect—although there will be no exploring for a while and planning the next leg of a journey will soon become pointless. The shit is about to hit the fan.

Trapped In Heaven But

Free In Bondage

Gone Viral

Want to know how to be blissful and free, even when you are in shackles? I found the answer in the Boudha Stupa's wheelhouse in Kathmandu, but it can happen anywhere.

Just three short days after moving into Pundarika Cozy Apartments to finalize plans for a great Spanish adventure, Spain closed. Most of the world closed along with it. Coronavirus has spun the planet into big panic. Almost everyone is out of work. All schools and almost all businesses are closed.

What we have here now involves social engineering and cultural manipulation much more than it involves any defense against disease. A lot of organized authority and energy has been invested in controlling human behavior. Nothing sane or in synch with the situation has been done about intelligently or realistically controlling a virus. I see police spray a seven-year-old girl from head to toe with toxic sanitizing chemicals while she waits in a long line for food from the monastery. This is panicked stupidity, not disease prevention.

Nepal has one reported case so far. That person was isolated and cured two weeks ago.

Dramatized fear, real economic impact, and spooky sociopolitical consequences are already producing worse effects than the actual disease in this part of the world. Nonetheless, the government has mandated lockdown

isolation for its citizens with no projected end date. My communication with the Western world tells me that the virus problem itself, and the reaction to it, are more pronounced there. The hospitals are full. Folks have died. Others are in an apocalyptic frenzy.

A disease exists and can be dangerous but media exaggeration, dramatization, and fearmongering as well as the harsh government-ordered restrictions seem to be serving some diabolical purpose that has nothing to do with a virus. Call me conspiracy theorist, label me a paranoid, and send me for counseling but I'll bet anyone that wants to take the bet—there is a socio-political plague and degeneration of personal freedom in the works that a virus cannot produce by itself. Political leaders know that chaos is an advantage for tightening control.

"Never let a good crisis go to waste." Winston Churchill

Anyway, I am trapped here in heaven and loving it, so far. I'm not at all loving the fact that folks around the world are sick and some are dying, or the way so many people are drinking fear as if it is a top shelf champagne during Prohibition. There is nothing lovable about the economic butt-kicking being suffered by so many people that have always been just a paycheck or two away from being homeless and hungry. No one could love the limits

already put on personal freedoms or the likelihood that restrictions will expand in the near future.

What I am loving is that sheer dumb luck landed me on a fragrant garden island floating in a sea of both serious real shit and media-inflated bullshit. Yes, there is a nasty storm all around us complete with big social maelstroms, a typhoon-strength manipulation of the public, tidal waves of debilitating fear, and real viral monsters that can sicken and even kill the vulnerable section of our population. Calm, well-balanced common sense is our most valuable ally when we are caught in destabilizing situations such as this, but it has also fallen victim to both the hype and the disease.

Life in the Boudha Stupa area is a bit more fun than most reports of life elsewhere. When your usual dimension is collapsing, it is a real plus to be surrounded by folks who are already halfway into other dimensions.

Legendary professor and mythologist Joseph Campbell said that when a person stops being directed by and mentally occupied with the history of his or her carnal body, but instead becomes immersed in and directed by the Consciousness that informs that body, then the suffering of that ego-driven carnal self no longer has anything to do with that person's experience of life. Conditions outside of oneself may stay the same, but our on-purpose, mindful changes of perspective,

perception, focus, and attitude make a lot of suffering disappear from the way we experience those conditions.

Identifying with Consciousness cancels so many problems that we ordinarily employ by identifying with our *normal* ego-and-body based frame of reference. It is not a matter of denying that things suck! It is a matter of paying attention to whatever can be done to make the situation as good as it can possibly get as opposed to just focusing attention on how terrible things are.

Exchanging a selfishly self-cherishing, problem-oriented focus for a bigger-picture and more inclusive-of-others focus on solutions is like having shackles fall off although they never leave your wrists. It is like being free in bondage. A popular expression states a similar notion as, "head in the clouds with feet on the ground."

An amazingly high percentage of the people here understand and live by these ideas. The monks and nuns spend a lot more time in Universal Consciousness than they spend in their carnally ego-based history. From their etheric residence within that Consciousness, they radiate what the Buddhists call Loving Kindness. This elevated quality is considered the base station of both human and universal nature.

The people in this neighborhood absorb a lot of what these robed folks radiate. The public then radiates the love and support back to the monks, nuns, and each other as well as toward any and all living things.

Some of you may be asking, "What exactly does 'radiate' mean?"

Have you ever met a person who it just feels good to be around? Someone who has an intangible quality that attracts respect and a crowd? Have you ever been around a person with such a nasty scowl, evil intent, and slimy presence about them that they don't have to say or do anything for folks to feel uncomfortable around them? Did you ever notice how dogs cuddle up to some folks and nip at others?

All these folks are radiating energy. We all do it all the time, although we usually don't realize it or think of it in those terms.

A kind and loving way of living makes sense. It can radiate good energy and have a positive effect upon all the people around it regardless of how good or bad life has become. This idea is not a new one. It has been proven in one form or another by sages and theologians, artists, musicians, psychologists, shamans, and scholars as well as many everyday people worldwide. It has been around since the beginning of people. The idea has been re-popularized by recent-era heroes and heroines such as Mother Teresa, Thich Nhat Hanh, Mahatma Gandhi, and Desmond Tutu. Generating Loving Kindness and psychological freedom by identifying yourself with what is more universal instead of identifying with the strictly and restrictively personal self gives major advantages. It

provides us with a great inner strength as well as a free ticket-to-ride with this Kindness's sibling components. These include altruism, empathy, compassion, joy, and a sense of connectedness. These qualities are the building blocks for a happier life.

Strong, free minds readily transcend conventional mundane thought. They also transcend the manipulative bullshit that too often hitchhikes a ride on that mundane thought.

The seeds of strong mental states find it much easier to sprout within more conscious minds.

Just knowing about these desirable mental states is a way different thing than consistently practicing and actively embodying them enough to internalize their benefits and become skillful in sharing those benefits with others. Knowing won't protect us from constant bombardment by the distractions and distempers that life throws at us. Knowing about the free, strong, clear-sighted, inclusive, and awakened Conscious mind won't save us. Seeing, becoming, and consistently being it will.

Knowing that we need food to live will not keep us alive if we don't shop, cook, and eat daily.

Regardless of whether our current situation is scamdemic, pandemic, or (as the evidence suggests) both, it doesn't take a shaman to see that we are on the edge of some very deep shit. It may be more important now than ever before to move toward working on the personal transcendence that brings planetary transition.

When the world gives us big tragedy, the need for self-generated joy and inner beauty expands. Inner joy and beauty can radiate outward to help heal the world. Even dumbass ex-junkies know that. So do the monks and nuns living in this neighborhood. So do many of the wisest healers in the world.

"The most revolutionary act that a person in this country can perform is to be happy." Patch Adams

Utpala Cafe, Mahesh, and The Juice

There is an organic vegetarian café here. It does a good enough business to help fund the large monastery that established it. They also host a Saturday Farmer's Market. Since Corona started, this restaurant isn't open for usual business but has been allowed to stay open several hours a day in order to feed trapped tourists. Free meals funded by the monastery are provided to travelers.

Curfew only allows local people to be on the street from 6-9 a.m. to shop for food and other essential goods at the very few businesses permitted to sell them. This curfew is blessedly ignored enough by police to allow foreigners the option to avoid going hungry or crazy. We do this by visiting Utpala Cafe throughout the day. Homeless Nepalis and foreign tourists are not harassed if found out on the street during the twenty one lock-down hours of the day. Everyone else is.

The airports are closed, so most folks who thought themselves on a two-week spiritually uplifting vacation are now in a very much less pleasant situation with no scheduled end in sight. The Utpala Cafe is a life saver for these international guests. Many tourists are otherwise trapped all day in hotel rooms with no kitchens or company. The company of Western-oriented, English-speaking fellow travelers is as essential as food.

We are not allowed to sit together or touch. We have to speak with each other from double arm's-length distance, but at least it is human contact. There are also several resident dogs to pet here!

Mahesh is an assistant manager at Utpala. Like so many folks in Nepal, Mahesh is a welcomed walk on the bright side. We become friends quickly. I ask if his café has freshly squeezed juice. He says he would love that but there is no juicer. I offer to buy one for the café if he can find two juicers and let me keep one.

Somehow Mahesh finds two shiny new forty-nine-dollar juicers during a total lockdown with nearly all businesses, including appliance stores, closed. Juicing is more than just a tasty move. It is a practical one. A virus can only feed on a weakened immune system. The many fruits and vegetables available here have all the vitamins needed to strengthen an immune system.

Besides free meals being available at the Utpala Cafe, one lady is allowed to sell fruits and vegetables near the back gate. I buy fruits and vegetables there and

give them to the crew. The kitchen crew makes juice for the eight folks that work here and for me. These people work hard. They are always polite and diligent. How they succeed in keeping a hundred or so pissed off and frustrated tourists well fed and happy is a miracle. They deserve appreciation, so I juice them up. I also put some individually sealed 500 mg. vitamin C tablets in a bowl for tourists as well as giving some to the crew. This is, again, practical. We are the only people allowed out on the street right now. It would be rude for us to take care of ourselves poorly. We could catch the plague and pass it on to the neighbors when they are again allowed out of the house. Even if the plague never arrives, any extra nutrition is almost always a good thing, even more so in a place where the majority population lives on rice and lentils—if they are lucky.

The psychological lift to the immune system of medicinal strength nutrition, and of knowing that someone appreciates and cares about you enough to provide it, may be just as powerful as the physical lift.

Animal Emotion

No animal should go hungry.

No wild animal will go hungry for long. A pack of wild street dogs will take down a small, old, or weak human if they have no other options. Our street dogs

are usually fed by people that are currently not allowed out of their houses.

There is one noble animal-loving vigilante Tibetan refugee lady in her mid-50s hauling around bags of dog food. She pays for the food herself. The bags look like they might weigh more than she does, as do tea kettles full of water that she also carries. She feeds and waters all the dogs within a square half mile as often as she can and sometimes has to run from the police who chase her for violating lockdown. They don't think that feeding the dogs is "essential." Even in heaven the law can be rigid and cops can be rigid enforcers.

I tell Mister Mahesh of my immediate concern for the neighborhood dogs and projected concern for the neighborhood humans. He arranges to get dog food.

My first dog-feeding trip around the neighborhood is a bizarre experience.

As I try to feed the first cluster of four that I meet during 6-9 a.m. market hours, a local says to me in his broken English accompanied by a dramatic shoulder shrug, “Won't eat!” I give big handfuls of food to the dogs and discover how right that person is. None of them take the food! One of these dogs scurries away nervously but three of them rub up against me. The dogs insist on being petted. I do so. Tails wag. They are very obviously happy about the petting.

Of the hundred or so dogs I find within a square half mile, only three dive into the food as if they haven't eaten for a while. At least fifty approach me and insist on being petted. These creatures are not starving for food! They are starving for all the people missing from their streets and the affection they are used to getting from human passersby.

I wonder how many people are suffering the same problem as Kathmandu's dogs.

Myself and a canine buddy.

Welcome To The Twilight Zone

Life on Earth is full of spooky things. Most of us have seen both the beautiful and the terrible sides of spooky. Many people have been scared and scarred in terrifying wars, natural disasters, and other such horrid events but they have also had orgasms so heavenly that life-out-of-bed seemed spooky afterward.

I have had meditational and LSD experiences that left me a little spooked but without a doubt that I'm god and so is everyone else. I've also found dead junkies on my floor, their skin so blue it would scare the shit out of a deity.

I have never seen anything spookier than Kathmandu in lockdown.

There is no traffic or industry. Every street in the city is sealed. No shops are open. The Stupa area is patrolled by police chasing folks back to their homes.

This scene would seem spooky anywhere on Earth. In what is usually the bustling epicenter of downtown Kathmandu, it seems even stranger. Streets here resemble ghost towns in old western movies, complete with everything but tumbleweed. One of the spookier things I have ever experienced is being the only person walking around an otherwise almost constantly crowded holy ancient pilgrimage site. The sea of human energy that usually makes walking around the Stupa circle seem like a stroll within a heavenly dimension is gone. There are only a few dogs for company. I feel like that Burgess Meredith character in the old *Twilight Zone* episode where he is the only one left on Earth. The only thing stranger than the situation is that I can still feel the Stupa's magic!

There is no coronavirus here. The authorities seem to be over-killing the attempt to keep it that way. How can something that is not present be contagious?

On the brighter side, the sky has suddenly turned blue. Mountains surrounding the city are visible for the first time in fifty years! Formerly pollution-clouded stars and moon can now be seen at night. The air is healthier to breathe.

Entering Week Six Of Lockdown

After more than five weeks in lockdown, morning shopping trips are still pleasant but the tension is rising a little in the 'hood. Some of the dogs look like they are ready to eat people. Some of the people look like they are ready to eat the dogs.

Now there is some Corona in Nepal. It still is not much of a problem. There are only nine total cases in the whole country. Those cases are all in one small area near the Indian border. If authorities had sealed border provinces better and let the rest of the country get out to earn a living for the past two months, a lot of problems would have been avoided.

In the government's defense, the under-patrolled Nepali/Indian border is even more porous than the American/Mexican one.

Folks in this neighborhood believe that remaining upbeat is a social obligation. They do not deny that the world has been shaved by a drunken barber but they know they have options in the way they will react to it. The nastiest side of current conditions becomes a little nastier with each dysfunctionally scared or depressed person. Most of the folks here know better than to be supportive of evil or compliant with it. They seem to think that the best way to tell both the virus and the human forces that manipulate and increase the virus's

negative impact "You didn't get me!" is to not let them get you.

Each individual that maintains wellness within his or her own coherently-steered canoe, in spite of the whitewater that is violently slapping against the sides, adds strength to humanity's chance of recovery.

At Ten Weeks

Many of Nepal's poor people have run out of food. The government does not help. There is no national safety net here. NGOs, private citizens, and monasteries hand out food on occasion but not often enough. Once a week, hundreds of people line up in the schoolyard across the street from my front window for free food distributed by the monasteries.

Lock down was supposed to end this week but since a couple of viral cases were reported in the city yesterday, that seems doubtful. Yet another lockdown extension seems inevitable.

The government may be effectively starving a good portion of the population to death in order to prevent them from getting the flu. This is not a country where most people have a little money in the bank. There is enough food, but many do not have the money to buy it. Most of the folks that do have enough money for food don't have enough money to give any away.

Imports from India and China account for much of the food in Nepal. They have been cut off. Even if one

has big piles of cash, what is not available cannot be bought. Many shelf products and several ordinarily available types of produce are missing from stores.

My friend Andrea is a German woman that runs an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization). Her group is called Windhorse. It supplies as many local families as it can with food. The government may soon stop her from distributing more in order to avoid further congregating.

As if everything isn't royally screwed up enough here already, thousands of Nepali migrant workers are starting to return from the countries they were working in—without being tested for Corona and with no place to get a job when they arrive home. The income Nepali workers earn in other countries and send back home makes up twenty-three percent of Nepal's total income. That percentage is now MIA along with most of the in-country income.

The Nepali government is not alone in manifesting all these malfunctions! No administration on the planet seems to know what to do.

If governments do know what they are doing, things are a lot worse than we suspect!

Myself and a few friends are brainstorming how to get food to some of the people here that need it most.

Pandemics And Root Canals and Hornets, Oh My!

If you are anything like me then after eighty days in near-solitary confinement watching your species go insane over this century's bubonic plague while Earth's richest and most powerful sociopaths blatantly gaslight democracy out of existence—you need some diversion. After you see murder hornets invading Washington State while mindless racism and riots vent lifetimes of both righteous indignation and misdirected anger as they swallow your homeland's last remaining shred of integrity—you need some excitement!

How about finding a working dentist with first-world knowledge in a fourth-world country during a lockdown where people are afraid to shake hands much less put those hands into each other's mouths? Wouldn't a bunch of root canals be a fun thing to do while waiting for this experience to turn the corner and become the zombie apocalypse we've all been anxiously awaiting? Can you think of a more fun-filled activity to engage in during a time when clinical depression is considered normal than the painful procedure so many sadists view as their go-to form of torture? I certainly can't!

Apparently, my teeth can't either. The few natural teeth left in my mouth have gone rogue. They scream like mindless infants among the many silent, space-age implants housed in the rest of my jawbone. Severe pain distracts me from both hash pipe induced hibernation

and golden meditations. It is one of the very few things that could inspire me to attempt something that seems to be impossible—finding a high level professional with a strong knowledge of cutting edge procedures and some sterile, modern equipment in a country where I don't know a single word of the native language. The dentist needs to be willing to risk exposure to plague by diving into a foreigner's mouth. This foreigner comes from the nation with the planet's highest plague-related death toll. This treatment needs to happen in a world that is shut down, and in a part of that world where the phrase "a strong knowledge of cutting edge procedures and sterile, modern equipment" has never been part of the vocabulary.

Sometimes you get lucky. Doctor Samdup's Monlam dental clinic has an internet presence that includes an email address. He answers emails quickly and opens for emergencies even during a pandemic.

During our first meeting, he shows more than enough dental knowledge and humanity to inspire my confidence. Doctor Samdup seems to be a wonderful and very talented person. The office has only one other employee. His younger brother, Chungdak, is now his dental assistant. The dentist has lost his actual assistant. She returned to her small, distant village as soon as the lockdown began. Chungdak knows his way around the dental office pretty well. Tibetan refugee families are

tightly knit. Chungdak has no doubt been watching and learning from his elder brother since birth.

There is a high risk in this situation that doesn't involve the dentist. The high risk is with administrations that control mandatory closing of businesses such as the laboratory that makes the crowns.

There is a five-day wait after the root extraction before lack of infection can be verified. That verification allows the remains of the rootless teeth to safely accept crowns. A lab makes the crowns during that five-day gap. Teeth lose most of their core strength when the central nerve (root) is extracted. Nothing is left in the middle but a vacant canal. Teeth left in such a fragile condition, without a strong permanent crown to offer protective cover, could easily shatter. If there is a sudden forced shut down of the lab, it could leave unprotected teeth at high risk for a long period of time.

Decisions such as whether or not to shut down a business are often made on the fly amidst the uncharted waters that have engulfed our lives. The administrative authorities around the world, within government and business alike, have shown a lot of confusion about what an appropriate Corona procedure is and exactly how to implement it. Actions that affect everyone everywhere are sometimes decided by very small groups of people doing guesswork in offices and boardrooms. They can't be altogether blamed for this. Most political, social, and medical functions are on new ground. We all

suffer a shortage of accurate information. There is also, at times, a lack of any knowledge as to what to do with accurate information even if it appears in a recognizable form.

Folks in authority often suffer from and function with a dangerous confidence without clarity. To be fair, so do many folks that aren't in authority. Confidence that is stained by an arrogance and/or ignorance will not allow its host to admit just how little he or she actually and accurately knows. This can result in half-baked and counterproductive decision making.

All these factors are currently making life, and my dental procedures, very unpredictable.

Again, sometimes you get lucky.

The lab stays open and everything goes smoothly. Two short weeks after first entering Monlam dental clinic, I discover that it is possible to have fun getting four root canal procedures done and a bad tooth pulled. Doctor Samdup has the heart of a Mother Teresa, the knowledge of a dental scholar, and the skill of a top-level dental surgeon.

Those of you residing in the West will think the following is a misprint. It is not. Four root canals, four crowns, and an extraction costs less than five hundred US dollars here. The same procedures and prosthetics anywhere in America would cost somewhere between five and thirteen thousand dollars. It is very unlikely

that the dentist performing these procedures in America would be any more talented than Dr. Samdup of the Boudha section of Kathmandu.

Holy Forking Shirtballs! I Really Am Dead!

Here is something even more bizarre than root canals during a zombie apocalypse!

I claim that this book is being written by a corpse. As you know, American doctors told me the death thing would happen by now. This light-hearted comment has just tripped over its own feet. As it turns out, this little chuckle seems to be a different type of funny than I had originally suspected. I've seen and experienced more trauma than most people do in several lifetimes. I don't freak out easily or often but am a bit freaked out now!

The monastery's Utpala Café that serves free food to trapped tourists is required by the authorities to keep people at least three feet apart while they wait in line at the steam tables, to make sure that each person wears a mask except while eating, and to see that each person sits at a table that is separate from others. Management is also required to welcome diners with a thermometer put to the skin of each before they are allowed to enter the first gate.

If you have a fever, there are other procedures. Fever is not my problem. I've always been abnormally sensitive to cold. When most other people are wearing

shorts and a T-shirt, I wear a sweater and cap. My friends Mr. Dawa and the very lovely Miss Diki are the Utpala employees that press the thermometer up to my head every day and say, "you're fine." Then I proceed to hand washing and line waiting.

Recently Dawa showed the thermometer to me. It displayed a 90 degree reading. I told him to get a new thermometer as either his was broken or he was talking with the undead. He held that same thermometer to his own and several other people's heads. All those readings were between 97 and 100 degrees—within a reasonable range of the normal 98.6. We have tried this experiment many times during the past two weeks. Every time my temperature runs between 87 and 93 degrees. The same thermometer is then cross-checked with other folks. It consistently registers them between 97 and 100 degrees!

There is no apparent explanation for this. I have to guess that large amounts of ganja and many hours of meditation lower my blood pressure severely enough to result in slower blood circulation and sharp temperature drop, but there seems to be no way to prove what the real cause of this syndrome is.

It appears that this book *actually is* being written by a physiological corpse. For all my joking about the zombie apocalypse, I never thought of myself as one of the zombies!

Somewhat, Perhaps Temporarily, Free At Last

Lockdown has just loosened a bit here in Nepal. Stores are open. We are allowed out of our houses. The restaurants or other places where people congregate in groups larger than two are still closed.

This bit of freedom may be temporary. There may be more medical, political, or economic lock downs in the future. Everyone here doubts that we have seen our last surprise.

The illnesses and deaths are surely tragic but with any luck they have not been in vain. Perhaps this virus and all the social distancing have made it clearer to us just how fragile our freedoms and very lives, not to mention our comforts and patterns, can be. The isolation has inspired many people to think different thoughts than the conditioned responses that habitual living usually dictate. I wonder how many will use this opportunity by putting those new thoughts into action.

I ask a friend what he pictures for the future. He answers "We can only hope."

I disagree. Forget hope! If hope alone replaces a concerned, sensible, confident, dedicated, and energetic involvement in our human process, as it has too often in the past, we are rapidly circling the drain. If it doesn't, then there actually is some hope!

Meanwhile, it is time to celebrate, or at least get outside. We have been on house arrest for four months.

Sometimes A Little Goes A Long Way

Sometimes just a little kindness can have a snowball effect and keep rolling. Here is a good example. The Windhorse NGO fed a lot of hungry people with the limited resources they had but ran short of funds midway through this lock down. Among the many families that my friend Andrea and her Windhorse group were feeding was one headed by a very crippled lady. She could not move and had two young daughters to feed. Life was tragically difficult for this family before Corona ever appeared. Miss Andrea told me about her and I donated fifty dollars.

Windhorse got food to the family quickly. While there, Andrea convinced the woman to see a doctor. The doctor found that the woman's legs were broken quite a while ago but she kept walking and working out of the necessity to feed her daughters. That process pushed her legs up into her hips! The pain would have been enough to kill most people. She kept going. The doctor was so touched by all of this that he operated on the woman at no charge. She now walks pain free and life is very much improved for the entire family. This all stemmed from a little fifty-dollar contribution.

Never underestimate even the smallest act of kindness. Just a little often goes a much longer way than we can imagine.

Monkeys Aren't Puppies!

My friend Zak is much younger and more energetic than I am. He gets around. Zak tells me that the Hindu Temple about a half hour's walk from the Stupa is worth the trip. We find a taxi and go.

As bright as Zak is, he forgot to tell me one essential piece of information: monkeys are not puppies.

There are hundreds if not thousands of them on the grounds of the Hindu Temple. I approach one as if it is a friendly dog. The nasty thing tries to take my face off with a ferocious swipe of his razor-sharp claws! Luckily, my face isn't within range. I have learned my lesson. The rest of the monkeys I meet get a polite but distant nod. The place is literally crawling with them. Several hundred steep stairs lead from the base of the temple's hill to its crown. The walk averages at least one monkey per step.

At the top are jungle, temple buildings, beautiful views of the city, and more animals. Bulls, cows, buffalo, cats, dogs, squirrels, and of course the monkeys frolic in the dense vibrant green vegetation and small open fields within it.

A few larger temple buildings resemble European castles. They are made of thick, roughly-quarried stone. They are each surrounded by several smaller wooden outbuildings. Hindu swamis and yogis are seen near these outbuildings. Brightly colored orange, yellow, or

red robes offer vivid contrast to the greens and browns of the forest. Other ascetics or yogis can be seen living in isolated shacks made of forest materials. Several of these solitary yogis become visible as soon as we crest the hill and climb down the other side.

The priests in this particular group are on a very serious spiritual and psychological mission. They are familiarizing themselves with the impermanence of all things by very literally staring death in the face. At the bottom of this hill we are descending is a narrow river. Directly on the other side of this river, still on temple land, are charnel grounds. When a person of the Hindu faith dies, their body is brought here for cremation. A funeral pyre is built beneath the corpse. Prayers are sung as the body burns. After the final blaze of glory, the ashes are offered to the river. The area is cleaned and made ready for the next corpse. Several of the departed may make their final trips simultaneously as there are several cremation pyres in the area.

I watch for a few minutes while thinking about the terror, beauty, and inevitability of all things turning to dust and ash. The yogis living on the hillside have this cremation site as their neighbor. They are 24/7 observers of the process.

I wonder what a trip it would be to walk around in their minds for a while!

More Photos here!

Pema Feeds The Dogs

The airport is still closed to all international traffic, street traffic is sparse, and business is slow, but folks are getting out and about. Several people are now feeding and paying attention to the hungry, lonely street dogs here. My canine buddies are not so hungry and lonely anymore! One business is involved in this recent rise of concern for canines. They post videos of their action to social media. These are clever as well as big-hearted people. In angelic Tibetan/Nepali fashion, they help the dogs. In a commercially intelligent move, they turn an act of kindness into promotional mileage.

My good friends at the Pema Boutique Hotel and Cafe are these angels. Hotel administration blames their motivation on a particularly human Fearless Puppy but I know that their kindness is the real motivating factor. Wangmo, Nikky, and the Pema crew would've done this project even if I hadn't inspired it by my earlier fussing over the dogs.

The Pema cleverly inspires public participation. They create a contest with prizes. Ms. Wangmo, myself, and other crew members post the project all over social media and hang up printed posters about it throughout Boudha. All this media issues a challenge to participate. The hotel offers a prize for the best photo of a human feeding a street dog. There is another prize for cleverest caption accompanying such a photo. I get to help with

the poster hanging, promotion, dog feeding, and judging the contest photos.

The dogs appreciate the food and petting and the humans seem to have even more fun than the dogs!

Take a look.

Three New Yorkers in Patan

When three people with a connection to the same small rural upstate New York town meet in a neighborhood on the other side of the world that hasn't seen a new tourist for nearly half a year, it almost qualifies as a miracle. I'm from Brooklyn but have done a lot of work in Oneonta, NY. Zak grew up in Oneonta. Our other friend Shiv went to college there.

Shiv knows the Kathmandu area well. He has been coming to Nepal yearly for decades. He suggests seeing nearby Patan. We find a taxi and are on our way.

Patan (also called Lalitpur) is known as "the city of fine arts." Reports of Kathmandu Valley's history often vary depending upon who is giving the account. The most popular version says that the city was founded in the year 299 A.D. by King Veer Deva. Of the many small kingdoms that have sprouted and fallen throughout this valley over the centuries, evidence suggests that Patan is the oldest.

Nearly a quarter-million people live here. Many are artists and craftsman. This has been a fact since the very beginning of the region's recorded history. This city has spawned more master artisans than any other area in the nation. There is so much pottery, painting, sculpture in all mediums, weaving, architecture, and more here that it would fill up a whole book to describe it all. Here are highlights.

Patan is designed and structured in the shape of the Buddhist wheel image with a big Stupa at each cardinal point. The Stupas were built by Indian emperor Ashoka during a pilgrimage here over two thousand years ago. These Stupas are not the only spiritual structures in town. Temples are everywhere. There are well over twelve-hundred Buddhist monuments that occupy the city! The main grouping is in Patan Durbar Square. It is another World Heritage Site. The main section of the square holds the ancient Royal Palace and its three courtyards. These include a large octagonal, ornate pagoda-style, three-story temple built in 1667, another temple, and the royal baths. The most amazing part of these major structures are the stone sculptures within and around them. Many look alive!

A few intricately carved creatures resemble fierce dogs interbred with dragons. Others look like children of a marriage between lions and crows. My favorite is a giant Garuda sitting on top of a seventy-foot-high stone pillar. Garuda is also known as The Solar Bird and The

King Of Birds. It is such a popular creature in Asia that it appears on the coins of some nations. Garuda is often pictured as part man, part bird, with beak and claws that are indestructible. Garuda is the great protector—ferocious but benevolent. It fights injustice and evil. Some of these Garudas have the strength to carry fully grown adult elephants to safety.

Shiv suggests a place with authentic local food. I guess tooth-shattering beaten rice and enough spicy chili peppers to peel paint off a Buick are considered to be delicacies if they swim in enough grease. I don't care for mine and so wander a bit while my friends eat. I wonder whether a trip to Doctor Samdup the dentist will be necessary for my friends after they finish eating their concrete rice.

Within twenty feet of the restaurant I hear a cute gurgling above my head. A four-year-old girl is being held by her mother in the second story window above me. She sings, smiles, and waves at me. I sing, smile, and wave back. The little girl picks tiny green leaves from a tree that reaches her window, kisses the leaves, and then throws them down to me. I throw her kisses and continue smiling and waving with her.

Sculpture, history, natural beauty, spirituality, and many other wonderful aspects of Nepal attract people from all over the world. These all make the nation well worth visiting, but the sweet and unimaginably friendly

demeanor of the people is what makes Nepal one of my favorite countries.

Photos here!

The Kingdom of Bhaktapur

We same three New York musketeers go on another sightseeing mission during the following week. The city of Bhaktapur is famous for several things. My favorites are the world's best yogurt and a Hindu porno temple.

Bhaktapur was once a big, powerful kingdom. It is now a lovely little city. The promotional brochure says "Bhaktapur gives shelter to almost a hundred thousand people, most of whom are peasants." Is it just me or is that one of the stranger sentences in the history of travel advertising? It seems the department of tourism could have phrased the promo a little differently.

The city's history can be traced back to the early 700s A.D. Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, it reigned as the capital of the nation. The town square is another of Nepal's World Heritage Sites and another of the nation's artistic communities. Again, sculpture and carving seem to be the main art forms. Wood, metal, and stone carvings are on many of the buildings. None are as exciting as the porno temple. I shit you not! Intricate, intimate carvings on all sides of this building depict nearly every position and activity the human sexual realm has to offer—fellatio, doggie style, cunnilingus,

anal, missionary position, and every other sideways, upside down, or other angle of sexual interaction are represented. You name it, it is all carved into the side of a holy building in Bhaktapur!

Pottery Square is another one of Bhaktapur's artistic areas. If you've ever seen the *Little Buddha* movie that stars Keanu Reeves, this looks just like the place where Siddhartha's first exposure to human suffering was filmed. I have no way to confirm this but since much of the film was shot right in the Kathmandu Valley and since this area is a dead ringer for that location setting, I have to guess that it is the same place.

Bhaktapur is also home to Earth's most delicious yogurt. I usually can't stand the stuff! That tart, off-sour taste and creamy consistency always make me think of some year-old vinegar-and-mayonnaise combination. But Bhaktapur yogurt is very different! It is also known as "King Curd" and "Sweet Yogurt."

We eat lunch at a rooftop restaurant in downtown. The amazing panoramic view of the mighty Himalayan mountains make the strenuous five-story climb up the narrow iron fire-escape-type stairways worth the trip. We chat with friendly locals at this top-of-Bhaktapur eatery. They turn us on to homemade moonshine and the first actual ganja (not hash) that I have seen here.

I don't want to get redundant on you so I won't go on again about the friendliness of the people here, but I

have to guess that residents of any big American city would be as stunned by it as I am.

Photos here!

College Number 9 Is A 5-Year Option

I attended eight different colleges and universities but learned more while traveling in other people's cars. Nonetheless, college number nine's four-year language program starts soon. I may not be able to attend any classes if and when virus-inspired sanctions make their predicted comeback. Truthfully, class attendance won't be consistent regardless of any virus or its sociopolitical side effects. Learning the language would be wonderful but the bigger reason for enrolling is to get a five-year Nepali student visa with multiple entry options. These are available to US citizens that register and pay tuition at an educational institution here. Nepal has an agreement about student visas with the US and so only Americans can get this long-term opportunity. This visa allows me to stay for the next five years in what seems a relatively sane, small country that sits right in the midst of a big, insane world. "Multiple entry" means that during the next five years, international travel is allowed and Nepal will always grant re-entry (if this country and airport aren't on lockdown).

It takes wrangling, wangling, waiting, fees, surprise fees, lots of paperwork, and several processes requiring

professional help to accomplish this visa. These hoops have all been jumped through.

Here in Kathmandu, a nearly seventy-year-old college student that was written off as dead years before is not much of a standout. Everyone still here from other parts of the world has recently survived a half-year of bizarre circumstance. Each was already an unusual character with a very interesting backstory long before lockdown started. After absorbing so much of Nepal's wonderful strangeness as well as absorbing so much of Corona's not-so-wonderful strangeness, most folks have gotten even more interesting.

My best friend, Zak, is the son of two musically adept college professors in upstate New York. It shows. He may be the most intelligent, literate, twenty-five-year-old person I have ever met. In spite of his young age, Zak's scholastic ability and background make him one of the best at editing academic paper work and advising potential college students.

This smoothly mannered gentleman could be getting more ass than a toilet seat if he wanted to do so but for the time being he prefers to channel all his energies into spiritual and academic efforts. The best part of Zak is not intellect. He brings a compassionate heart, a firmly fixed moral compass, dignity, a firm connection to the bigger picture, a sense of humor, and common sense to the world. Each of these qualities show a solid strength that should belong to a much older person.

I come up with good ideas every now and then. Zak makes good ideas happen. I come up with the idea to get a five-year visa and suggest it to him. He is smart and patient enough to overcome the many details involved. We navigate school sign-up and visa processes together. This makes all the delays, changes, adjustments, and frustrations easier to deal with. Waiting six hours in a bank for your advocate from the school who got tied up by paperwork at a government agency is less than a joy. It is more doable when you have a friend there to joke with while you hurry up and wait.

Picture yourself going through a full week of dealing with the tedious and confusing processes of a half-dozen agencies and then trying to coordinate a mountain of paper into one coherent document!

Zak left his computer and a few other possessions in Thailand. He was teaching English there. Nepal was to be a short vacation for him. Before his two weeks were up, his option to leave disappeared for the next six months! Now he doesn't care if the airports reopen. He bought another computer and will not leave Nepal.

This is true of many people including myself. Spain has become just a maybe-later destination instead of the firm primary goal it was a half-year ago.

Our advocate for the visa procedures is a thirty-year-old miracle of a human being named Romash. He is a ball of thunderous good will with a several-pound

knot of hair piled on top of his head. He never loses his smile. I call him Saint Romash. He is an attorney, visa specialist, and the university's liaison. He seems to know everything and everybody. Romash deals all day with confused and sometimes angry tourists as well as with government bureaucrats. You might've been able to piss Mahatma Gandhi off, but you can't piss off Romash. Besides having superhuman patience, he is generous and empathetic. Romash started and is the captain of our grassroots project to feed the suddenly unemployed and hungry Nepali laborer families in this area.

Many folks plaster fake smiles on their faces throughout the business day because it is part of the job. Mr. Romash smiles because of the joy he gets from helping people. Romash is always moving at the speed of light to get dozens of visas processed through a long, complex series of steps. He makes a decent living doing this and deserves it.

I have no idea how long I will remain in Nepal. The long-term plan is still to travel completely around the world, write a book about the trip, go back to the errant doctors that told me I would die by now, bring them each a signed copy of the book, buy them a drink, then sell the book for a zillion dollars and use the money to sponsor a planet-wide increase in the number of wisdom teachers available to the public. I realize that may be a little overly ambitious, but stranger things have already happened this year.

As is true for nearly everyone on the planet, my own little personal plans are being regularly interrupted or at least altered by external forces. Everyone has to work around all those interruptions as best as they can. Everything I have seen and heard about what is going on throughout the world tells me that I am very lucky to be interrupted and altered in Nepal.

Not Moving For A While

In spite of paying what is considered in Nepal to be an almost criminally exorbitant rent, I am hesitant about moving to a different apartment. I am not attached to the fanciness of the digs.

Location, location, location is so often the answer to business success. It is also a good part of the answer to my happiness. This location is not perfect. There is a panhandling wino gauntlet to deal with between here and Utpala. There are ankle-bending streets of curved stone. There are fuming motorbikes without catalytic converters. But I am listening to trumpets, drums, and a hundred monks chanting across the street to my left. In front is a nearly full view of the Stupa from my balcony and a completely full view of it from the roof. In the other two directions are over six hundred lamas in a monastery. They can often be heard doing their thing. Dharma vibe and its benevolent intentions surround and saturate this spot. This makes my only remaining

serious job on Earth (i.e. don't be a dickhead) so much easier to accomplish!

Back on House Arrest

Severe lockdown is back. Many people that I have spoken with, locals and expats alike, figure revolution is a strong possibility if this house arrest type lockdown goes on much longer. Without the tourist traffic, folks were just barely (or not) making ends meet even with their shops open! Now they are forced into a complete closure again. Hungry people get pissed off much more quickly and violently than well-fed people.

To avoid complications I slide through backstreets and stay away from the police. Most of them are posted by the Stupa entrances. There are not enough police to cover all the streets. The café for trapped tourists is still open but only through a back entrance.

Some pissed off businesses that are on the edge of extinction defy the law and provide other options. We can travel through a series of alleys to back entrances of a few restaurants. These are tucked away enough to stay under the radar. It feels like the early 1900s Prohibition time in America with its "speakeasies," the hidden taverns where people would drink in spite of alcohol being illegal. We are doing the same here except that food and human company, not alcohol, are the contraband.

I have a momo (dumplings) luncheon tomorrow at The Pema Boutique Hotel. Only family, crew, and a few close friends will be there. The Pema isn't a speakeasy and is truly not open to the public at all right now. That makes avoiding the police easier, and the circumstances more acceptable to the authorities if I do run into them.

Another good lockdown activity is the Pundarika roof. There is an amazing view of the whole Kathmandu valley as well as the Stupa. The roof trip occasionally gets rained out. There hasn't been a full twenty-four hour day without rain during the past several months of monsoon season, but there is at least a little sunshine on most days. The clouds are now more of a blessing than a curse. The Asian sun is brutally hot on a clear day at this time of year. Folks use umbrellas against both sun and rain.

The streets are ghost town quiet once again. The air is getting cleaner and clearer again. I have plenty of everything and am in a nice place, my body temperature is up to 97, and everything is great except for being forced to stay indoors most of the time.

The school I enrolled in is not much of a school. It would no doubt be a much more impressive institution if Corona were not in session, if students could actually be in classrooms, and if administrative offices were on the job at all. There have been no receipts for tuition given, no letters to welcome new students, no schedules, and no syllabus. I have gotten no contact at all from them! I

hear reports of Zoom classes for the very few students psychic enough to find them. Even Zak with all of his academic wizardry finds school scheduling, curriculum, and the teachers themselves impossible to follow.

I complain to a friend. Even in the face of what are admittedly some very difficult circumstances, this school seems like an incompetent operation. My friend is kind enough to educate me. I have been looking at this from the wrong angle! As a college, the school is in shambles. As an organization acquiring five-year visas for people that want to stay in Nepal, they are extremely efficient.

It would be nice to learn a little bit of the language but I'm not complaining. Getting a visa was always the primary goal. My friend is right. It's all in the way you look at it.

Doing Something

The word pandemonium translates to English as "the place of all demons." Has Earth earned that title yet? Corrupt officials in many places pocket funds that are earmarked for virus prevention, treatment, and economic relief. Other authorities ignorantly and dangerously mismanage the lives of their citizens. Many offer no assistance at all to their citizens in crisis.

You can always tell when a civilization is on its deathbed. It will display the same characteristic decay within all of its major institutions. The lust for wealth

and power replace humane behavior as motivating forces in government, medicine, religion, economics, and education. A small number of disproportionately powerful people orchestrate the rapid growth of their own interests with no regard for fellow humans or other living things. Impotent majority populations become the witnesses, rather than the architects, of their own fates. Most individual citizens are blindly compliant with or ineffectively active against the malevolent whims of a few sociopaths. These signs are all too painfully obvious in our civilization.

Much of the world is poverty-stricken. Even the smallest dip in resources drives many folks from poor to destitute. Such is the case here. For several years, Mr. Romash has been helping to feed poverty-stricken kids whose parents work in a neighborhood brick factory. Even during the best of times, with full working weeks and regular wages, these families barely have enough food. The brick factory has been closed during the strict lockdowns of the past half-year. Most of these families have no income at all. Resources are drained. Romash mentioned the problem to Zak. Zak was moved to take action. I was moved to join them.

The Promo Looked Like This

My posting efforts came with the introduction below.

This link is to the GoFundMe page for a project that we friends put together in order to feed the hungry

children here in Nepal. Please help. These children were always poor. Now they are destitute. The GFM page explains why. No contribution is too small (or too large). We figure that forty-six dollars gives a seven-member family here a full two weeks supply of their traditional food.

Children worldwide cause less evil but suffer more of it than any other age group. NGOs and the other aid groups can't keep up with the rapidly expanding need to keep our children alive and well. Governments often cause more suffering than they cure. Most of the local neighbors here are not much more affluent than the children, so they can't help either. In these times of rapidly increasing crisis, in this sad era where so many things have been done wrong, please join us in this very important effort to do something right. Those whom we trusted to be the professional directors of our social structures have mucked things up pretty badly. The future has suddenly been dropped into the shaky hands of you, I, and other dedicated amateurs. Please help these children to have a future. Thank you very much for whatever you can do. Be well, Tenzin

*p.s. Any Forwarding/Sharing that you can do with this announcement, wherever you think appropriate, will be very helpful.

In case you want to know who the project organizers are:

Zak Aldridge—of Oneonta, NY/Columbia University. This project is his brainchild. He is a respected private tutor, thesis editor, and coach to college applicants and students.
Romash Shrestha—Kathmandu attorney. He has been doing what he can to take care of these kids for years. Those nice alphabet T-shirts they are wearing in the GFM page photo came from him.
Doug "Ten" Rose—is the author of Fearless Puppy books and projects.

The Results Look Like This

Public reaction through the Internet is great. It gets us past goal! Results on the ground are heartwarming. Trucks get loaded by cooperative food wholesalers. We drive unmolested to the village. The link above shows the first delivery. Take a look!

Great Places, Great People

Thanks to the White Gompa's Utpala Cafe, it is still possible to see some of my fellow humans even during a lockdown. It is a miracle to find so many wonderful people in one small neighborhood! Much of this miracle has to do with location. Within Nepal, and especially within the Stupa neighborhood, there is a very much different variety of tourist than the ones you will find

drinking on the beach in Cancun. Foreigners here are more likely to be looking for temples rather than bars—although many can be found in both.

You also find a different type of native resident here than in many other countries. There is a strong happy-family feeling between Nepali natives that carries over somewhat into their treatment of foreigners.

Buddhism's main component is compassion. The neighboring Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery and Temple complex, also known as "The White Gompa," puts that compassion into action by footing the bill for the tourists' free meals at the Utpala Cafe.

The whole world is suffering similar circumstances but strangers in a strange land have several additional difficulties to face. We are far from family, friends, or familiar surroundings and have no ability to speak the local language. Personal culture shock has to be rapidly sublimated in order to deal with a much more severe and universal shock. A military veteran here comments that it feels similar, in that regard, to a combat situation.

The free-flowing money that makes tourists popular in tourist areas is dammed up. We deal with very limited banking opportunities and a financial caution caused by an unpredictable future. There is a limited availability of food and other necessities.

The bad parts of this situation are obvious. The good part is that folks caught in such a web get to know each other much faster than they ordinarily would. Bonds are formed, trusts are earned, respect flowers, and mutually beneficial interdependencies grow quickly. Many otherwise casual relationships run deeper in traumatic situations than they would in normal life.

A few folks show colors I don't want to see, so I stop looking in their direction. Others act so humanely that they seem more godly than human at times. I look in their directions as often as possible.

All the people mentioned in the link below own a great humility as well as an incredible presence. They may be embarrassed by my descriptions, but it wouldn't make sense to release this book without acknowledging them. Much of this book would not exist without their good influence. I might not still exist, were it not for their friendship.

If you have read this far, you are a bit special yourself. You probably think a bit outside the box at times, just like these folks do. I am sure you will appreciate knowing these other wonderful people. With apologies to them for any discomfort that seeing themselves in print might cause, here they are.

This is my favorite link in the whole book!

There is much greatness in Nepal. Great centers of learning specialize in psychology, philosophy, kindness, and spirituality. There are incredible rhinos, tigers, eagles, leopards, elephants, rivers, and lakes.

Nepal contains several great World Heritage Landmarks and sacred locations including the birthplace of the historical Buddha. It is home to Earth's undisputed champion of mountain ranges. But, and I hope you will pardon me for saying it again, it is without question the people, both locals and expatriates, that are Nepal's greatest gift to the world.

Stupaville Don't Crack

A popular expression in America says "Black don't crack." The concept is that after suffering from centuries of every imaginable abuse in a country they physically built but were never allowed to feel at home in, black folks have developed unbreakable resilience. Many wear this well and age gracefully.

Nepal has this strength in common with Black America. Life in Nepal is as bad or worse than it is everywhere else. Stupaville still doesn't crack!

The second severe lockdown has finally relaxed, but has taken its toll. There are several thousand people living within this Boudha Stupa section of Kathmandu that aren't monks or nuns. Several of these people have

lost jobs. Some of them have lost their homes. A few lost loved ones. Most income in this relatively affluent neighborhood comes from tourists. Tourist traffic has been nonexistent for almost a year. Some businesses have permanently closed.

It is amazing how many of the people here still walk around with an internally generated happiness that can only come from a deep faith in the inevitable.

The locals always act like they are more grateful for remaining advantages than they are grieved about lost advantages.

This ability to not crack up in the face of severe adversity is even more amazing when you consider the backstory. Nepal has been a poverty-stricken nation since long before any of the economic, social, and political malfunctions of the coronavirus were just a twinkle in Pfizer's eye. Most folks here live without any heat for the entire four-month winter. Most of their homes are concrete buildings that could easily function as meat lockers. The people are often chilled more thoroughly than the food they will be eating. During the seven very warm months of the year, lack of modern refrigeration and an inconsistent electrical grid become even bigger problems.

Many Nepali folks were malnourished long before this recent crisis. The average salary that I have heard mentioned here is $170 a month. Food prices are

much lower than in the Western world but are still not low enough to accommodate the wage.

Tuberculosis and many other unpleasant diseases are by no means a rarity. Air pollution in Kathmandu is among the worst in the world.

Nepalis have to pull together in order to survive these harsh circumstances. They do. They are strong, inclusive, and cooperative as a community. This strong sense of community throughout Nepal is a very serious accomplishment considering the diversity of the native population. Many cultural units arose from the various small kingdoms that once occupied Kathmandu Valley and its surrounding hills centuries ago. Some of these kingdoms made brutal war against each other.

Descendants of these small kingdoms still maintain some old cultural traditions but now peacefully co-exist with the descendants of all other tribes.

Although the country is Hindu by a large majority, other groups are made to feel at home. There is a large exiled Tibetan Buddhist community and many Christian as well as Muslim devotees. There is a New Year's Day every other month! Each culture has its own.

There is mutual respect between tribes. There's no need for a _____ Lives Matter campaign. The police brutality is either infrequent or hidden better than it is in America. This rarely-seen brutality is distributed equally among all Nepali people when it does happen.

Beggars work on several streets. Some are in real need of food. Many others just want to be drunk again. Several are part of beggar cartels. This is their career. Others are scamming to pay the mortgage on a condo in India. A few of them can be aggressive. Not everyone contributes to them but I have never heard anyone yell "Leave me alone and get a job, you bum" during the near-year that I've been here. Folks with homes and jobs are polite if not helpful to the beggars, as well as to each other. This is very impressive considering just how rude and even sociopathic some street beggars can be. The Nepali culture recognizes that the divine is living in all creatures no matter how well disguised it may be at times. People of all social and economic levels greet each other with the same respectful "Namaste." The most popular translation of the word namaste is "I recognize The Divine within you." Everyone here seems to figure that it is best to be polite while talking to God, and that God is in every living thing.

The world seems to be changing more rapidly and severely than ever—certainly much more rapidly and severely than it ever has in our little lifetimes. Whether the Boudhanath Stupa neighborhood will ever crack under the pressure is an ongoing question. But life here in Stupaville, at least for the time being, is still a joyful celebration that stays strong enough to carry resilience in the present and a sweet hope for the future.

I hope that's also true for your life, wherever you are.

A classic Stupa photo

Yet Another New Year's Day

The Kathmandu Valley's original inhabitants call themselves Newar. Newari people still make up the largest portion of the valley's population. When they party, everyone gets into the festivities.

Today is the official Newari New Year's Day. Two blocks north on the big avenue outside the Stupa's main gate, pedestrian crowds cover up four of the six lanes of traffic and slow the flow to a near standstill. There is a gigantic sand mandala on one side of the avenue that says "Happy New Year." Across the street, a well-dressed man with an authoritative look gives *tikas* (red paste on the third eye) to everyone. He presents everyone in the big crowd with rice grains. These symbolize prosperity.

Everyone smiles at and is friendly with the strange foreigner that comes over to take part in their ceremony. I was the only non-Newari there.

A different sharply dressed and official-looking gentleman ties a red ribbon around my neck. There are big kettles of milk tea, trays of cookies, and other sweets. They graciously offer and I gratefully enjoy.

It is a great psychological lift to be in the middle of all this celebrating, happiness, and inclusiveness after so many months of lockdown followed by several months of harsh restrictions that were then followed by another lockdown. The whole crowd is elated. I can almost hear them thinking "This year is going to be better."

A Few More Problems A Few More Solutions

IT IS WEIRD TO BE "RICH"

I spent several teen years begging on the streets for survival and much of my adult life working for causes that did not return appreciable, if any, paychecks. I'm certainly not complaining! Much of it was fun and all of it was educational. Decades were spent sleeping on my friends' floors or spare mattresses. I often drank the beer, ate the food, and smoked the weed of benevolent friends and was always the poorest person in any town that I entered. My life and work have been even more "dependent upon the kindness of strangers" than was Miss Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Friends were always happy to a be part of all the street level environmental and charitable efforts I worked on. I was always very grateful for the help and support that allowed me to do the work.

Of all the culture shock I should be feeling here on the opposite side of the world from my homeland, there is only one aspect that seriously jars my system. It is so forking weird to be considered a rich guy! Of course, this being rich thing is altogether relative. With $445 a month of so-called Social Security income (and a bit of savings), I would be living well below the poverty level in America.

Although I am a rich guy among some people here, I am not one as compared with the Tibetan community

that occupies much of this neighborhood. Tibetans make up a good portion of this Boudha Stupa area but less than nine percent of the population of Nepal. Much of the remaining ninety-plus percent of indigenous Nepali people, and even more so the non-Tibetan immigrant groups, aren't as fortunate as the Tibetans seem to be.

This is certainly true for the labor force that works within but lives outside the Stupa area. They work the restaurants, shops, construction, and have carts in the streets that sell fruit or vegetables or kitchen utensils or Q-tips or anything else that can be sold to make a few rupees profit.

Many people came to Nepal from India to enjoy the greater financial opportunities. Most of them became well-respected members of the community. Others came because begging and the other street hustling rackets are more productive here. These are the most annoying and aggressive operators in town. They can be seen training children to be cute, pitiable, and profitable. They are raising career beggars. These beggars usually live in small tin-roofed shacks within squatter ghettos and are a large financial step below the local workers. In America, these street/tin shack people and I would be in a very similar situation. Here, I am considered wealthy.

Oddly enough, the amount of money I have is not what influences their decision. They have not seen my bank balance. What they have seen is my skin color.

During pre-Corona-scare years, the mostly Indian street people got accustomed to having tourists from the so-called First World visit Nepal for a few weeks. They have seen so many foreign vacation dollars flying loosely by and around them that many of these people think everyone white is rich! Relatively speaking, they have a legitimate point. Anyone that can afford the price of a plane ticket to get from the Western world into Nepal actually is rich compared with those folks on the street trying to live off of what trickles down from the visitors.

Most locals that give to street beggars contribute five or ten rupees. During my first four months in town, I would give a twenty rupee note to every and any one that asked. I'd pocket fifty of these twenty rupee notes at a time, hand them out over a couple day period until they were gone, and then go get some more. I like being helpful, twenty rupees is about eighteen cents, and it put myself and the street folks in a happy state of mind.

Some beggars looked like they were doing fine. Some were missing parts of their body or mind. Others were alcoholics. Whatever their story was, it made sense to me that if they were out there asking, they needed to be helped. Many homeless people suffer as much from the inequities of our economic and social systems as they do from personal bad luck, bad habits, or bad decisions. Many programs advertised as being part of a humanely-based war on poverty are more accurately covering up institutional wars on poor people. These thinly-funded

efforts offer no substance or solution. They are often based in a cold economic policy or political photo op rather than in functional compassion.

I like, respect, and defend many of my fellow street peeps. Some are more fun to be around than others but they all remind me of how slim and temporary that line between material wealth and material poverty can be. Street experience taught me long ago that there may be plumbers, carpenters, single mothers, innocent orphans, even doctors, attorneys, and professors sleeping in any given alley right alongside the junkies and winos. Half the world is only one bad break or decision away from being street people.

Many are polite but several of these beggars are rudely aggressive in their efforts to widen the very thin trickle within the trickle-down theory. These hardcore beggars ask and don't stop asking if you say "no." They will keep badgering in their native language although they know that only one out of every thousand tourists will understand what they are saying. They often tug on your sleeve as they follow you down the street. Some bark "Money! Money! Money!" near your ear for a length of two or three blocks. Others loudly interrupt while you are talking with friends in the street. They continuously caw in your ear like a crow on crack. Their hope is that you will give them some money so they will just shut up and go away. They have what we call in Brooklyn a "crawling up your ass" approach. In much of

Brooklyn, these people would get their butts kicked more often than they would receive contributions.

Myself and the fellow beggars that I have known in America always realized that once any prospective contributor said "no," our time would be more productively spent by moving on to a new, hopefully more receptive target. The Indian/Nepali beggar hasn't yet figured out this little point of practicality and shows no concern for any points of street etiquette.

As a guy with personal panhandling experience as well as almost four decades of begging on the behalf of many environmental groups and charitable efforts, it is forkingwell bizarre and unsettling to be hit-on dozens of times a day by folks that are trying to shine my sneakers or extort money in exchange for them just leaving me alone. An invasive, aggressive, annoying persistence is only an asset in rare situations. Career begging is not one of these. Certain variations of this type of aggressive persistence are severe enough so that they need to be ended immediately. Perpetrators need to be punished (if you believe in that sort of thing) and mandated into rehabilitation.

Here's an example.

A young, attractive woman begs near the Stupa. One side of her face is severely black and blue. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a man hovering about twenty feet away. He darts glances at her. I give the woman thirty rupees instead of my usual twenty.

I learn later that she was intentionally beaten in the hope that signs of abuse would evoke sympathy and bring in bigger contributions. The hovering man was likely her husband, pimp, boyfriend, or owner.

I don't give money to many Kathmandu city street people anymore. I do give to old people and folks with missing limbs. My change of attitude is about more than just aggressive and annoying folks. Some of the horrible things that happened in the Slum Dog Millionaire movie actually happen here in real life. It may be a lot more widespread and severe in India, but some of the same cruelty exists in Kathmandu as well.

I feel badly about not helping my street brothers and sisters that are regular people in legitimate need, but there is no way to tell which folks are on the level and which are part of a beggar's cartel—or something even more abusive and disturbing. I have to step on my natural instinct to help in order to prevent supporting the many forms of pain that gather their strength on these streets.

The US government's savage military actions and TV's exaggerated imagery have internationally fostered a bad reputation of the American people. But as is true in so many countries, individual citizens are often a lot nicer than their governments.

Americans can be quite generous, compassionate, and forgiving—especially if we have had some training in and experience with both the conventional and the

more esoteric concepts of generosity, forgiveness, and compassion. But if I ever again see a woman with a black and blue face, and a man hovering nearby with his eyes fixed on her begging hand, I will likely forget what the Buddha taught me and kick the living fork out of the guy.

He beat up a defenseless woman, and he iced the heart of a warm man.

Journey With A Purpose

If you have read this far in the book you already know who Thinley Wangmo Lama is. Besides being administrator of the all-around best hotel in Boudha, The Pema Boutique Hotel on Phulbari Street, she is also an adventuress, the driving force behind an ambitious project to improve women's health, status, rights, and justice in her country, and my volunteer tech adviser. She is my favorite make-believe granddaughter and one of my favorite real-life friends. She has many sincere admirers due to her constructive strength, a transparent honesty, energetic diligence, and gentle kindness. These qualities are rarely found together within one person.

Many social issues are just now starting to get the attention in Asia that they have enjoyed in the West since the 1960s. Women's health concerns, rights, and equality are among the issues at the top of that list. The

world is joining Wangmo and other dedicated people in Nepal and across the planet to right the inequities and injustices that women have endured for millennia.

A closer look will reveal that every living thing, not just our mothers, sisters, and wives, have suffered severely from the lack of respect that our worldwide culture often directs toward women. More attention has been given to providing men with artificial erections than to providing women with authentic healthcare. This shows a criminal lack of both common sense and common decency. Unless that lack is soon addressed and remedied, there is little chance for survival of our species. Until the compassionate, nurturing aspects of the feminine presence gain as much prominence in our human affairs as the constructive, productive, and often destructive drives of the masculine presence, we are in a deep pile of doo-doo and will continue to sink deeper.

Wangmo's first project is an effort to help women in the remote village where she was born. These women suffer some archaic health practices as well as suffering archaic prejudices. Many women around the world are shamed by their communities just for having the natural occurrence of a period. They use old rags for sanitary napkins. They suffer avoidable health complications that accompany a lack of education and respect.

Here's what Wangmo did about it.

RESULTS

The essential $5000 US in contributions was raised and the perilous voyage was made. The mission was successfully accomplished as described in the detailed description in the link above and the few details below.

Most of what we hear these days is about what is going wrong in the world. Here is proof that there are things going right. Women's health, rights, equality, and an increased respect within their culture are all being addressed by this effort. Another phase of this project, women's literacy training, is in the works. The men in these locations can already read and write. The women very much want to read and write but have not been given the opportunity to learn—until now.

That fact alone sums up the pervasive problems.

Miss Wangmo sums up the solution. Here are the results of her Ecopad project.

Ecopad Project Limi Valley, Humla Nepal | Journey With A Purpose Project Report

Goals Achieved:-

1. Distributed Eco Femme Reusable Sanitary Pads and cotton Underwear to 232 Limi Girls and Women

2. Taught correct way to use the ecopads and made sure they realized the importance of drying the pads out in the sunlight
3. Emphasized symptoms of Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and hygiene measures during periods
4. Tackled menstruation shame and embarrassment
5. Raised their self-esteem and exhibited a positive attitude towards menstruation
6. Taught basic yoga exercises for lower back pain, knee pain, menstrual cramps and to enhance blood circulation to the reproductive system
7. Selected a volunteer from each village to monitor the project outcomes

Future Plans

Asked what other kinds of support the women require, the majority of them **showed interest in learning how to read and write.** Younger women are frustrated at not being able to write their name in English or Nepali, and by having to sign official documents with their thumb impressions. Older women are interested in learning how to read Tibetan prayer scripts in order to be able to understand Buddhist Philosophy in depth.

•How do we plan to achieve this?

We realize that the Limi women are extremely busy with their household work, field work, and community-building works throughout the year except during the winter. So, a winter coaching session seems like a good

idea. We want to start the first phase of teaching the reading of Buddhist prayers to interested women this coming winter. Of course, interested men will also be welcomed.
Therefore, with the remaining donation amount, we will be starting a class in Halji with how to read Tibetan script.
Anyone NGO or Private Fund interested to support this Limi Literacy Program, kindly contact/Whats-App me at +977-9840222717

Thank you all for supporting our project and the women of Limi Valley.
Thinley Wangmo Lama, Team Ecopad

The Literacy Project

Wangmo and her team continue kicking butt in the most positive ways! This video is perhaps the most touching one in the book.

If it isn't right there, scroll down very briefly to the four-minute video at February 4.

https://www.facebook.com/groups/1569683236709446

Personal Moral Dilemma

I think I may now have a part-time girlfriend with an eleven-year-old son. She is sweet. He's a great kid.

Skalpana is thirty-five-years-old and already taking pills for diabetes and thyroid. She speaks a little bit of English. Much of what we say to each other is understood. Some isn't.

The boy's father never officially married his mother. Dad has been in Dubai for four years and sends mom only fifty to seventy-five dollars three or four times a year to care for his son. He might come back tomorrow or never. Skalpana says she will stay with the dad for the child's sake if the dad ever returns. This approach never made sense to me but has to many people, including my own parents.

Skalpana tells me she is not married but keeps calling her baby-daddy "husband." I ask about it. She says there is no official marriage certificate and was never a ceremony but in this country if two people have a child together they are considered married. Skalpana says she presented her situation to me as "not married" because I am American. She isn't married in American terms and perhaps not even in Nepali's binding legal terms. She is married in Nepali culture.

I am in a moral dilemma. Among approximately two hundred women that I've been intimately involved

with, I have at no time knowingly been with one that had a husband or boyfriend. I wouldn't even jerk off to a fantasy with a married woman in it! I feel weird being in bed with a married woman after a full lifetime of not doing so—even if she is sort of not really married and the entire situation is a weird foreign-to-me cultural glitch.

I help her a bit where I can. She is happy about that. For a hundred dollars I bought her a new display table and stock to sell to tourists. She makes her living selling Nepali souvenirs and costume jewelry on the street. Although technically illegal, many Nepali people do it in tourist-heavy locations. Police sometimes chase them off.

She pulls in anywhere between fifty cents and five dollars per day. Even here where things are cheaper by far than in the Western world, that's not enough for a woman and child to live on. The continuing thin tourist traffic means there are less people to buy her souvenirs and no other work available at restaurants or hotels.

I tell Skalpana she will have to find a white boy with more money because I don't have the resources to give her everything she should have. Skalpana laughs. She is gorgeous when she smiles, but who isn't?

I would like to help more but a hundred dollars is almost a quarter of my monthly Social Security check. Luckily, she and the kid get big thrills from little things

that you and I might take for granted. Those cost less. I can do that much. We go to a restaurant for pizza. Mother and child both glow as if invited to Buckingham Palace for dinner! She says it has been a full year since they were last able to go to a restaurant.

Uggh!

A few things happen today that solve my moral dilemma. Skalpana came up to my room for our third sexual fun-fest. She slides into my room quickly so that no one will see her. It is considered a shameful thing for younger Asian women to be with older Western white men. The locals take it for granted that there is no real relationship there, that the woman is just being used for sex and the man is just being used for his money. We cannot even hold hands in public for fear of what the neighbors might say.

I keep telling Skalpana to let the neighbors go fork themselves and take their little provincial, repressive, regressive attitudes with them. We have real feelings for each other. We should be happy and open about that in spite of her countrymen being stuck in ideas that might be considered restrictive even in the American 1950s.

I do understand why the natives feel the way they do. They are often right! Intercontinental affairs often really are just a sex/money exchange camouflaged with a very thin veneer of relationship.

Skalpana doesn't understand that we should treat ourselves differently than the folks involved in veneer

relationships, and that the neighbors will have to fall in line when they see that we are real about each other.

I soon find out why she doesn't understand that.

After our little happy nap together, I ask if she will be going to work today. She responds, "I am working now." I am stunned and ask her, "Does that mean that every time we have sex you consider it a job and I am supposed to give you money for the sex?"

Skalpana keeps smiling and nods a "yes." Holy shit! The problem that the neighborhood might look at her as a prostitute has just become a minor sticking point. The real problem is that she looks at herself as one! I refuse to give her money, explain why, and tell her that I've been happy to help but will not do so any more under those conditions. She seems fine with that, says "OK," and hugs me as if nothing happened!

She is a desperate single mother doing what she has to do and I am a desperate single man seeing what I want to see instead of what is actually there. I am in a veneer relationship but thinking I am in a real one!

I don't know why I am so surprised. This scenario runs rampant through every nation in Asia that I have ever visited. There are very few relationships involving men and women from different continents that work out well. For every one of them, there are a thousand more that are all about money for sex, sex for money, being used by lovers, and shamed by Haters.

It is more likely that the man will fall in love with and be used by the woman than that things will happen the other way around. Native Asian women seem to have a practical sense of non-attachment that comes with their culture. White men have a more ego-based, possessive sense of romance that comes with theirs.

Renting a woman's (or for that matter a man's, if that is your preference) sexual equipment can happen anywhere in the world without much difficulty. Chances are a lot slimmer for a foreign man that is looking for a meaningful relationship involving romantic love with an entire woman. The odds of success get even worse as we get older.

Many of the women in these sex-for-money veneer relationships are single mothers caring for their children without much help. Single parents that are caring for their children without much help are heroes. I would not begrudge them anything they have to do to raise their child. But I have a strong aversion to relationships that are based on shame, fear, and finance—especially when they are blatant pay-for-play situations. While I understand that it is the only option for many women, it is not an option for me.

The sort-of-married complication just adds a little icing on the can't-do-this cake.

I'm (at least temporarily) done looking at women in a romantic light. I love several as friends and several

others as much as granddaughters. These friends and granddaughters are wonderful relations!

As far as more intimate relations go, I'll just wait for a single woman who thinks that love and/or sex is not a source of shame or income.

The Other Side Of The Coin

Every coin has a front and back. There is always a flip side to every story. Maybe I just need to get over myself and adapt to the culture that I am in.

Skalpana likes and may desperately need what little financial help I can give her. I have access to nutritional information and resources that may possibly keep her alive long enough so that poverty doesn't kill her before she finishes raising her son. If I give her Spirulina, she takes it. If I buy her a green juice, she drinks it. If I am suddenly out of the picture, she has no idea what that Spirulina is and can't afford the green juice.

If the whole story about her baby-daddy is true then she doesn't give a shit about him, he obviously doesn't give a shit about her, and on paper they aren't actually married.

Neither of us have ever left the bedroom unsatisfied.

She says that she isn't having sex with other men. If that's true, classifying her as a prostitute instead of as a desperate single mother is a little severe.

If I see her only once a week instead of every other day as we have been doing, it should be easier to avoid getting serious—or seriously habituated. We poor men

are biologically hard-wired to the point where sometimes our brains don't do the thinking. I am a man.

Besides occasional ice cream, every eleven-year-old child should have the opportunity to learn how to read, write, and be around people their own age. There is no free schooling here. It costs twenty-nine dollars every month. Some months Skalpana has it. Sometimes she says she does not. I will always have it for something like that.

It seems that my dilemma has returned.

Finished

I go by Skalpana's souvenir stand. She asks if she can come to my room for sex and then get some money from me. I can't do this. The situation is what it is—not what I want it to be.

As soon as you figure out that you are on the wrong road, no matter how far down that road you have gone, turn back. I feel bad about having to abandon a woman who, if she's telling the truth, needs help. Some women string along three or four foreign men at a time for the profit. They are tired, but doing well financially. I don't think Skalpana is one of them, but neither is she the person that I thought I was involved with. Sometimes people would rather see the wool that has been pulled over their eyes than what they would see without it. At times, they even pull the wool over their own eyes. It seems that is what I have been doing.

Best Solution

I stayed away from Skalpana for a week to think about this situation.

I see her start to glow as I approach her and have to admit that there are probably layers of involvement here that neither of us completely understand. I tell Skalpana that she is married so we can't have sex anymore, I don't have enough money to be able to give her any more, but I like her and want to help her get healthier.

I bring fresh green vegetables, Spirulina, turmeric, and other healthy things. Now we are friends. She has a chance at better health. I feel better about not having sex with a pay-for-play semi-married woman. Every one is happy enough with the way it worked out. No one has to feel dumped, used, shamed, or guilty.

This still leaves her needing money and me needing a real girlfriend but it's the best solution I could come up with on short notice.

Epilogue

For several days in a row, Skalpana says she will come by to pick up the Aloe Vera plant she requested a week ago. She does not. She does not come by at all any more. It seems that Skalpana is not interested in her health. Perhaps she doesn't have thyroid and diabetes conditions but said so to increase sympathy and income. Maybe she was always just interested in money. If so, I understand. If I was raising an eleven-year-old boy by myself in an already poverty-stricken country, with its

economy being further debilitated by a failing tourist trade, I might just be interested in the money too.

Cigarettes

Masochism's management team.

These noxious fumes and poisonous gasses would be considered war crimes if used in times of combat.

In communal suicide, everyone lights up together. We run away quickly from a burning building but set our own human houses aflame from the inside leaving sludge, soot, and ashes behind. We cough up remnants of what used to be vibrant human energy and tissue that took a long time to build. That tissue and energy used to help us breathe life in deeply. Now it flops out of our bodies in stained gelatinous globs as we suffocate like fish fatally lost on dry land.

Automatic repetition of destructive action lacking any benefit. No thought. No thought or awareness of and certainly no concern for either self or the innocent bystanders that become our fellow victims.

Those bystanders never consented.

We smoke without care, blatantly looking truth in the face and calling it a liar. We are junkies, folks, and stupid ones at that. At least heroin gets you high, and most heroin addicts will admit that they have a problem. We are junkies who continue to bullshit ourselves in the

face of evidence so overwhelming that even the tobacco companies selling this poison readily admit their guilt.

What are you going to do about it?
I've got a better question.
What am I going to do about it?

"Jah made the Ganja, the devil made tobacco."
Bob Marley

POKHARA

The Road From Kathmandu To Pokhara

The road to Pokhara from Kathmandu is only one hundred and twenty-five miles long but takes six hours to travel. After spending over a solid year in the big concrete city, the ride through a mountainous jungle bordered by river is a ride through ecstasy. Brown earth accents the lush green vegetation rising into the sky. Twenty foot wide shelves are carved into several of the mountains giving a stairway-to-heaven appearance. The steps accommodate rice and other crops. The crops feed the locals and also hold the earth in place, which helps to prevent landslides.

The road is all curves! The longest straight-away of the entire trip lasts only twenty yards.

One out of every half-dozen vehicles on this busy two-lane highway is a truck that spits out toxic black fumes so noxious that the vehicles would be impounded, with the drivers heavily fined and likely arrested, in many parts of the world.

Small towns and smaller villages pop up out of the mountains every five or ten miles. As is true throughout small-town Asia, there are some very nice houses but at least as many tin-roofed concrete block shacks with no running water or plumbing.

A river follows the road for most of the distance between Kathmandu and Pokhara. In places it flows

well enough to accommodate rafts and kayaks. Other spots, especially the tributaries, show the exposed stone riverbeds that let everyone know it has been a very dry winter and monsoon season is still a ways off.

Nationwide forest fires are a serious problem. Smoke sits over the mountains and joins truck fumes in making the air unpleasant and downright dangerous to breathe. I cough up a little extra money for a Jeep with AC instead of coughing up a lung.

Within an hour of Pokhara, severe thunderstorms accompanied by violent winds strike suddenly. It mercilessly bounces the few motorcycles off the road whose drivers aren't smart enough to pull over. Luckily, no one appears hurt. Even the deluxe-size Jeep I am riding in gets blown around a bit! Visibility is at no more than a car's length. This doesn't stop a few berserk drivers from passing each other on blind curves. Near-zero visibility, explosive thunder, lightning bolts massive enough to be in a National Geographic photo, and water flowing from the sky in thick sheets instead of drops can not slow down a Nepali driver!

The storm stops a half-hour outside of Pokhara. The air is more breathable and the terrain more visible. Everyone in this nation hopes that the rain has also put out some of the wildfires.

My car pulls up to the hotel where a friendly staff helps unload too much stuff and hauls it all up to my room. The view from the balcony is stunning!

Yumpin' Yimminies! Those are Mountains!?!

The hundred hotels in view can not diminish the natural splendor surrounding them. They are dwarfed by it. On the north side of the hotel is a beautiful lake nestled between emerald hills. I wouldn't swim in it but the view is as sweet as any in the world. Composing the horizon on the south as well as much of the east and west are breathtaking mountain ranges. Snow covered behemoths tower over the sweltering life below in silent majesty. Our grand civilization looks like an ant farm by comparison. These mountains make most of the Rockies look like foothills and Vermont's Green Mountains look like large speed bumps. After staring slack-jawed at the glorious Himalayas for a half hour, I head into town.

The lakeside main drag of Pokhara looks a bit like downtown Waikiki's oceanfront main drag in Honolulu, but is so much sweeter, smaller, cleaner, and prettier that the comparison is short-lived. Travelers from countries around the world use the city as a base station for their trips into the mountains. These people would be more accurately called trekkers rather than tourists.

There is a noticeable difference between the vibe in Pokhara and the vibe in Kathmandu. Pokhara is also a big city but the more natural and less man-made aspect at lakeside seems to keep the population moving at a more natural pace. There is less hectic motion, less of the big city hustle and bustle. Of course the people here

also go places and do things but the action feels like it is taking place in a California beach town. Action in Kathmandu feels more like it is taking place in Brooklyn or Boston.

The city of Kathmandu, especially in the Boudha section, hosts many rich spiritual environments due to the population's deep involvement in spiritual practices. Pokhara inspires good feelings due to its rich natural environment and offers many fun activities as well.

Is it Lakeside Drive Or…?

A preview of rainy season seems to have arrived in Nepal at the same time I arrive in Pokhara. There is an abrupt several days break in the dry season. People are wet and happy. The air is clear and easier to breathe. Forest fires are diminishing.

When monsoon season fully arrives, the rains will visit daily for months on end. Some days will see hours of light showers. On other days there will be near-solid sheets of water falling out of the sky that can block all visibility. These heavier rains are often accompanied by high winds, booming thunder, and lightning that can appear massive enough to shatter the Earth.

There will be a few all-day soakers but most days will be cloudy and end with a massive downpour during late afternoon. That cloudburst may last for a half-hour or until the following morning.

I am out on Seventh Street, looking for breakfast on Lakeside. I have no idea if it is Lakeside Drive or it is Lakeside Avenue or Street or Road. Everyone just calls it "Lakeside," although it runs a few blocks away from the actual lake.

Breakfast happens on the upper deck of the Moondance restaurant near Thirteenth Street. If laughter is coming from a restaurant it is almost always a sign that they serve good eggs. I hear the laughter while walking past, then backtrack to the front door.

As it turns out, that laughter is a sign that Moondance restaurant serves good wine! Four Nepali friends are up here finishing off what I have to guess is not their first bottle. I get a contact high from their party while sitting at the next table. They are laughing as if it is New Year's Eve at midnight! The three women and one man, all in their mid-twenties, are having so much fun that my breakfast tastes better in their company. Conversation with them is limited. I look over, laugh, and say "Hello." One of the women smiles and laughs back, saying "We friends gathering!" The gathered friends go on drinking, laughing, and talking to each other in Nepali.

After breakfast, me and the umbrella I'll be carrying for the next several months head further down Lakeside in a consistent light rain. The street continues for a full mile. It is predictably lined with high and low end craft

shops, art galleries, souvenir shops, cafés, bars, T-shirt emporiums, tour vendors, restaurants, and small food markets. The street resembles most lake and seacoast waterfront areas that cater to tourist traffic—but there has been almost no tourist traffic for well over a year. Lockdown is now temporarily ended but the "gathering restrictions" are still in place, and new tourists are still not allowed into the country.

Occasional side streets branch off Lakeside. They run the two blocks north to the walking path promenade that is actually on the lake's shore. The south side streets branching off of the main drag run into the main part of Pokhara city. Perhaps one out of every five businesses on Lakeside is closed. A staggering fifty percent of the small businesses are closed on northern side streets. We can add to the long, sad list of somehow-Corona-affiliated-or-manipulated disasters the fact that the situation is damaging almost every mom-and-pop family business on Lakeside, and endangering many. Only the banks and pharmacies are doing well. I have to guess there are similar problems all over the world.

Many of the closed businesses will reopen. Many of the open businesses are in danger of permanent closure.

Corporate chain operations, the big major high-end concerns, and other businesses that can do so without starving close shop and wait out the storm at home. But there are many locals working at their shops every day, doing whatever they can to keep their businesses and

families alive. Many small shop owners keep their doors open to nearly empty streets, hoping a stray traveler will buy enough merchandise to fund the family's daily rice and beans. From the little that I hear and understand, it seems that some Nepalis have already been forced to sell or just abandon their businesses. Those businesses are bought up by the few rich Nepalis or one of the many well-heeled Chinese, Indian, and other trans-or-multi-national interests. If I am correctly understanding all the fractured gossip, and if it is true, gentrification appears to be in full swing here. This process is way too familiar to an inner city American.

Nepalis are very strong, resilient, mellow people but I can see the stress on the faces of merchants. Many are just starting to realize that regardless of the course any virus may take, the restructuring of social and economic systems will continue to steer what used to be "normal life" into reclassification as "the good old days."

Would you like to see some colorful Pokhara boats? Click here.

THE LAKESIDE WALKING PATH PROMENADE

The Lakeside Walking Path Promenade begins at Thirteenth Street. It runs for over a mile into the North Shore section. It is a scenically breathtaking walk that includes beautiful green hills reflected in the lake, giant snow-capped mountains in the distance, and a variety of

birds including egrets, crows, hawks, sparrows, and even some eagles. Under ordinary circumstances many taverns and restaurants feature good live music at night. There are rowboats, pedal boats, a small amusement park, and a fish hatchery with research center attached.

There are often a few goats and cows on the stone path. They enjoy the tasty jungle vegetation that grows on either side. Neighborhood dogs sometimes hang out with the cows and goats. They don't eat the vegetation. They just like the goat and cow company.

Some folks say that both the path and road areas by the lakeside are too touristy. Maybe. This is a matter of perspective. If you want natural wilderness, the Pokhara lakeside area certainly is touristy. But if you are comparing it with Cape Cod, Coney Island, or the "Rivieras" of Europe and Latin America then Pokhara's lakeside is more of a pleasant small town than a rudely commercialized tourist attraction.

Locals optimistically look forward to better times while gratefully enjoying what this time offers. They think better times will arrive soon. Pessimists may be accurate more often but optimists live longer. With any luck, a stubborn but cautiously realistic optimism may keep folks alive long enough to see those better times. Meanwhile, Nepalis seem to feel that the only rational choice is to deal with what must be dealt with, party on, live, love, laugh, and help what neighbors can be helped with the resources still available.

Want to see a nice Pokhara photo?

Araati

Three blocks of Thirteenth Street run from Lakeside Drive down to the actual lake. On the left is a wall stretching the entire distance that looks like it protects an ancient castle. Symmetrically set stones, each about the size of two bricks, rise twelve feet above the street. Behind the wall is a bit of jungle. Among the trees in that bit of jungle are hundreds of snow-white egrets. Most have rust colored necks. Behind them are barracks of what has to be the most attractive army base I have ever seen in my life! Even military housing has style in Nepal.

Thirteenth Street ends at the lakeside in a hundred-foot square concrete slab. This slab acts as an outdoor temple for the Araati ceremony that begins each evening right before sundown. Three platforms are at the front of the slab. This is where three Hindu priests do their thing. A fifteen-foot space sits between the platforms and public seating in order to protect the faithful, and the curious tourists, from errant bits of fire that may fly off of the priests' equipment now and then.

The most uncomfortable heavy iron chairs that any butt has ever sat on fill the rest of the slab. Without a bed pillow from home to sit on, my spine would likely stay contorted into that chair long after the ceremony is

over. Night after night, the Araati experience seems well worth a bit of physical discomfort.

This may be one of those things that can't really be described in words. I'll give it a shot anyway.

This "Araati" ceremony is complimented by two strikingly beautiful backgrounds. The first contains a brilliant bloodshot orange sunset and vibrant green hills. A second background, exactly as beautiful, shimmers as a reflection in the lake. In front of this awe-inspiring scene are three Hindu priests dressed in ceremonial red and gold. Their fire thrills the tourists and inspires the faithful.

Araati is about a bringing of light and purification into both the individuals attending the ceremony and the world at large.

The word Araati itself means "remover of darkness" in some translations. In others, it means "complete love." In yet other translations it means "a gift of god," and other folks have said that Araati means "to develop the highest love of god." There are several more translations of Araati's definition and nearly as many ways to spell the word as there are definitions!

I use the local one.

Araati here is offered and dedicated to all naturally occurring, life-supporting forces, especially and most specifically to the deity Shiva and to bodies of water.

Bodies of water are themselves considered deified by virtue of their life-giving ability.

The priests face the lake for an initial phase of praise before turning around to face and then transmit blessings to the public.

All of Earth's elements are represented and praised by the priests and their symbolic tools. One after the other, the three priests twirl their symbolic tools in time with the prayer music, and in homage to many aspects of nature and spirit that allow life to survive and thrive on Earth. The elements and their symbolic representations are: 1) space (white cloth), 2) air (a big wispy white feather), 3) light (flames), 4) water (the lake is right there), and 5) earth (flowers). These are each in turn twirled, danced with, and thanked for their service to all living creatures.

Fire itself is considered a quality of the divine. The faithful benefit from it by absorbing energy (Akash) raised by the fire and the divine presence it invites. The faithful are said to absorb the Akash according to their level of devotion. The more open to and serious about this process a person is, the more she or he will benefit.

This Akash energy's light and purification are well represented by the flames of over fifty small oil lamps contained within one large metal oil lamp carriage held by each priest. The oil lamp carriages are shining brass and well over two feet long. Each contains seven levels of circular shelving with larger, wider shelves at bottom.

Each shelf above is a little smaller than the one below it. The shelves are anchored on a central post. The small individual flaming oil lamps are placed symmetrically upon these shelves. They make their section of carriage resemble a flaming upside down ice cream cone.

These carriages look way too heavy to lift! They are brought to the priests already lit by assistants. Somehow the priests not only raise them but make their flames dance! Whether recorded or performed live, songs of praise always accompany the ceremony. Ours here are recorded and broadcast through a very loud speaker system. Awesome natural scenery and the three priests in gold and red twirling fifty fire lamps each in perfect time with the music give an otherworldly appearance.

Near the end of the ceremony, the prayer music turns into a more lively tune. Folks get up to dance with the music in celebration of life and the forces that allow it to exist.

The ceremony itself ends with praises to the lineage of ancient Hindu teachers—but the proceedings are not over yet! Everyone files up front to wave the remaining Akash smoke toward themselves. The more altruistic among the crowd wave it toward the sky and out into the world. Then the faithful approach the priests. They receive a tika on the forehead and a blessing.

Most folks leave the area with a spring in their step, a smile on their face, and an obvious joy in their hearts. One of the faithful tells me "It is God Medicine!"

Photos

Lockdown Resilience—Eastern Hemisphere Style

"Why can't we just use all the money to fix shit?!"
Jon Stewart

Total lockdown has returned to India, Nepal, and much of the world. I wonder if lockdown in Pokhara will be much different than lockdown in Kathmandu.

We are obviously living in a troubled world, but trouble can bring resilience, resilience can sponsor strong resourcefulness, resourcefulness facilitates our survival, surviving hard times inspires confidence, that confidence can be the birthplace of our success, success can give rise to gratitude, gratitude can feed emotional abundance, and emotional abundance fosters happiness. I'm no Pollyanna. We have a row to hoe that's even longer than that previous sentence, but humanity has survived and at times artistically responded to disasters such as murderous tyrants, fires, slavery, famines, floods, petroleum products in our food, televangelists, wine in a can, life-sized inflatable sex dolls, and Andrew Dice Clay. We will also survive this nasty virus and the small, nasty cartel of mentally ill people that are using it to increase their personal power and material gain.

There are many things happening in Asia right now that resemble the America of sixty years ago. Many people here are more innocent and naïve than average Americans have been for decades. They are a little more trusting of their government, news media, and popular institutions. They are more likely to believe and hope than they are to think critically or doubt. This is a very sweet way to live. There are good reasons why the phrase "ignorance is bliss" became such a very popular expression during the past century. But folks throughout the world, not just in Asia, are rapidly discovering that some types of bliss can be dangerous as well as delusional.

Blissfully accepting that there is a "buddy" God on your side that will slay your enemies for you can make life very comfortable for a while. So can a blind belief that politicians work for the benefit of all the people, all police protect and serve the public, all doctors have the improvement of your health as their main motivation, parents always know what is best for their children, news media reports the unbiased truth, schools teach you what you really need to know, legitimate businesses are all actually legitimate, banks protect your money, the government always protects and facilitates the public's best interests, churches protect and mediate relations with Creation, and advertising always gives an honest representation of the product for sale. As comfortable as these illusions can make us feel, they aren't sustainable.

Like any house built on a foundation of bullshit, collapse is imminent. All that formerly comfortable Nepali naiveté is now on a horrific blind date with reality.

A collapse seems to be in progress throughout the world right now. Our institutions, economies, and our personal belief systems alike are all facing the guillotine. Many of us are rightfully troubled. We are necessarily readjusting to all the new circumstances by attempting to release life-long conditioned ways of thinking, living, and believing. It isn't easy. We often simultaneously, habitually, and at times defensively grasp on to the very same things we are trying to release. We are stepping on the gas and brake at the same time. Our human engines are quite understandably smoking as they melt.

It is a strange world we live in. It gets stranger every day. Thank goodness people are still people! Some folks are reacting to their fears more than they usually do but most of us are still as loving and trustworthy as we ever were. In contrast to humans, most global information systems have become a cruel and manipulative joke. Bullshit has become a prevalent norm, truth is rare, and everyone has suddenly become an expert on subjects they know nothing about. Small fractions of truth warp badly under the strain of their division from the whole picture. Exaggerated fears that cross the line between constructive caution and flagrant intimidation, along with a lot of unrealistic wishful thinking, have been blended into unfounded subjective

beliefs that masquerade as facts while folks panic themselves into irrationality.

Latest reports say India is now getting hit as hard by the virus this year as the Western world was last year. It is often true that as goes India, so goes Nepal.

All the deaths and many other sad results are due at least in part to the actual plague and in just as great a part to the mind-bending results of the way the Corona situation at large has been steered. There is a one-plus-one-makes-three looping effect that intensifies danger.

Media dramatizations foster great fear while the government mismanagement and manipulation foster a loss of the control and direction we used to have over our own lives. These factors produces stress in all our individual human systems as well as in social systems at large. That stress lowers the ability of immune systems to fight off illness. Weakened immune systems increase the spread and potency of disease, further increasing the initial problems and their accompanying stress. These elements continue to feed each other in an endless loop.

That being said, a couple of very simple and basic understandings have kept life fun and productive for many Nepalis in spite of dire global circumstances. These same simple understandings keep life fun and productive for me in spite of the dire global as well as personal circumstances.

The first is that human beings have, from first breath to last, the obligation to work for positive change within our own minds as well as within our culture. If the inside of a mind isn't well, everything outside of that mind suffers. Don't believe me? Go ask any member of any family whether life is more fun for them when dad is being a jackass than it is when dad is considering family happiness as well as his own. Ask a neighbor if the neighborhood will benefit or suffer when a resident throws trash, be it physical or emotional, into the streets.

Another thing that keeps me from occasionally wanting to bite on a blasting cap or just walk around all day with my head buried deeply in my own little bullshit is remembering that in the long run, there may be more silver lining to this cloud than we can see right now. Precursors of better days are obvious in the few visible lighter, more hopeful, encouraging, and even amusing sides to the horrid world situation. I see them every day during this current lockdown.

Our resiliency, the human ability to adapt and to survive in any situation, is astonishing! Our manners can, at times, be quite sweet as well. Even the most stubborn folks in this town that harbor total disbelief in any damaging abilities of the virus wear their masks to market out of respect for fearful neighbors, as well as a respect for the legal ordinance.

Food stores and other essential services are only legally open from 5 to 9 a.m. but a Speakeasy, Roaring Twenties style, culture has been spawned by creative shop owners and patrons. This being a tourist town and not a monastery enclave, the Speakeasy system is a lot more widespread and sophisticated here in Pokhara than it was in Boudha last year.

It is now noon. I knock on a sheet metal gate and wait behind a nearby brick wall as a shop owner behind that gate prepares my carrot juice. With a mindset of invisibility that I used during trips through Spanish Harlem to buy heroin from Mr. Lopez in the 1960s, I slide back around the wall long enough to pay for the juice through a small opening in the sheet metal, then slide back behind the wall to drink it. While all this goes on, I notice a few other people in the street on the way to their Speakeasies.

We respect the understaffed police force and the job they are trying to do. Everyone tries to stay out of their range and not force any situations that the police would have to respond to. Situations that police have to respond to are uncomfortable for everyone. It seems that these police respect and understand public needs, especially those of the foreigners trapped in hotel rooms without kitchens.

After juice, I head from my south side 'hood to the north side of the lake. My friend Sjoerd lives near there. Mister Sjoerd is a sixty-seven-year-old gentleman

from Holland. He is a walking smile. I guess I would be too if I had a nineteen-year-old lover. But Sjoerd isn't being his blessed self because he is having so much fun. He is having so much fun because he is being his blessed self. That self pumps out so much positive energy and good intention that no matter where Sjoerd goes, the people there hope for his speedy return. Zak and I have both referred to Sjoerd as "Almost Jesus."

He is also a good artist.

Here are some of Sjoerd's drawings.

I want to say hi, make sure Sjoerd is well, and buy bread from the Speakeasy cafe/bakery there. Police are blocking the main street. They do not want citizens to wander any further than is necessary to get essentials, so they have set up a blockade to cut the area in half at its center point. I slide around the blockade through a back street and then a side alley with the stealth of a smuggler on a pirate ship in a Jimmy Buffett song. I meet up with Sjoerd in the alley. We enter a cafe's back door and have breakfast behind its closed sheet metal front door. After breakfast, I buy a loaf of bread and leave through the cafe's back door. That exit feeds back into the alley and allows me to retrace my steps home.

Dinner comes from a restaurant close to my hotel that has a similar arrangement. Whenever I knock on the window, the manager slides it open. He takes my

order and the window closes. I move away to a nearby stairway while the cooking happens. I am sheltered from any street view by a giant tree. When dinner is cooked and bagged, I slide some money through the re-opened window, grab the bag, and hide it in my little backpack. Myself and the waiter both smile, nod, and say thank you. I head home to enjoy dinner. No one has been put at risk. I get to eat dinner. The employees that work at the restaurant and their families get to eat too.

No one knows just what the tricky future holds for humanity. History runs all the way from cold murder to divine benevolence. Our most extreme participants have ranged all the way from Stalin, Cheney, and Pol Pot to Mother Teresa, Gandhi, and Jesus. But I have to think that if confused residents and business folk that are technically under house arrest in a small tourist city without tourist traffic, in one of the world's poorest countries that has limited resources even under the best of circumstances, under what are very possibly the most totally debilitating conditions that this planet as a unit has ever seen, can figure out ways to keep most of the population fed and at least part of it employed while not doing any harm, then there is hope that we can fix what is broken.

FAMILY

Family means something different in Asia than it does in America. The difference is most often beneficial but it can be restrictive and detrimental at times. When I grew up in Brooklyn, most families including my own resembled a badly managed zoo where the lions, rhinos, jackals, mongoose, and occasional cobra were all thrown together willy-nilly in one cage. Independent thought and a rebellious spirit were at war with tradition and conformity throughout much of America during the 1960s. This struggle was perhaps most evident within families. Many thirty-to-fifty-year-old parents would regularly beat and scream at their ten-to-twenty-year-old kids, whose goal in life was to get as far away from their wacky parents as they could and do it as quickly as possible.

Many teenagers considered at least one or two of their family members to be negative examples. Parents showed us how not to be. Many adults of that time had a very prejudicial and narrow-minded attitude toward black people, gay folks, and most other subdivisions of the human race that they were not personally members of. Besides racial bigotry, a destructive disrespect for nature, and a second-class-citizen attitude toward women that was woven into almost every aspect of life, there was also an ill-tempered discontent displayed to

many urban and suburban children of that era by their parents. A compulsive striving for material possessions and status often rode roughshod over patience and compassion at the expense of love and sanity. This cost many families to suffer ill moods, ill health, obsessive behavior, and a more than unpleasant schism between family members. It made some parents appear to their children as embarrassing housemates that were related only by biological accident and a temporary financial necessity. This lack of admired in-house role models to emulate drove a lot of young folks into new lifestyles.

What has been publicized as "America's greatest generation" was no kinder to its parents than it was to its children. They may have won World War Two but this was also a generation that invented putting their grandmas in an old age home almost as soon as grandpa died. Farming out the old folks was unheard of during previous generations. There are still very few old folks homes in Asia. Grandparents live with their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren until they die.

Many married Nepali couples move into a house of their own but many others continue to live with their families in the same house where they grew up. Others build a house very close by. This does wonderful things for the stability of everyone in the family. Old folks are more comfortable with the idea of being old when they are constantly loved, cared for, and respected by the

family. Children feel more secure among a whole tribe of loving relatives. The neighboring and cohabiting aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins can act as second mothers and fathers, giving the child a broader range of practice relating with adults while mom and dad enjoy a little more alone time and some help with the strenuous job of parenting.

On the down side of all this togetherness is the problem of obedience often bypassing personal freedom and creativity. There are many instances where future professions, spouses, and living arrangements of offspring are heavily influenced or altogether decided by the parents. Within such a culture of obedience, it is very rare that a young adult will tell his or her parents, "I will work and live where I want to and marry who I fall in love with! This is my life, not yours!"

As is true of so many aspects of life in Asia, an impending American-style 1950s/60s shift is in the air regarding family structure. That severe of a separation between generations hasn't shown itself yet, but there are signs. Youngsters live on the internet as much as they live in their homes. They are becoming entrained to some ideas that are very different from ideas that have been dominant within Asian families for millennia. Some of these notions are an improvement. Many are not. It is wonderful to have access to an unending stream of good information about nutrition, hygiene, and so many other

aspects of a constructive education, but graphic violence and some very unloving varieties of sexual conduct as well as a lot of flat-out bullshit and harmful information on almost every subject are just as easy for a youngster to find. Children tend to make exploratory choices. The past few decades of internet access have offered more things outside of home and family to explore than were available in the previous two hundred thousand years of human history combined. Information acquired from some of these explorations will soon be acted upon. Some of these actions will put many young adults at odds with the status quo in Asia, as they did with many young adults in America over a half-century ago.

There is no valid generalization to be made about whether a tighter or looser family structure is the better method. Neither is always better or all ways worse. Like most other things on human Earth, the success or failure of a family depends upon the individuals that make up that family and the cultural variables that influence it.

All our family members, like all other humans, make us happy—sometimes because we are able to stay with them and sometimes because we are able to get away from them.

Crows Like Brown Bread

I look at the lake from my balcony while having breakfast at noon when Hekyll and Jekyll land on the railing. I don't actually know what their names are in crow language. Technically, the Hekyll and Jekyll that my new ebony-winged friends are being named for weren't even real beings, much less crows. They were TV and movie cartoon magpies that made their very first appearance in 1946 and their last in 1981. The resemblance between the two sets of birds is so strong that those cartoon names seem to fit my recently arrived friends.

The crows look over at me with a desire and hope in their eyes, then let out a series of loud caws that are easily translatable to English as, “Can a brother get some of that nice brown bread you have there?”

I break off a piece for my boys (or perhaps girls?) and put it on the railing about a yard away from the birds. Jekyll is afraid and flies off quickly but then circles back around to sit behind his partner. Hekyll is the obvious Alpha. He takes a hop backward on the rail without ever turning head or body around to stick the landing. He sticks it anyway. If it was an olympic event, the judges would give him a score of 9.9. Within two seconds he becomes a speeding blur that lunges forward and snaps up the bread. He gives me a cautious look.

Seeing that I have no problem with him or his bread hunt, Hekyll sits right where he is and eats his breakfast while I eat mine—and while Jekyll looks jealously on.

I try to get Jekyll even but Hekyll is just too quick! I put another piece of bread on the far side of the railing behind the two birds and close behind Jekyll. With the speed of lightning Hekyll flies around Jekyll and snatches up the bread. He eats with a complete lack of concern or respect for his sky mate. I wonder if all crows are selfish or if some share.

After a few more pieces of bread that give Hekyll a full belly and Jekyll a contact high, the guys are pretty comfortable with me. I duck into the room for a minute. When I get back to the balcony, they have cleaned up the scraps that were left on my plate and flown off. But I can see them. They are hanging out with three adult cows that are blocking most of both lanes on Lakeside Road right in front of the balcony. Lockdown traffic is close to nonexistent and the people here love cows at least as much as they love people, so the cows are in no danger. And of course, neither are Hekyll and Jekyll.

From this second-floor balcony it looks like Jekyll is telling the patiently listening cows the brown bread story while Hekyll picks his teeth.

"If you need a sign to remind you to laugh,
are you alright?" Sara Schaefer

Ylli and Dawa

Ylenia ("Ylli") and Amol ("Dawa") are two of my best friends here in Pokhara. They've been bopping between Pokhara and Kathmandu together for years.

Ylli is a thirty-seven-year-old Sicilian bouncing bundle of instantly accessible, undiluted, happiness that shines on the world from a tiny hundred-pound frame. She has the energy and exuberance of a seven-year-old child, and inspires as much joy in everyone around her as seven-year-olds inspire in their grandparents. Her love of and concern for the happiness of all of her fellow humans touches everyone around her. It turned around my seventieth birthday from a boring just-another-day into a day I will remember for as long as I live.

Dawa is a thirty-year-old gentleman from a small village in Nepal who works as a tour guide for foreign trekkers hiking the Himalayas. Dawa is as mellow as a monk. He has the physical appearance of Bob Marley if Bob had stolen Tarzan's body. Mr. Dawa is very kind. It is easy to see why Ylli loves him and why they are such a good couple.

I am at Ylli and Dawa's house for dinner. They live in the little suburb of Sedi. Sedi is an extension of the North Lake region of Pokhara. Sedi's main road is sparsely occupied with restaurants, shops, and hotels. The lake is on one side of that main road. Big hills that contain the side streets and residential area of the town

occupy the other side of the road. Ylli and Dawa's room is a half-mile up one of those hills. The property has a nice garden and avocado trees.

There are few pet dogs left on their road. Many of them have been eaten by the tigers and leopards that come out in the dark of night. I shit you not! Uphill Sedi is an unmolested jungle that reaches close enough to the barely developed residential section for big cats to be wandering on to the dirt roads looking for food. The big cats seem to feel like they were here first. They are hunting at home in their ancestral jungle.

Many dog owners put spiked collars on their pets. Cats notoriously grab prey by the neck. If the cats bite into metal spikes, it may surprise them long enough to give an adrenalized dog the chance to get away.

Ylli and Dawa's place is in a concrete building containing just four apartments. The other units are all occupied by the owners and their family. Everyone uses the same kitchen. Ylli and Dawa are considered part of the family and when a friend visits them, that friend is also treated like family by the owners and their children.

Ylli and Dawa are both amazing cooks. They make some Sicilian/Nepali combination dishes that are legendary. Tonight we have pasta carbonara with *nuero*. Neuro is an indigenous fern that grows by the lake and tastes a lot like the fiddlehead fern. Fiddleheads are a popular and expensive delicacy in the northeastern US.

It is now three weeks before my birthday. Dawa will leave tomorrow for Kathmandu on business. He promises to be back to Pokhara in time for my birthday. Photos here.

So Many Birthday Surprises!

SHIVA

I like to make a fuss about other peoples' birthdays. Watching the joy folks show when they see how much you appreciate that they are alive makes fussing worth the trouble. I do not care as much about my own birth anniversary. Time seems like a beginning-less and endless process that keeps on rolling eternally. The public marking of the very personal experience of a singular passing year has always seemed kind of silly to me. The crew insists that I care about it more than I ordinarily would. This year's birthday is my seventieth. For some reason they think seventy is more significant than sixty-nine or seventy-one.

Dawa does get back on the day before my birthday. He has a big surprise with him. Brother Zak has spent seven hours on the back of Dawa's 350CC motorcycle traveling on a partly rainy, fully windy, narrow, heavily trafficked, polluted, curvy, bumpy road all the way from Kathmandu to Pokhara to be here for the occasion.

Having such wonderful friends present is enough of a gift for me but the gifting has just begun. With Ylli as the main coordinator, the crew has organized a series of events for the day.

The first trip is to the top of the mountain where the largest Shiva statue in Nepal abides. The road leading up to it is an obstacle course. After half an hour of bouncing over jagged boulders that surprisingly shatter neither my spine nor the taxi's axles, we hit the top. The blue Hindu deity with his famous trident is massive and inspiring. An ornate temple adjoins Shiva's statue. The locals and tourists alike come to pay their respect and homage, or just enjoy the statue and the scenery below. A panoramic view of the area spreads out for miles. The Shiva statue and the scenery surrounding it are awesome enough to make the torturous trip up the rocky road worth the trouble.

I've been in Nepal for a year and a half, patiently looking for rainbows through two full rainy seasons. I have never seen one—until today. A massive, vibrantly colored, fully visible double rainbow covers the valley below the giant Shiva statue! We only get to view this spectacle for ten minutes before a hard driving monsoon rain arrives. We narrowly escape it by ducking into the lone restaurant near the Shiva statue. The downpour is strong enough so that all of us wonder if the road that was barely passable on the way up in drier conditions is now washed out altogether, and if we will be stuck at

the top of this mountain for the rest of our lives. Everyone jokes about it and decides that Shiva's mountaintop would be a nice place to live. We are fine with the idea!

The taxi surprisingly maneuvers us to the bottom with very little trouble. Photos Here !

PEDAL BOAT

For several months I have been bending Ylli and Dawa's ears about someday taking a pedal boat trip on the lake. They decide that today is the day! It has been raining on and off all day long, but not as we approach the boat dock.

The boat runs on leg power. I don't have any and suggest we hire one of the many available and waiting pedaling professionals to come along with the boat. The crew insists on doing the pedaling themselves. Everyone takes turns except me. They kindly give the old man the day off of pedaling as another gift. As we pedal out far enough on the lake to smoke a tasty phat birthday joint, the rain kicks back in. At seventy degrees Fahrenheit, rain isn't much of a problem. It actually adds an element of celebration. Zak in particular is inspired by the rain (and the smoke). He begins singing loudly as he pedals away like a madman! We crack up with laughter at the show he puts on.

Suddenly, we are being yelled at by some native boatmen twenty yards away. Luckily, Dawa is there to translate. We have almost run into their fishing nets! In our defense, the nets were very poorly marked.

The potential problem is avoided quickly by Zak with a turn of our rudder. Everyone in both boats smiles and waves.

Here is a funny fast-motion video Dawa made of the occasion. I hope you enjoy watching it as much as we enjoyed making it.

BIRTHDAY DINNER

The Vegan Way Cafe is my favorite restaurant in town. To be more accurate, we have to call it the Not Entirely Vegan Way Cafe. This place has the best food in town but it is not altogether vegan. They don't serve meat but do serve food cooked with milk, eggs, cheese, and other non-vegan ingredients. This happens a lot around here. There are also several restaurants that call themselves "organic" that are not. Some owners actually think their establishment meets the qualifications for these terms due to common misunderstandings or mis-translations of English language. Others are just playing ignorant and knowledgeably trying to draw customers in with false advertising. The Vegan Way Cafe not only has the best food and prices but also boasts owners and staff that are among the nicest in the world, so I'm guessing their name just suffers a mistranslation.

The crew brings me there for a birthday dinner. We have a fancy cranberry bread-cake from Gigi's bakery. Gigi is a great baker from Arizona who has her shop just a few doors downstream from The Vegan. Two big candles sit on top of the cake. They are in the shape of a

7 and a 0. Several *khatas* (the ceremonial scarves that symbolize love and respect) are placed around my neck, as is the tradition. Everyone sings the birthday song. Of course, after the cake, it is time for a hash-smoking walk on the lakefront. When we return, several of the Vegan Way's other clientele join the party. The staff puts music on the sound system. The laughter goes on for hours.

It took seventy years for me to get excited about my own birthday but it finally happened due to the friendships that made the day so special.

At 70 Years
WHAT I HAVE LEARNED SO FAR

As you already know, doctors told me I would die within six months but I decided that traveling around the world would be more fun than dancing with The Reaper. That was four years ago.

Tough times are constant companions to a seventy-year-old with arthritis, degenerative spinal disease, two hernias, two hammer toes, and a terminal liver cancer diagnosis—but so are blessings and miracles. This trip has brought me half-way around the world from where I started. Complications caused by the global Corona panic have already extended the original schedule by more than a year. It has been fun and an adventurous experience full of wonderful insights into a few different cultures, but it hasn't taught me much about humanity

that I didn't already know. It has confirmed a lot that I already suspected.

People everywhere and anywhere are a lot more similar than different. Most try to be decent and happy but all have different definitions of what "decent" and "happy" mean. There are a small number of seriously self-centered jackasses, but even they are also just trying to hunt happiness in their own warped fashion.

Nice people can be awfully cruel at times. Cruel people are occasionally nice.

No one gets out alive but most folks act as if death only happens to other people. There is very little real consciousness of mortality going on.

Actually, there's precious little consciousness going on at all. Folks seem to live much of life habitually, without any deep awareness of their thoughts or actions. Few realize how many choices they have. Many folks seem to be busier strangling opportunities with a lot of irrelevant and often inaccurate historical information instead of taking any advantage of those opportunities. They don't realize that a lot of what is called tradition turns out to be little more than peer pressure from dead people that lacks any valuable, and often even any real, substance. They seem swept away by life, like a body trapped in the current of a wide river. They don't realize that there are banks on both sides of any river that we

can swim to, climb ashore on, and perhaps find golden new possibilities waiting for us.

Many people are hypnotized and fooled by the commercial, religious, and political nuances that their culture feeds them into believing that remedies to their problems lie somewhere outside of themselves. These misleading nuances are more similar than different no matter what culture they travel through, no matter what language they are presented in. They are all aimed at convincing the public that it has a real need for what those nuances are trying to sell. The products and ideas being hawked are always something external to the human ingenuity and intelligence that is more likely to be harboring a better solution to any given problem than those nuances hold.

Many folks get trapped for an entire lifetime in well-promoted but largely fruitless external pursuits of well-being. Few realize that all of their solutions are within. Many are aware that something is wrong and that there is something out of place with life but they just can't figure out what that something is.

The historical Buddha is often misquoted as having said that “Life is suffering.” But the word “dukkha” that he used is more accurately translated as “dislocated” or “out of joint,” like a dislocated shoulder or collarbone. Many folks give lip-service to the well known fact that love is the answer. They mouth it often. They feel it

more on Sundays and at Christmas. But most folks have trouble putting that feeling into a consistent application during the rest of their week and the rest of their living. They may know what the best stuff is but are disjointed, dislocated from it.

Pain will happen in life but suffering can often be optional or at least adjustable. Reconnecting with that Bigger Thing will obviously eliminate the dislocation from it. That re-established connection with something bigger can supersede and modify previous connections to suffering. It doesn't matter whether one tags the "Bigger Thing" as Jesus, Allah, Buddha, Holy Alfalfa Sprout, The Great Pumpkin, The Field, The Force, Universal Consciousness, or Self. Correctly driving any good car you put fuel in will get you to the destination. The quality of attention paid by the student is often more important than who the teacher is. Good teachers, mentors, exemplars, and deities can be wonderful and in many cases essential catalysts, but if a person is not staying awake and focused on what they are trying to learn, he or she could be in a room with Jesus, Vishnu, and Buddha but still walk out of that room an idiot. Those guys/gods won't/can't do it for you. They can give you tools to work with and meaningful instructions on getting it done.

More people every day are realizing that we are at a crucial point in history. Earth is in crisis mode. The fine-line details that are necessary to reach whatever "enlightenment" is are just not as important as what has to be done immediately to save our asses. Folks can figure out later that those tag systems, all those gods and goddesses we think will do our work for us, are almost all symbolic and minimally literal. We do not need to immediately realize that the supernatural is a state of being available to almost any human who takes the time and makes the effort to build his or her natural into something a little more super.

Right now, even paying serious attention to truly positive "beliefs" can do nicely as a vehicle on the road to saving the environment immediately, improving life as soon as possible, and gaining objectively sound wisdom for the future.

That wisdom in the future will include coming to terms with the fact that the word "belief" implies a lack of real knowledge. It will include the courage to simply say, "I don't know." Admitting that we don't know a lot of the things that we currently make believe we do know can eliminate our attachment to some unfounded, unrealistic stories that have become the backbone of many disappointments. Believing in fairytales can foster a false sense of an actually nonexistent security. It can disfigure objective reality and allow awareness of our

serious problems and their solutions to slip through the cracks.

Many of these stories were control devices that were designed to tame and civilize, or intimidate and rule, unruly populations. Others may have been meant more symbolically as brilliant metaphorical lessons. But history shows that over a period of centuries, a lot of material meant to be metaphorical was concretized, bent to individual purposes, or inaccurately translated. Take a look at what happens in just a few short minutes to a message running through a chain of ten kids playing telephone! Give our similar adult processes a few dozen centuries or even months and the remaining fragments we receive may no longer have any resemblance to the actual meaning of the original message.

It gets even worse in some cases. For example, one has to wonder how much of the original centuries-old message King James got into his Bible translation. In addition to the time gap taking its toll on accuracy, the notions of a slave-owning narcissistic monarch of the world's biggest empire who had strong sexual identity confusion accompanied by a bad attitude toward women as well as a royally egotistical sense of entitlement and superiority might not have been the best filter to run our sacred truths of equanimity and compassion through.

The good part is that everybody wants to get love and life right, even if they are not consciously

aware of how to do it. That desire may sometimes see very little practical application in the modern world but increasing numbers of people are realizing that they want to be an improved, happier, nicer version of themselves. Folks are searching. There is hope.

I see more people waking up to essential altruism and equanimity every day! Unfortunately, it is also true that every day another poor jackass is hypnotized from birth to think his little life is so important that your life doesn't matter at all. These are usually the people that manufacture and fuel separations that keep humanity from becoming itself. Sexual, national, religious, and ethnic differences are so very often given mob value judgements and inappropriate importance in our everyday physical world!

There is nothing in mundane existence wrong with the pleasures that these differences afford. There is not much wrong with the limited feeling of inclusion that these little clubs we belong to can give us—as long as it isn't fostered at the expense and degradation of any of the other little clubs. But these preferences, likes and dislikes, accidents of birth, and so on have no such place of great importance in the world of consciousness, and it is insane to allow these meaningless variances to overpower the inclusiveness that pure consciousness entails.

I have seen a lot of human inconsistency while traveling around the world. There does not seem to be

any sense in being an optimist or a pessimist. I am more of a realist. It appears that we can go either way. Everything may work out just fine or humanity may become extinct in short order. Most folks are nice. Most people mean well even if they don't get it altogether done every day. Our happiness and even our continued existence depends upon whether those nice folks can find enough inspiration, power, and intelligence to make the nastier people on the planet see reason. That's going to take some doing because in order to help anyone else do that job efficiently, nice folks will first have to do a version of it on themselves. Mechanics of The Bigger Thing dictate that things work the way Gandhi did.

A mother came to the Mahatma and asked him to get her sugar-addicted child off of sugar. Gandhi told her to come back in two weeks with the boy. She did. The Mahatma talked to the boy and the child stopped eating sugar from that day on. The mother asked the Mahatma, "Why did you have me wait two weeks?" Gandhi answered, "Two weeks ago, I was on sugar!"

Nice folks also have to be careful to not become just like the nasty people. It happens sometimes. People have killed off tyrants and then become tyrants themselves. Revolution, by dictionary definition, means you eventually end up back where you started. Evolution, on the other hand, will put you somewhere else. "Somewhere else" would, in almost every nonphysical

sense of the phrase, be a good place for humanity to move to—especially that nastier fraction of humanity.

Perhaps the most important thing I have learned in the past seventy years is that *We* are more important than *Me*.

Whether you are basically nice or nasty, like your sex with men or women, are born black/white/brown/whatever, and no matter where on Earth you are living, we now have no functional choice but to figure out and embody inclusion, generosity, and cooperation over competition and selfishness. Humanity's lone hope for survival hinges on whether or not we replace the greedy self-centered aspect in each of us with a kinder, much more altruistically centered-in-self orientation. Now that we face likely extinction on so many fronts including environmental, warrior/political/nuclear, and potentially fatal overpopulation of Earth as well as the draining of its resources, it is essential for each individual human to stop being a victim of our collective inconsistencies.

If finding our untapped courage and kindness ever allows us to live up to potential, the utopias of legend are possible.

The criminally selfish and willfully ignorant men that we hire by election to dictate our actions and take blame for our disasters cannot save us.

We can.

I wonder if we will.

Monsooner or Later This Rain Has To Stop!

It is monsoon season in Nepal and we will be wet for months in a row, but the monsoon clouds come with silver linings. There is a lot to love about monsoon time! Pokhara enjoys a year-round green covering. The monsoon season sponsors a lush jungle vegetation that is comparable in beauty to any in the world. The fish and birds as well as the humans are abundantly happy with all the edible vegetation and other food that the rains stir up and bring to the surface for them. Tasty ferns grow by the lake. Quiet streets become quieter. Cows, oxen, and dogs amble down main avenues. They enjoy the leeway allowed by thinner traffic. Human couples with arms around each other share romantic moments under a single umbrella. Smoky clouds airbrush the green hills in an affect more beautiful than any artist can manage. On better days, moderate breezes accompany the precipitation. Dreams, aspirations, and intentions that were bogged down in stifling heat and humidity now travel easily on these refreshing breezes.

Much of the precipitation is light and whimsical. Some is a lot more serious. Have you ever seen full-tilt monsoon rain? It is an awesome spectacle to watch from the comfort of your home but can be dangerous if you are outside on the wrong side of a hill during a severely monsoon-ing day.

Nepal struggles with heavy rains that last for at least one-fourth of the year. The rains cause flooding and landslides in many rural areas. Pokhara is the wettest city in the nation! The massive Himalayas are on one side of town. Fewa Lake is on the other. Even when the sun is partially clouded it can bake everything. Monsoon rains often start gathering in the early day's heat and literally pick up steam during mid-afternoon hours. Water evaporates into the air from the lake itself as well as from the jungle vegetation that surrounds it.

Sudden explosive cloudbursts can produce enough water to flood a plain, cause landslides on the muddy mountains in countryside areas, and ruin crops. Pokhara has a relatively easy time of it. Much of the Lakeside area consists of steep hills that guide all the water from seasonal downpours into the lake.

On most days, we see only moderate downpours. On severe days the flows gather a dangerous strength. Small animals can be swept into the lake as currents that can drown a dog turn streets into aquaducts.

The rains are at first a welcome change from the severe heat that precedes them, but after a few months folks start to feel like bloated sponges. We wait for the sun and the cooler temperatures of autumn and winter.

The many days of heavy humidity are much more uncomfortable than the rain itself! This humidity makes breathing difficult and has folks feeling like they need another shower as soon as they get out of their shower.

Life under this atmospheric hot, wet blanket struggles to get on with itself as if walking through molasses.

Even during the non-pandemic banner years for tourism, monsoon time is the slow season. The streets, stores, and lakeside areas are less crowded. Everything and everyone moves at a mellower pace. Relaxation and creativity flourish.

One of my favorite monsoon things to do is quack like a duck while flapping my arms like a bird for the kids on the street. The children always laugh. Parents occasionally do too. It is also fun to walk up beside a stranger that is getting wet and hold an umbrella over their head. This is not considered quite so off-the-wall here as it might be in New York.

Besides the adults enjoying a more relaxed pace, the children and dogs enjoy the puddles! Hounds and toddlers both love to jump up and down in tiny sidewalk swimming pools. Water coming from the sky does not stop folks from getting into more water on the ground. We can't let rain stop us or we'd never be able to leave the house! I have gone swimming in a big outdoor pool and taken boat rides around the lake in monsoon rains. This water-above-and-water-below thing makes "I'm a fish" and "I'm a duck" very easy daydreams to come by and fun games to play with the kids.

Monsoon rains are as much a part of Nepali life as rice, Shiva, lentils, and Buddha.

The options are to either move to a different part of Earth, or to stay and deal with the minor difficulties while enjoying the beauty and benefits.

Like so many things in life, monsoon season in Pokhara is hard to live with and impossible to live without. The monsoon rains here are our beloved porcupines.

We hug them.

Legend of the Porcupines (origin/author unknown)

It was the coldest winter ever. Many animals died from the cold. The porcupines, realizing their dire situation, decided to group together. They found that they could successfully cover each other and protect themselves—but the quills of each wounded their closest companions while they gave off heat to each other. After a while, they decided to distance themselves one from the other and began to die, alone and frozen.

So they had to make a choice—either accept the quills of their companions or disappear from the Earth. They wisely decided to go back to being together. In this way they learned to live with the little wounds caused by a close relationship with companions because the most important part of it all was the heat that came from the others. This way they were able to survive.

Moral of the story: The best relationship is not the one that brings together perfect people. Great relationships happen when each individual learns to live with all the

imperfections of others and admire all of the other's good qualities.

BACK TO BOUDHA PART 1

I've been in Pokhara for nearly a half-year. I love it here. There is night life, music, natural beauty, Earth's most majestic mountain range, lakes, good food, and an atmosphere that easily accommodates foreigners. But at certain times of year Pokhara has a climate that can be painful. Rainy season goes on for nearly five months! Continuous eighty-to-ninety-plus degree temperatures that are often accompanied by eighty percent humidity are a bit much for me.

The locals tell me there is always a long rainy season in Pokhara, but that this one is more difficult than usual. Most folks attribute all the severe weather to global warming. People from (relatively) nearby Bangladesh say this is no news to them. They have suffered the devastating effects of climate change for a long time. Bangladesh is low altitude and covered with rivers. A large delta of the Ganges River extension empties into the Bay of Bengal. A lot of life has been lost in that delta during the all too frequent flooding of recent decades.

On a brighter note—there are friends, monks and nuns, and drier air in Kathmandu's Boudha Stupa area.

Time for a visit!

The short plane ride from Pokhara to Kathmandu is amazing! The view from our mobile eighteen-row metal tube flying thousands of feet above Earth at hundreds of miles per hour is awe-inspiring. Our first minutes in the air show soft, shape-shifting cotton ball clouds fronting the massive, sharply defined snow covered Himalayan mountains. Clear azure skies background the white-on-white portrait painted by the world's tallest mountains rising above their puffy amorphous companions. Most of the rest of the flight is green. Rivers run through the vibrant green valleys that provide flooring for the green hills rising above them.

After twenty-five minutes each of taxi ride to the Pokhara airport, the plane ride itself, and then another twenty-five minute taxi from the Kathmandu airport, I am again in Boudha at the Pema Boutique Hotel.

No matter where on Earth you go, folks are selling things to make a living. Commercialism is a normal part of life. In some places it pervades the atmosphere more than it does in others. Tourist towns, even when those towns contain people that are as wonderful as those of Pokhara, are a good example—especially when they have been hit by a devastating two-year dry spell in commerce due to pandemic. A commercial process also exists in Boudha, but is different than in most other tourist areas. This commercial process is overridden by

the spiritual vibe. As you already know, over a thousand monks and nuns live in and wander through this area. Love and compassion, not sales and rentals, are their primary occupations. It is life in a different dimension. There is a strong atmospheric presence of kindness here that can't be found even among the sweetest merchant/tourist communities. That presence accompanies every breath taken in Boudha. Some people think the Stupa itself has a holiness about it. Perhaps that's true. To me, it seems that the residents and devout visitors keep the area's metaphorical gas tank filled with high-grade holy-and-pleasant. The truth probably involves both aspects.

Many of the non-monk/nun folks that live here are first or second generation refugee Tibetans. They wear traditional Tibetan dress and are nearly as reverent as the monks and nuns. An elevated sense of devotion as well as the gratitude of a people in exile for their kindly neighbor's hospitality permeates everything. A simple walk around the neighborhood can provide an uplifting experience that will boost a good attitude for the rest of the day.

My two weeks in Boudha include, among many other brain treats, one of the most reverent and at the same time rowdy festivals on Earth. The Hindu Tihar festival includes dogs, crows, cows, and humans that all simultaneously display party animal ability as well as deep involvement in the significance of the occasion.

Nepalis excel at both!

Back To Boudha Part 2
Festival Time! and Family As A Work Of Art

The Tihar festival in Nepal (called Diwali in India) resembles American Christmas season, New Year's Eve, and Fourth of July all rolled into one. It features a love, respect, and gratitude for many aspects and elements of Nepali life.

Lead time in and the straggling finale time out of Tihar, as well as the Dashain Festival that immediately precedes it, combine with Tihar festival week itself to produce nearly a month of celebration!

There is a constant barrage of fireworks. The folks here call them firecrackers but noise from the explosions sound more like American M-80s. Even at the relatively quiet Pema Boutique Hotel, explosions from the street can be heard.

The focus of Tihar is dedication and appreciation. There is one day honoring dogs and crows, and another honoring cows. Several other days honor the important characters in and facets of Nepali life. Peak day honors brothers and sisters that come from the same parents.

I have to say "from the same parents" in order to clarify that this sacred festival's celebration of siblings is more intense than the already intense feeling of family that exists between all Nepali people. There are some distinctions of socio-economic class and status here but

the people do not allow them to interfere with the sweet familial camaraderie that is so much a part of the nation. The most respected member of any community might not hang out with a low-caste person, but would refer to him or her as brother or sister. The richest and most powerful person in town calls his waitress *bhaini* (younger sister) and a cab driver *bhai* (younger brother). If that same powerful person is younger than the person they are addressing, then *∂ai* (older brother) and *∂i∂i* (older sister) are the terms used.

The Tihar ceremony itself doesn't range that far. This festival's most sacred day involves children of the same parents.

Appreciation is shown by way of giving *tikas* as well as special attention, food, gifts, and flower garlands. A *tika* is that mark placed in the middle of the forehead where the third eye resides. It can be more decorative than the usual simple dot. Within the ceremonial Tihar holiday process, it signifies a commitment by the person administering the *tika* to care for and protect what or whom ever receives it. Whether you put one on your dog, cow, sister, or brother, the *tika* process swears your allegiance to them. It is a touching experience to see a population of dogs, cows, and humans wandering city streets en masse with third-eye markings on their foreheads and brilliant orange flower garlands around their necks when you know that each *tika* mark and flower signifies a commitment of love, respect, and even protec-

tion for the living creature that wears it.

Nearly all businesses are closed on this day. Many close for a full week or even the entire month of festival time. Folks here work hard and are usually efficient at whatever they do for a living. When party time comes, they do just as good a job of it.

Most of my friends are very tame party animals but they still know how to have fun. Some of them don't smoke or drink at all. This is true of my friends Tenzing and Dolma.

Dolma escaped Chinese government oppression in Tibet at the age of eight. She became a talented ER nurse but recently retired to care for her new baby.

Her husband Tenzing is an internationally known Thangka (religious iconic painting) artist. He is from the high altitude region of Nepal called Dolpa. His work is commissioned by people around the world.

This couple has a four-month old baby that has to be one of luckiest children on Earth. Little Tenzing is constantly being smiled at, cuddled, and loved. This family lives in near-constant happiness. Their festival extends throughout the whole year.

I hope yours does too.

Do you want to meet Tenzing, Doma, and the baby?

NOT The Last Page

This was going to be a book about going totally around the world after being told by doctors that death would not allow it. I haven't done that "totally around the world" part just yet. Circumstances stretched out the trip. Almost upon arrival in Nepal, forces beyond my control locked everyone in place. Then I fell in love with the country and didn't leave for years after the option to travel re-opened.

I'm still not dead and am ready to continue the trip now. A great comedian said "Nobody ever wrestled an alligator unless someone else was watching." I hope you've enjoyed reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it for you. If you did, please let me know that. If there is enough positive reaction to this Part One, I will write and send Part Two along to you. Part Two will take us around the other half of the world.

Thanks for taking the ride with me. Please stay well. See you again soon, Tenzin

DON'T GO AWAY! SOME OF THE BEST WRITING FOLLOWS **ONE MORE LITTLE SINGLE PAGE REMINDER THAT I WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR HELP IN GETTING THIS BOOK TO FOLKS WHO MIGHT ENJOY IT.** ***THANKS!***

THE TRAVEL STORY IS OVER FOR NOW, BUT THE BOOK IS NOT. ENJOY THE REST OF IT!

FREE 5* BOOK! No strings attached.

Actually, the reviews aren't in yet. But since my first two books got dozens of five-star reviews on the Amazon site and this one is a much better offering, I am guessing it will receive solid five-star reviews as well.

The book is yours for free! I will not be sending it off to corporate commercial publishing houses or be dealing with self-publishing's elaborate promotion and distribution processes. I trust the public more than I trust these other avenues. So here you have it, a likely masterpiece at no charge. That doesn't happen often!

If you like what you have read, please consider helping this effort in these two very simple ways:

1—Please forward this book through your mailing lists and all social networks possible. At the least, please send it to a few receptive friends. By the time you finish reading, it will become obvious that there is content within that many people will be entertained by and others will find helpful—and I need the exposure. Circulation is the most essential thing anyone can do to help.

2—If you feel so inclined, send a contribution to keep a starving (sometimes literally!) artist going. Any amount helps and can be sent to the Fearless Puppy account at Community Bank NA, 205 Main Street, Brattleboro,

Vermont, 05301 USA. I otherwise have a total income of $445 a month from social security.

Do you have questions?

If so, jahbuddha13@hotmail.com is the place to reach me. I'll answer as many emails as time allows.

As you know by now, this book is the unique real life experience of a man that doctors said would die four years ago—the same man that was pronounced dead fifty years earlier at a hospital in New York and has been predicted to die many times in between those events. I hope you are finding it to be just as unique and exciting as a true story for the living. Thanks for reading and for passing it on.

Please stay well, Doug Ten Rose

A Little More About Buddhism In Asia

There has been a Hindu/Buddhist set-point in the Asian mentality for several millennia. This has produced a very different culture than our three big monotheistic Western religions have on the other side of the world.

Largely due to HH the Dalai Lama's international popularity as the leader of Tibetan Buddhism, a great many philosophical, psychological, and spiritual notions from the Far East have become popular in the West.

Why? Can these ways of thinking, feeling, and being make our Western lives better? Are they the keys to joy, bliss, and other desirable states of mind? Are they just nonsense? Are they just common sense?

It seems best to start looking for answers to these questions with a quick look at the man most responsible for attracting Western attention to all this information.

The Dalai Lama

Followers of many religions call the Dalai Lama "His Holiness." I don't. The reason I don't is because the man himself is constantly saying that every one of us is as potentially holy as he or anyone else is. He says we are all part of a bigger Whole to a much greater extent than we are the individual fragments of humanity we seem to be. It is not easy to keep the Dalai Lama off a pedestal but out of respect for his insistence that he is "a simple Buddhist monk," I try.

The Plain Facts

The Dalai Lama was officially enthroned as the leader of the Tibetan while still a young child. His countrymen and many others around the world consider him to be an incarnation of Chenrezig, The Deity of Compassion. There is evidence to support this notion.

He escaped likely murder by the Chinese army when he was twenty four years old in 1959. The Chinese military

killed nearly a million Tibetans and destroyed thousands of holy sites, temples, and monastic universities.

Since then he has operated out of his nation-in-exile's base station in northern India along with thousands of his countrymen, working tirelessly on behalf of Tibetans still living in Tibet as well as those with him in exile and scattered throughout the world.

The Tibetan nation-in-exile has offices in nearly every major country on the planet. In locations throughout the world, the Dalai Lama has re-established every single major monastic university that was destroyed by the Chinese military. He has seen to the training of many thousands of monks and nuns while he simultaneously established many agricultural, artistic, and educational programs that preserve the Tibetan population in exile and their culture. He is responsible for the education of thousands of children that have escaped or been born in exile from Tibet, and has established additional facilities to care for and educate the thousands of children still being smuggled out of Tibet.

He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his continuing focus on nonviolent means of improving the tragic circumstance of the Tibetan people. He offers a Gandhian quality of resistance to the shameful abuses of the Chinese communists.

Do you know of any other twenty four year old kids that barely escaped savage aggressors and went on to successfully set up an independent national democratic government, educational system, agricultural economy, preserve an entire culture, and win the Nobel Peace Prize—all without having a homeland or the support of any government in the world or the United Nations?

Neither do I.

Being around him is always a memorable experience. The most memorable of the several week-long Dalai Lama teaching events that I have attended took place at UCLA a few decades ago. Here are just a few quotes from his opening address, and a few more from the printed material available that day. You've heard similar words from Jesus, Gandhi, Baal Shem Tov, Lao Tse, Bahaullah, and others. Many folks take such notions very seriously. Others do not. How seriously the world takes these ideas right now may well dictate whether humanity will stick around for a while or soon join the dinosaurs.

QUOTES

The purpose of our life is happiness and joy. Our basic human nature is gentleness. Genuine peace is not a mere absence of war.

Peace out of fear still leaves us unhappy.

Compassion is not just pity. It includes awareness and a feeling of responsibility. Realize that the other person is just like us—that they want and deserve to not suffer, and to have happiness the same as us.

Compassion develops inner strength, this can develop self-confidence, this washes out fear. Negative attitude toward others, pessimism, and hatred...come from fear. With compassion a person becomes more positive and constructive. Without this inner quality a person can become more negative and destructive. A person without this good human quality becomes unreliable. They can say one thing and mean another. In politics they can become dirty politicians and cause great suffering. Good hearts create mental calmness—very important for good health.

Human beings don't knowingly pursue suffering.
Ignorance, impatience, and short-sightedness lead to it. Every human has a good heart at birth. We all start with it. That's why the news is negative. We pay much more attention to negative events because of the surprise and shock of it. It is contrary to human nature.

The antidote to hatred in the heart is tolerance.
Tolerance is an important virtue. It can enable a person to refrain from reacting angrily to the harm inflicted by

others. You could call this practice "inner disarmament." It makes you free from a compulsion to counterattack and protects you from being conquered by hatred itself.

Consider the following. We humans are social beings. We come into the world as the result of others' actions. We survive here in dependence on others. Whether we like it or not, there is hardly a moment of our lives when we do not benefit from others' activities. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that most of our happiness arises in the context of our relationships with others. Nor is it so remarkable that our greatest joy should come when we are motivated by concern for others.

But that is not all. We find that not only do our altruistic actions bring about happiness, but they also lessen our experience of suffering. Here I am not suggesting that the individual whose actions are motivated by the wish to bring others happiness necessarily meets with less misfortune than the one who does not. Sickness, old age, and mishaps of one sort or another are the same for us all. But the sufferings which undermine our internal peace—such as anxiety, frustration, disappointment—are definitely less. In concern for others, we worry less about ourselves. When we worry less about ourselves, the experience of our own suffering is less intense.

Western education tends to develop the brain while it neglects the heart, so you have a longing for teachings that develop and strengthen good heart. Christianity has wonderful teachings for this, but you don't know them well enough, so you take interest in Buddhism! (Laughs) Perhaps our teachings seem a bit less religious and more technical, like psychology, so they are easier for secular people to use.

When we meet real tragedy in life, we can react in two ways—by losing hope and falling into self-destructive habits, or by using the challenge to find inner strength.

Birthday Tribute

The Dalai Lama's birthday is an easy one for me to remember. It is exactly a week before mine. If it wasn't, I'd still remember it as surely as I remember my own.

Every year I write up and post a tribute on the sixth of July. This one is my favorite.

Waves (and a Quote) / The Village Elder

I am sitting on a beach in rural Southeast Asia. Next to me is the man considered wisest by the two hundred or so residents of this little village. When he speaks, every ear listens. The Village Elder is a wonderful person, a Class A human being. He is as much of a friend to me as possible. I cannot speak his language.

He cannot speak mine. He patiently and gently works around the language barrier.

We watch the waves rise up from and then return to the ocean.

The Elder has lived his whole life in this tropical paradise. He enjoys a bond with Nature itself. Much like Nature, he is stable in the knowledge that nothing is stable. He knows that there is no consistent norm. The Elder knows that our human lives are composed of an incredibly wide variety of changes and experiences that are as fleeting as Nature's weather. Some changes and experiences are fun. Others are not.

The Elder knows that people can react with wildly differing degrees of intensity to all these changes and experiences. For many of us, these reactions bounce around inconsistently on either side of a near-mythical center point of complete emotional stability. Many folks never get to that centered point of perfect emotional balance even once during their entire lives.

Our Village Elder is at home there.

The Elder has seen the comings and goings of so many highs, lows, traumas, joys, elations, confusions, and heartbreaks that he has earned the wisdom to deal with them, and the talent to help others deal with theirs.

I wonder how many waves he has seen.

We sit in near-silence but occasionally pass the few words back and forth that we know in each other's language. A few times, one of us laughs at nothing. Then the other laughs at the first one. We both end up laughing at nothing. Nothing, itself, seems to like it best when we both laugh.

The Elder starts to speak to me in his language. A selfless desire to communicate and a few meaningful hand motions accompany his voice. It is not necessary to literally understand every word. Vast empathy and compassion allow him to convey love and wisdom without language. The Elder transmits a comfort that smooths rough edges off of jagged situations. He does so with a universal ability that even animals and babies can feel and somehow understand.

He owns a smile that can stop a war.

"Be aware of everything but do not worry about anything. Waves come in, waves go out, life goes on. Do whatever is possible to help. If it doesn't help, don't do it. Enjoy your time here. Learn what you need to know."

As he speaks, I feel better. Things will change. That's what things do. Change can be at least partially under our own control—and it can be pleasant.

Anyone sitting with The Elder would feel a strong electricity radiating from him, as I did. You can

feel the intense power of this man's serenity in a simple waving motion of his hand and see it in the sparkle of his eyes. There is an obvious and incredible depth to the wisdom that this old man has developed during his very extraordinary life. I am fortunate to be on Earth at the same time and in the same place as this person.

"The waves come in, the waves go out. Underneath, ocean… calm." The Dalai Lama

Here's a great photo/meme of the Dalai Lama.

The Ties That Bind/The Treasure That Heals

In Tibetan Buddhism, a Lama is a monk that has received recognition for having a special quality or achieving certain goals. There are many brilliant Lamas.

Lama Kunsang Dechen Lingpa Rinpoche was among my earlier exposures to such folks. I've always been grateful for that.

I am not a qualified teacher of anything except English as a Second Language. I'm not very good at that. I've always been a haphazard, rebellious student. In high school, I threw books at teachers and attended a lot more drug parties than classes. Well after high school, I fell in love with a teacher. Not in a romantic

sense, of course. He might likely and more accurately say that I fell in love with what was coming through him. As a result, I paid attention to what he was saying in a different way than most folks pay attention in class. I might have absorbed his thoughts well enough to be able to fashion words around them. (There might also be a few residual LSD notions of my own that survived the decades and are mixed in here.)

I'm not going to try to tell you things I have no spiritual or intellectual authority to tell you—except for this one thing.

So here goes.

We are all connected. There is a singular fabric of life that contains everything living. This bigger picture is more real than our little individual ones. We are each a part of one big unit as surely as, and more profoundly than, we exist as independent individual humans.

Choose any one of the many well-known cloth metaphors: cut from the same cloth, the threads running between us, woven into the fabric of… They all have truth to them.

A thread ties you to your mother. There's a lesser one that ties you to the grocery clerk. You and I have a strand that connects us. There are other threads—and they may be a lot less visible but believe me, there are other threads—that tie you to every living creature on Earth. You have never met most of these people or other

creatures in the flesh. You never will meet most of them. There is still a connection so true that wireless providers would kill to figure out its technology.

There is also a connection between every person (including you) and some extremely powerful, beneficial esoteric energies. In this age of modern technology and distraction we have very busy minds that are not always open to or aware of these connections and energies.

They exist nonetheless.

One of my stronger threads ties me to an energy that is represented by a large mythical bird that rebuilds its life from the ashes of its own destruction. This energy teaches how to transmute poisonous experiences into success and benefit. There also seems to be a thread running between my self and some very wise people who can translate, even to a relatively dense mind like mine, what that mystical bird symbolizes. These folks make complex concepts understandable.

Millions of people in every corner of the world are consciously enjoying these types of connections. Folks of every conceivable nation, occupation, and spiritual tradition are receiving transmissions of energy and information from who or whatever their teachers may be.

The teachers offer this information openly. They send it out like the sun sends out warmth and light, but they have no control over whether folks will choose to receive that warmth and light or shiver in the shadows.

The quality of attention paid by the student is at least as important as who the teacher is.

Teachings may come through exemplars such as Jesus and Buddha, or through a pony's ass or an alfalfa sprout. The lesson to be learned is within the student. Anything or anyone is a potential catalyst, a vehicle that can open the door to a deep mental circuit within us.

The cultural frames of reference, language, and nuance that all these catalysts are carried on can vary greatly. They present themselves according to the needs of individual students' receptive abilities and disabilities, habituations of cultural programming, and reflective tendencies.

Although the presentations of all these catalytic agencies are different, the root nature of the information and energies being transmitted is the same.

The common denominator among people I know to have received such transmissions seems to be a simple but active motivation. If you have a deep inclination to transmute harm into help and be of benefit to others—whether they live right next door, on the other side of the world, or in the Twilight Zone—you will eventually connect with sources of energy and information that will assist you.

If your motivation is less altruistic, you are in for a bumpier ride.

Contact with these sources seems to be a matter of continuously asking for it through actions as much as

words, then persevering (maintaining direction, strength of conviction, and determination) until the assistance requested arrives.

Another thing seems apparent. Teachers aren't only teachers. They were and usually still are students themselves. I have seen evidence of a strong thread that runs between a modern mystic Lama and a legendary teacher from a thousand years ago. Most folks with any knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism are familiar with the famous teacher of a thousand years ago. The modern-era teacher is nowhere near as well known.

My research about this modern teacher says that Lama Kunsang Dechen Lingpa Rinpoche is considered to be a "treasure revealer." I have to disagree with my own research. My experience tells me that the man, himself, is a treasure.

p.s. There may also be a connective thread running between what we commonly know as time-and-space and a pathway to detour them—but that's another story.

Why The Monks And Nuns Are Who They Are/THE BIG BRAIN THING

Locals, expats, and tourists alike go to the temple/monastery complexes regularly to speak with the monks and nuns. After talking with the Wisdom Professionals, even the most formerly forlorn usually leave smiling.

Why do so many people come to see robe-wearers? Why do they all leave feeling better than they did upon arrival? Why are all these robe-wearers such fun to be around? What makes the monks and nuns who they are? At least one reason is very obvious.

It is The Big Brain Thing.

Everybody has a brain and a mind. Many people consider these to be different words for the same thing. Technically, the brain is just a biological organ while the mind is something deeper and more inclusive. But in case it makes someone more comfortable, we will use these words interchangeably here. The words "soul" or "spirit" are a bit more accurate and consciousness is what we are really talking about—but some folks think of these terms as abstractions. Many people find the more familiar words "mind" and "brain" easier to pin down.

It is widely known that a human uses only a small percentage of his or her mind/brain at any given time. Exactly how much gets used and what the percentages pay attention to are very important matters.

The monks and nuns believe that every individual carries deep responsibility to focus the greatest possible percentage of their mental facility on the kindest, most loving, and most wisdom-heavy attitudes and functions they can produce. Fulfilling this responsibility is not an option but mandatory for them because they feel that it

affects individual, familial and social as well as planet-wide relationships, and the relationship with themselves. It affects our survival as individuals and as a species. They are correct, of course.

Directing our minds toward constructive, positive ends is not an esoteric or saintly activity to be practiced only by some cloistered Wisdom Professionals. It is a very practical and logical activity that can influence every human's personal life. Our material and emotional satisfaction are most comfortably born from a strong base of mental satisfaction. Happy, compassionate folks feel prosperous regardless of financial status. They deal more efficiently with life's setbacks and its triumphs than depressed, selfish folks do. They usually make much better decisions, don't usually steal from or kill each other, and often live longer and more enjoyably.

Whether conscious of it or not, we always think of an action before we do it. There are major advantages to thinking consciously. Monks and nuns know that any action should be avoided if it doesn't help, and that blind emotions bubbling up unrecognized from subconscious depths lead many folks into destructive actions.

They have no blind emotions. By quieting their mental turbulence, robed folks clearly see what they are thinking and then steer their perception—the angle that they interpret and deal with those thoughts from—where they want it to go. From there they can better

steer their actions. In that way, everything they do is done on purpose. Nothing gets away from them.

The sub- or unconscious type of thought and the actions resulting from it are usually fueled by instinctive or habitually programmed mental reflex reactions. These are all too often based in memories of our past traumas or a blind fear of the unknowable future.

The most basic sub/un-conscious thoughts are survival instincts and callous self-interest—the animal reflexes. We all live partially under the direction of such instincts. Our DNA has carried these instincts since the caveman days. They are a long-standing physiological part of us, but with enough proper attention can be transcended.

Our subconscious minds have inherited another big batch of characteristics and instincts from training and information received from our schools, churches, parents, governments, TV/media, and so on. These are the conditioned reflexes—behavioral patterns we have been observing and absorbing since birth.

These biological and historical patterns coexist as what can be called "the little brain." So very many of our human actions could more accurately be called knee-jerk reactions. Our subconscious minds have such deeply entrenched pre-recorded programs of how-to-be and what-to-do in them! We often react to situations without giving any thought at all to those reactions.

Many people spend most of their lives controlled by mental patterns that they are not even aware of.

But we have all floated into The Big Brain Thing on occasion. When you and a lover feel like one body, when you feel your child's pain as if it is your own, when a "superhuman" kind of physical strength and perseverance or clarity arise in emergency situations—at these times we go beyond the so-called normal human parameters of feeling and function. We wander semi-consciously into Big Brain mode.

Monks and nuns work toward living there. Their conscious focus is always on the mind and life that all living things share in their involuntary coexistence with other creatures—animal, human, and divine. They are of the opinion that similarities and relationships between us all are more deserving of attention than differences. They feel that mutually beneficial goals outweigh any personal goals in importance. Oddly enough, it often turns out that personal goals are more easily met when universal goals are given priority!

The concept that all of humanity shares a mutual existence and universal mind containing great power that trained individuals can tap into resembles Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious—except that with the nuns and monks it is conscious, the idea has been around for several thousand years before Mr. Jung, and it is considered fact, not theory.

If from here on this gets a little redundant for you then please skip to the next chapter. These ideas took me a while to understand. It may help some folks to look at them a few more times from a few different angles.

The drop/ocean metaphor is often used to explain it. Most of us think of ourselves as individuals—a drop of humanity. The monks and nuns think of themselves as an integral part of a vast ocean that contains all living things. Both views have some truth to them. Buddhists call these two variations of truth conventional reality and Ultimate reality. The Ultimate reality "we are ocean" attitude, when compared with the more familiar conventional reality "I am a drop" attitude, might seem strange but it has advantages. Individual problems and personal pains recede a bit when we pay attention to the bigger picture. The freedom and security that a vast and all-inclusive ocean offers is much greater than the freedom and security available to a singular drop of water, or any single human being.

Like many of us, the monks and nuns have good intentions. They are more committed and loyal to those intentions than most of us are to ours. They make that commitment functional by regularly taking serious vows to donate all their motivation for achievement toward improving life for all their fellow creatures as well as themselves. They constantly work on improving their

little drop (self), but that process is always based on how to make their drop become a better drop in order to become part of a better ocean—how to best improve their lives in a way that improves all lives. They are dancing with their own legs but a much bigger force than any individual is always playing the tune. All ways.

To put it yet another way, these robed Wisdom Professionals have trained their little brains thoroughly in the concern for each and all little brains. Their trained brains keep them tuned in to the same wavelength as the bigger force that both contains and is solely concerned with the well-being of all little brains—The Big Brain. Through long training and dedication they have become a conscious cell in and therefore a co-creating partner with The Big Brain. Call it God, The Force, Collective Unconscious, Dharma, Unified Field, or whatever you want to call your all-inclusive divine resource, they are now part of it. Perhaps we all are. But they are very aware of their inclusion in this bigger system and are well-practiced enough in that system's processes to stay coordinated with it. A consistent, conscious practice keeps the thoughts and actions of nuns and monks at least as concerned with the ocean at large as they are with their individual drop. This affiliation with the Big Brain governs their lives. It directs the choices they make as surely as a commander directs his or her troops.

There are many different methods of meditation. I don't quite know how to introduce this one. There is more gravity in it than words can carry. How far down the rabbit hole you go with it is going to vary a lot between readers, so let's just dive right in.

VIPASSANA

THE BACK STORY

The ancient Vipassana process wasn't widely known in the modern world until its popularity was rejuvenated in the mid-twentieth century by a Burmese-born Indian teacher named Goenka. Ten-day Vipassana meditation retreats involve intensive instruction and practice. Total silence and a very structured schedule begin at 4 a.m. each morning. Having repeatedly done nearly every hallucinogenic drug available to humanity, I can safely say that the Vipassana experience is the most mind-altering of all mind-altering experiences.

This system of breathing meditation originally comes from India and is reputed to be the historical Buddha's own base-station system. Vipassana literally means "to see things as they really are."

It is a totally nonsectarian practice and so doesn't conflict with any religion. The goal of the process is to eliminate mental impurities and thereby eliminate our suffering. Perhaps not all at once, but if the process is done diligently and consistently over a period of time it

can result in a balanced and compassionate state of mind that will create harmony and happiness more easily.

Life always contains illness, old age, and death but the way we view these things can increase or reduce much of the actual suffering that often accompanies those experiences. Vipassana training and continuing mental exercise (practice) helps us more constructively influence the way we view our life experiences in the present. It also helps decrease the number and severity of situations and circumstances that might lead to future suffering. As is true of many common-sense practices that are referred to as spiritual, this practice involves a lot of self-observation.

There is a strong and generally underrated link between mind and body. Vipassana practice gets us more in touch with that link by paying the right kind of attention to bodily sensations through focused, silent observation. This type of attention can lead one to the common root of mind and body. From that root, a lot of emotional crap we have accumulated can be dissolved.

The basic method that is learned during the initial intensive retreat needs to be practiced regularly. The ten-day initial session leaves a serious mental imprint but in the long run the benefit from this process, like everything else in life, is a use-it-or-lose-it type of thing. Don't believe it? Try ten days of piano lessons. Even if you tinkle those ivories for the entire twenty-four hours

during each of those ten days, if you do not continue to practice after that you will never play in a band.

p.s. This was a difficult piece to write. Once you get used to writing and editing within the confines of the accepted grammatical rules of your language, it gets harder to ignore them in order to create a standing-firm-while-bouncing-off-the-walls feeling within whatever you are writing about. As is true for so many attempted descriptions of meditational processes, this one will sound in places like a line from the Beatles song *I Am The Walrus*! "I am he as you are me as you are he and we are all together." You will also notice sentences that are fractured but still cling together well enough to relate a partially clear idea. In addition, the tenses sometimes float between the past, present, and future within the same sentence. There are ideas that walk through the same door from different angles.

These oddities aren't just in the writing! Many people have described a lot of these things as being part of their Vipassana experience!

THE EXPERIENCE

Separation. Men here, women there. No type of communication at all. With anyone. No speech, waving, eye contact, or hand signals. Up at 4 a.m. Meditation and instruction until 9 p.m. with teachers that rarely speak. Infrequent rest and meal breaks. Silence and awareness also maintained during break times. Many

thoughts, feelings, and judgments arise. These same thoughts, feelings, and judgments subside. Any and every thing that has the nature of arising is shown to also have the nature of subsiding.

Simple applied awareness dispels several varieties of ignorance but that awareness wanders away and is followed by a regression to ignorance. Then a sudden reawakened awareness sponsors another clarity-and-growth spurt that is a little stronger than the first one, but then another regression, followed by another… The loop seems endless but soon we notice how periods of awareness and clarity keep getting a bit longer and stronger as the periods of attention-less mind-wandering keep getting shorter. Practice does not make us perfect all at once. It does make for obvious improvement.

Connections recognized—mind to body, body to mind, person to person, person to every thing, person to self. Constant, constant, constant attention paid to breathing and bodily sensations. Self becomes highly sensitized to every molecule within and without.

The air inside and the air outside of us is realized to be the same air.

Then intimate contact with and focus upon heart-beat. Fear, agitation, discomfort percolate to the surface. They are released and replaced by calm, focused clarity. The clarity somehow feels as if it has always been here but has also taken forever to get here.

Self-realization, seeing the light, The Ultimate Awareness, Enlightenment, or whatever you want to call it suffers too many definitions. It is an idea that has become unnecessarily difficult to grasp. It is not really an accomplishment at all! "Realization" just means that something was always there but we had it so covered up with nonsense that we couldn't see, couldn't realize, that it was there! Clearing stains, obstacles, and blockages from the mind and realizing its true nature is actually more of a recovery than an accomplishment.

Mental training uncovers multilayered awareness. The method is both tool and vehicle. It moves us toward psychological freedom from our drama and trauma—past, present, and even future—by discovering the root states of agitation and misery. Discovering the ability to pluck agitation and misery out by their roots so that they cannot rise up again may happen in a single day or a hundred years. It will happen.

The introduction to a clearer experience of every thing is sponsored by a clearer experience of oneself. We start to see things as they are and no longer through fossilized patterns of thought and emotion that tint and taint our perceptions. We find old problems at new and previously unconscious levels. Once recognized, they can be dissolved more easily.

The Vipassana method takes unconscious life to school. Unconscious life eventually graduates. There is

no more sub or unconscious. Everything is conscious. Every thing.

With all mental activity now in the realm of the Conscious Mind, negativity is no longer able to gather strength on the dark path it used to travel from autopilot thoughtlessness toward becoming a regrettable action.

Respiration and sensations of the physical body become the signposts of what is happening in the mind.

Pay attention softly, with equanimity and no judgment of what you see and feel.

Just observe.

We are watching our own movie. We become emotionally distanced enough from our mundane self to be objective rather than judgmental. Every thing, every feeling, now has equal status. It is all just there, without our emotional attachment to it. No thought or feeling was actually ever more important than another thought or feeling, except in our subjective relation to it. That is now ending. The world we knew is melting.

An increase in the freedom from overindulgence in the importance of personal perspectives, opinions, and points of view begins to show results.

"When you judge someone, you have no time to love them." Mother Teresa

This effect holds just as true when you judge yourself as it does when judging others.

This Vipassana process is not always easy. It can require facing up to personal ghosts and demons. Every sudden flash of clarity can be a painful blessing. There are some poisonous attitudes and hidden memories of negative experiences draining and releasing. These may be just as unpleasant while they work their way out as they were while working their way in. It seems we all have bills to pay.

Is this ever going to wear off?

I don't remember doing that!

Well, f**k them, they deserved…no it was a… .

Oh God, I'm going crazy!

No, I guess I'm not. Even if I lose my mind it does not really go anywhere. Truth be known, it was never really there to begin with. We kind of make the whole forking thing up, don't we? And actually, whatever history we've been fed since birth has likely built more of our mentality and fueled more of our actions than we did! Peer pressure from the misinformed and improperly motivated has sponsored most of the ideas that many of us live by!

When we start to lose our manufactured self image, we find a beautiful space in the mind. It is an emptiness that is somehow laced with bliss. Is leaving the space there what life is all about? Do good or bad things come to fill that space from elsewhere? Do we put the good and bad things in there ourselves? Is it our

own option? Shouldn't it be? Can we possibly answer our own questions? Can anyone answer them?

The detachment from our unconscious habits and reactive tendencies that can result from this effort do not involve escapism, denial, or indifference! The mind just clears delusions it has built over time so a vision that is free from our historical clouds sees the bigger picture.

What is the bigger picture?

Unity Consciousness.

A near-borderless sense of inclusion that naturally increases desire to help everything alive live better and happier. The line between individual and universal heartbeat starts to fade. Caring for everything is seen as the truest definition of caring for self.

Everything is indeed every thing.

Does this all sound like a lot of la-la land, wacko, space-case nonsense to you? It would to me too—if I had not experienced it.

How to Get Your Prayers Answered

I have rarely offered a conventional prayer and hold little faith in the concept. I feel a bit uppity and out of place writing a chapter about how to get your prayers answered. Everyone that has ever been alive has asked

this question at least once. It is unlikely that a person like myself could discover any important information about getting prayers answered while rooting through decades of deep intoxication peppered with a few layers of insanity.

I may have gotten lucky and tripped over some answers.

There are three steps to getting your prayers answered. They are:

~1~

Set your hope, wish, prayer, aspiration, desired intent exactly where you want it. Make it short, focused, and stick to basics.

If your wish includes doing harm, or is of no benefit to others, restructure it. For example, "I hope that nasty bastard dies painfully and that I never meet another asshole like him" probably won't work too well.

"I hope to never meet nasty people from now on and that everyone else has the same good luck" is a much better fit, but not quite good enough. The desired result needs to be framed in the present tense and in positive achievement. "I hope ..." should be restructured to say something like, "I meet nicer people, and become one myself. I welcome help with this."

If you really want to make big points within this system, say something like the following and really mean it. "I am meeting nicer people and becoming one. I hope that all people, especially that one who has recently acted so nastily toward me, become more decent and happy. I am grateful to everything in existence for help in making this happen." Use whatever you feel comfy with in place of that "everything in existence" bit. God, any representative or representation of God, The Universe, The Force, Collective Unconscious, Nature, Fate, The Field, The Buddha-field, The Laws Of Physics, The Quantum Field, The Void, Great Spirit, Great Beyond, Life, The Big Grand Wazoo, or whatever name you have for your Bigger-Than-You thing.

Language of positive direction and benevolent intent are extremely important! Use them. The potent effect of positive language is well illustrated in Mother Teresa's comment, "I won't go to your anti-war rally. If you ever have a peace rally, call me."

~2~

Empty your mind of everything else.

Don't treat this step lightly! It is not as simple as it sounds. Most folks cannot even sit for a single minute without having unsolicited thoughts pop up. Clearing mental clutter will take some work, but can be enjoyable

and will be rewarding. Relax through any initial bits of impatience.

Here's why this step is so important.

Everything comes from nothing. Whatever you want to put anywhere starts with it not yet being there. Nothing always comes before something. That is why it can truly be said that there is no thing as real as nothing. Any background is the birthplace of whatever stands out from it.

There can only be a hundred percent of anything, so there can also only be a hundred percent of your mind. If ninety percent of that mind is rattling around things other than those that you want in your line of focus, other than the fulfillment of the prayer—well, you can do the math. The amount of random thought prattling around in your head needs be reduced in order to have more mind available for focus on getting your intentions fulfilled.

Random thoughts will arise. Don't pay any attention to them. Pay attention to the awareness that is recognizing them. To stabilize this ability will take some patience, confidence, and consistent effort—especially at first. The more you do it, the easier it gets. There are tried and true methods that have been proven to work. Monks, nuns, and their ancestors have been using all of these methods for thousands of years.

A tried and true method that is guided by a good teacher is necessary. Using your own unassisted mind to clean out the clutter spawned by that same mind would be similar to hiring soldiers to end the concept of war. The cemeteries are full of dead soldiers that would love to be able to tell you just how fatally flawed this logic is.

Finding a good teacher with whom you can establish a working rapport is extremely beneficial to your mind-clearing process. Once you find a knowledgable and dedicated teacher, bring every bit of your attention to the learning process.

Being overanxious can work against a person who is picking a coach, teacher, or guide. Just because one is well-motivated and anxious to start doesn't mean that the first person to come along with a robe, or divinity degree, or crystal ball is the right teacher. Try sessions with as many teachers as you care to, and with an open mind. It may take a week or years. The right time, teacher, and system will be obvious when they arrive.

"We should be very careful who we establish a relationship with as a teacher. First we should check him or her out and allow him or her to check us out. If this doesn't work out, don't push it. It is always better to develop a relationship that we can trust rather than getting into one we are not sure of. This is essential advice. Student

and Lama have to have a strong faith and trust in each other." Lama Karma Rinchen

~3~

Take #1, plant it in #2, and don't ever give up.

The wish/dream/intention/hope/aspiration/mantra/prayer phrase from #1 needs as much of your attention as possible. Obviously, this should not be done while driving a car, crossing the street, working with a power tool, if baby needs some immediate attention, or if the house is on fire. Keep your wits about you. Stay awake.

The aspiration, prayer, or whatever you want to call it will reach both its internal and external sources with the continuing practice of it—and you'll notice something else too. It will become fun to do this. You will give more and more time to the process. The fun you have with this process to fulfill your wishes will sprout and grow just like everything else sprouts and grows—from nothing into something, from a mere seed into a living, thriving entity.

The focus phrase/prayer can be adjusted, amended, or altogether changed if it becomes appropriate to do so. If it contains the elements of doing no harm, benefitting more than just self, positive motivation and goal, and

there is enough mental space for it to live and grow, that prayer has a good chance of being answered. How quickly or completely this happens will depend upon the practicality of the request, the depth of altruistic intent, perseverance, strength of conviction, faith in the process, calm determination, grace, patience, and of course the amount of time spent planting and watering the idea in our little and Big Brains. (Don't go schizo! It may seem like there are two separate brains at times, but there is only one of you. We aren't fractured beings just because we are capable of seeing things from multiple angles!)

As the lottery people say, "You've got to be in it to win it." But the odds of succeeding with your prayer are a lot better than the odds of winning the lottery. As you pray to whatever you pray to, you build a mind that can answer that prayer.

> *Each temple may have different rules and schedules but three basics are the major focus for nearly all of them. These three things are so interwoven that although they seem like distinctly separate functions at first glance, each is only separated from the other by a very fine line that can disappear altogether upon closer examination.*
>
> **Chanting, Breathing, Meditation**

Ancient incantations provide psychic transportation to a place that is both path and destination. These melodic incantations combine with patience and consistency to nourish every journey, even on the most difficult roads.

There is no past or future here. There is only security in the present tense. No tension. There is no danger from any previous trip or the next one while on this voyage. All of you is traveling a singularly directed road.

All of you.

Rhythmic musical designs jumpstart primeval forces. Ancient wisdoms resurface daily to cement intelligence to itself.

Warm and safe from interferences, the mind builds tools for clearances of obstacles that are then quickly erased from history. It's no mystery!

It is a well known path shared by millions before you who have passed out of life but come back to adore you when you are chanting.

Perseverance required.

Meditation, Chanting, Breathing

We each own the key to the door that grants entrance to mind, entrance to thoughts that are coarse or kind. We also own the door. It is our house. No one, no thing, can enter without our permission. Vigilance and a diligent

practice are our locksmiths. Our house is not secure without these.

While experiencing meditation's medication, limitless expanses of Universe meet with molecular particles seamlessly, and seemingly endlessly. Though we are printed on so many pages and grow through a million stages, we are a single entity disguised as uncountable faces and places. Each of these faces and places is equipped through a series of graces to maximize their function in various spaces that range from broad stars to mere atomic traces.

All of us are within each one of us.

The sensations of hearing color and touching sound abound. The most touching sounds trip our emotional triggers earlessly as they fearlessly anchor an eerie yet centering effect. All selves connect in unity, traversing dimensions with impunity.

Meditation's maximum effect abides where all secrets reside—in the breath. If you want your body and mind to meet, it is baby-like breathing you'll need to repeat.

Breathing, Meditation, Chanting

Breathe like a baby. You will hear the wordless lullaby of a mother's rocking arms. Babies feel both Universal and personal mother's charms. It's the same air without

as the air that's within. Babies don't get hung up on small things like skin.

Sit still for long enough, the air will breathe you! Sit longer. Become stronger. Silently fill the breath to its greatest depth.

When breath hears its own heartbeat we find something rare as life becomes aware of the care we are giving it. This beat can't come apart. This heart can't be broken. There will never be a breaking in the rhythm it is taking from the effort you are making on its behalf.

An increased internal calm sees obstacles as dissolving pollution. Dismay finds absolution as the breath rides its wealth to the perfect self that has always been waiting with anticipation for its liberation. Treasures are easily uncovered when better instincts are mothered back into existence! No stressful resistance to evil is required once the strength of that evil is disarmed and denied by the flow of the life force (balanced inward and out) to the place where a nest egg of harmonies shout to become you—again. How odd that so many of our troubling confusions can find all their corrections, and find all their solutions in the simplest and most basic concept since death—in the sweet loving flow of a young baby's breath.

Watching a baby breathe can teach us how to be an adult. Neither sucking in nor pushing out but balanced

and flowing, constantly growing in levels of knowing grace. Knowing grace is in the place that it is supposed to be—inside of you and inside of me.

A Week in the Cave

Have you ever spent a week in a cave on Buddhist temple grounds? I highly recommend it!

Impenetrable domain.

Solid rock is solitude's fortress.

Thoughts and emotions have emptiness as their only company.

The first day in a cave is not as silent as you might think it would be, but the invasive noises of bats, jungle, and ocean soon blend their flurried motion into deep internal silence that negates commotion. That is when disturbing isolation transforms to become a comforting meditation. That is when our manufactured realities melt into shapeless ecstasies and play havoc in the shadows.

Isolation breeds memories. Memories recall connections to people, places, things, emotions, events—every thing. Soon memory fades as Presence takes over. Presence is accompanied by a knowledge with no fixed focal point. No concrete word or abstract thought can say what this knowledge knows. Any attempts to describe concepts so

far beyond words bring a sense of irony that will turn to laughter.

That laughter may be as close as we ever get to defining these mysterious concepts.

This type of knowledge, once accepted and embraced, leads to a tranquility of mind. A calmer mind uncovers mental clarity. Clarity welcomes a surprisingly potent serenity that was always within us. It does not need to arrive. It needs to be recognized—and right now, thanks to the magic of undistracted attention, it has.

Couldn't this happen in your bedroom or even your bathroom?

"We have been led astray through ignorance to find a split in our own being…
there was from the very beginning no need for the struggle between finite and the infinite... the peace we were seeking has been there all the time." D.T. Suzuki

Want to see photos of the meditation caves?

Epilogue
Pieces That Stand By Themselves

Some Of The Best Stuff!

Some of the best stuff was a little off topic, a little too kick-ass, or a little too complex in spots. I didn't want it to disturb the flow of the book's primary story and so here it is in very random order. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it for you.

COMMON SENSE/THE DISTANCE BETWEEN BULLSHIT AND ME

This hasn't been humanity's best couple of years. It has left many of us feeling like Helen Keller trying to work a Rubik's Cube.

Repeating popular rumor, the guess-work of friends, or personal views about it all seems pointless but I have to do just a bit of that to set the backdrop. I apologize.

I am one of the many fools that forms subjective opinions around what might be better left as objective observations. There are so very many different opinions among us! Our species is more socially disjointed than ever before.

There seems to be only one thing that almost everyone agrees on. We have all reluctantly realized that many of our commonly accepted pillars of stability are built on a foundation of nonsense and most of our life-long sources of supposedly true information are slanted if not lying. Entities we always thought of as honest have proven themselves unreliable and lacking integrity. To paraphrase Michelle Wolf's brilliant line at the Washington Correspondents Dinner. "Congratulations to you all who like to bring us the breaking news! You finally broke it!"

To add insult to injury, we have been forced to admit that many of these formerly-thought-to-be-trustworthy sources, through either intent or ignorance, have been feeding us a lot of bullshit for a very long time—and we have been believing much of it.

But so-called News is just the catalytic tip of the iceberg. By now, bullshit runs through so much of our social structure that very few havens are safe from it.

Among the many opinions we build for ourselves from the shrapnel and shards of all this ca-ca, the fastest growing one may be a backlash reaction. Realizations that we have been so blatantly and painfully betrayed by government and media have inspired many to think that there is no viral disease at all, and that the "scamdemic" is just a government plot. Nobody seems to know just which government is responsible but the theories run from America, to China, to America and China working together, to the whole United Nations organization, to… the list of suspects goes on and on. What seems to be the soundest of these opinions says that the governing forces behind this alleged bacterial/theatrical production aren't really national governments at all but rather the banking, oil & energy, pharmaceutical, agribusiness, weapons, and other assorted industrial manufacturers and business interests that operate in the shadows of, and pull the strings attached to, all governments. Many

of these industries are already well known for their dark history of profiting from human misery.

Folks on the opposite end of our popular opinion's pendulum believe that no intentional mismanagement is being performed and no known misinformation is being circulated by the media, any government, or corporate despots. They say that conspiracy theory kooks are just ignoring the very simple truth of virus-as-sole-enemy and that many are also ignoring the salvation available to us all from (albeit insufficiently tested) vaccines. Opinions in this camp vary as to whether the virus itself is an angry revenge of Nature, a flubbed experiment done by sloppy scientists, a purposeful manufacture of unscrupulous humans, or the result of a bat having sex with a chicken.

There is a third contingent. I am in it. Like other members of this growing third contingent, I'm sure that I have no totally clear picture of what is going on. I am aware that my opinions are not facts—but three foggily obvious things have been objectively observed by myself and my fellow third contingent peeps.

The first is that whether this bug is an ordinary flu exaggerated by media or a potentially apocalyptic new superbug, a form of virus exists. It can be a danger, and even deadly, to a small percentage of the population.

The second is that there is an attempt being made by sociopathic multinational interests to bring humanity

to its knees under their tightened control. Tough guys have been beating up peaceful kids and stealing their lunch money since the beginning of people, but our modern incorporated bullies have a much greater avarice and ambition inspiring them, and much greater resources and technology at their disposal.

The third is that the former is being manipulated by the latter to accomplish their purpose. It appears to many of us that the long-range effects of this selfish profiteering and criminal socio-economic engineering could become more detrimental to humanity than the historical Bubonic plague, much less the new virus.

Regardless of whichever set of causal details you believe, the effects are obvious to everyone. The effects have fostered a near-universal stress and drained vast reservoirs of happiness. Some of us have been overcome by panic, come apart at the seams, and lost our center—if we ever had one. Many among this wobbly-centered segment of humanity have bowed to media manipulation of one flavor or another. They've become psychologically and physically compliant with questionable sources of information and direction. These folks believe nearly everything that confirms their fears and opinions. They worry a lot. These people are most likely to get sick, most likely to die, and vulnerable to being corn-holed in many other ways while they are healthy and alive.

But there is light at the end of the tunnel-vision! The unanimous opinion of logical folks from all three contingents says that regardless of what caused the problems, our time would be best spent in activity that assists in repairing them. Who is right or wrong matters a lot less than what we are going to do about fixing everything that is broken. Common Sense dictates that the only things that matter now are things that help. A single minute of constructive action is worth much more than a year of spouting one-sided rhetoric or ignoring our circumstances.

The question many people are asking is, "How can I do something constructive and helpful when my hands are tied by these terrible events?" The answer is easy.

Our hands are not tied. Our minds are. Thinking your hands are tied is a blatantly fallacious premature subjective and reactive cognitive mental commitment. Put more simply, it is bullshit.

It is our bullshit now. It may have originally come from elsewhere but we gave it permission to stay. When people allow their hands to be tied and their minds to be controlled by forces outside of their hands and minds, they are surrendering part of their humanity to external coercion. They are thereby, at least partially, becoming slaves to someone else's bullshit.

There's a lot of bullshit in the world. Our odds of being exposed to this bullshit increase as we get more

directly dependent upon other people. Human beings are very interdependent animals. No one can completely avoid interdependence, therefore no one completely avoids bullshit, either. The world smells worse in some places than others but everyone is going to get at least a little bit of stank on themselves while living here.

(Luckily, we can also find as much wisdom and kindness as we want to look for. Vast amounts of them are available, although the good news rarely makes the front page.)

Whether the monsters attacking life on Earth are bacterial, governmental, corporate, demonic (if you like to look at things that way), natural, manufactured, or a combination of all these, most of what they do is beyond our individual control. On the other hand, our reactions to what they do are totally within our own control and can affect our future domination by, or be responsible for the future demise of, those monsters.

Our present-tense happiness and the future of our species largely depends upon whether we surrender our personal control to bullshit or use it to deal with real shit.

There is a space, as massive as you want to make it, between external coercion and internal direction. I look at that space as the exact distance between bullshit and me.

All of the forcefully programmed fears that are ground into our psyches could result in unhappiness, illness, and even death—but only if we allow them to do so. They cannot stop we humans from being humane, resilient, intelligent, healthy, and strong if we find it worth the effort it takes to maintain our relationship with those characteristics.

Everyone alive has the ability to transcend bullshit and do something that helps fix real shit. Some folks don't bother. They think they are only capable of small, meaningless contributions to the human condition. But every time we speak kindly and show patience instead of reacting with anger; whenever we go a little bit out of our way to help someone else in any fashion, we add meaning and power to what might be thought of as the bigger, more important actions.

Little things often coagulate and conglomerate to form big ones. Without small things, big things do not happen. Gandhi could not have done his salt march to the ocean and raised a nation by himself. Martin Luther King, if working by himself, would have been lynched or ignored at his first campaign. Any great person you can think of had many other folks involved in making their effect so great. We consider Gandhi, Dr. King, and others like them to be our heroes. They considered all the historically nameless people who were abused, and

imprisoned, and beaten, and even killed during those popular movements to be the real heroes!

Each of us seemingly less influential people cannot only make valuable contributions to life on Earth but we can also help others to do the same. Again, small actions can result in great impact. Just an encouraging word to a friend or a kindness offered a stranger can stand that person's attitude up tall enough to make sure that their best qualities rise and function that day. Many people who feel powerless to help have no idea how powerful the effects of a simple hug can be.

Besides benefitting the recipient of any constructive action, and the collective well-being of the whole world at large, there is also a well documented bi-directional effect to any positive effort. Doing a kindness always boosts the person doing it as much as it boosts up the person they are directing it toward.

I have friends that are actively working for women's rights, health, and empowerment. I have other friends that are working to feed starving people that have been frozen out of their employment by the events of recent years. Other friends are monks, nuns, witches, priests, shamans, and adepts of other spiritual practices that send positive energies and aspirations into the more esoteric world every day. They also act kindly to everyone they meet in the physical world.

Many others make great and often very effective efforts to keep themselves and those around them as happy and healthy as possible. They do this without employing monk-style austerity and discipline, or shamanic ritual. They blend helpful physical actions and constructive, upbeat mental directions discreetly into their everyday lives.

I am pretty lazy, but I do have one important job. I try to be nice. It doesn't always work. When I am not nice, I try to stay aware enough of that fact to catch my self broadcasting bullshit as quickly as possible. This always diminishes the number as well as the longevity of my screw-ups. It insures that I don't act like a jackass as often this year as I did last year. This is a very important part of maintaining the distance between a different type of bullshit and me. In this case, not culturally-influenced but rather my own internally-generated bullshit.

I try to stay centered away from bullshit, whether it comes from inside or out. I don't rent out space in my head to bullshit. I'm not going to argue with bullshit. I give bullshit as little as possible of my attention. From my own ignorant, open-to-all-possibilities, altruism-as-common-sense home base, I remember that the better aspects of what I want myself to be are more important than what any negative influence wants.

People think of bullshit the same way they think of the good stuff—always looking for the big, impressive pieces. Sometimes smaller and more commonly accepted bits of bullshit are a lot more influential than we realize. The most inane and seemingly harmless bullshit will still steal our attention and time away from doing a much more constructive good. A lot of nonsense can snare our attention away from things that desperately need it. Keeping up with the sexual tension scripted between immature fictional TV couples or watching some other crap-on-a-screen in order to vacantly fill time probably deserves a little bit less of our attention until the more pressing ills of humanity are cured.

My greatest hope and wish is that all eight billion people on Earth remember that it is worth every effort necessary to put some distance between yourself and bullshit—and if you should find yourself accidentally swimming in Bullshit Lake, don't bite on any hooks there! Fish don't end up in the frying pan if they refuse to take the bait.

There is always a shore nearby. You can swim to a place where you can shower off and very quickly restore yourself to a more no-bullshit, constructive, happy, healthy, and helpful life. That shore is where the party will happen.

So as you can see, the idea behind all this is simple. Once bullshit and its residual effects are eliminated from

our minds, only what is real will be left. Once we clearly see everything as it really is, we will more easily figure out exactly what needs to be fixed and how to fix it. With the intelligence and direction that such clear vision affords, we will happily put in the effort to accomplish a saner, safer, and much more joyful world. That's when the party will happen.

AUTHENTIC

Dedicated with very large gratitude and respect to all those with the courage, perseverance, and common sense to be themselves in the face of criticism, judgement, peer pressure, scrutiny, harsh sensationalism, and public ignorance—and to all those who refuse to allow anyone else's or their own bullshit to prevent them from helping others or growing into themselves.

People spend a lot of their time talking about "the truth" as if it is a familiar old friend, but the relationship is a more often like that of a fan to a celebrity they have never met. When these same folks actually meet the raw truth it usually scares the hell out of them.

Outside the world of Nature itself, truth is rare and bullshit prevalent. It can sometimes take a while for the truth to triumph, but it will eventually percolate

right through nonsense and rise above any pile of lies that it is trapped under.

This percolation is usually facilitated by people that are uniquely and authentically themselves. Folks fronting to accomplish various sorts of personal gain; those who are scared to stand out and would rather fit in; folks that act in pretentious, artificial ways in a quest for admiration, profit, or status cannot and will not get this job done.

Authentic does not mean perfect. Throughout our history, except for a few possible legendary exceptions, we have each been imperfect in reaching the peak of human potential. This includes our most accomplished, famous, and even our very wisest citizens. We live on a crowded rock amidst an unforgiving culture in fragile bodies attached to sensitive emotional mechanisms.

No one stays flawless while doing it.

"Even after you reach Enlightenment, you still have to do the laundry." Old Zen Proverb

Most folks agree that making effort to overcome or at least sandpaper the edges off of the less agreeable behaviors and attitudes we have grown into is among life's most essential jobs. Most folks also agree that this job is a lot easier to talk about than do.

Personal responsibility is always the engine of any effort. But a lot of our less desirable traits and our lack of progress in escaping them may have more to do with the way we've been programmed than it has to do with any basic character flaw or inability to achieve our direction. Spiritual/emotional progress has often been presented to us as being unattainable to "regular" folks. It is framed as an otherworldly process that only someone born with supernatural grace can accomplish.

Public relations men for churches, governments, and industries that stand to profit from misdirecting the public convince us that we need products and middlemen to negotiate our spiritual as well as our physical beauty and self-worth. If folks think they are incapable of reaching wisdom or happiness through their personal efforts; if we think that our ability to become better is limited or even impotent when we live as our authentic selves instead of monkeying commercially motivated and manufactured images, it puts us at the mercy of all the external forces that profit from pulling our strings.

This manufactured artificial distance between the folks we are and the faith in our ability to become the folks we want to be is a truly dangerous thing. It is too often used by the discouraged as an excuse to replace our personal responsibility with compliance, nihilism, apathy, cynicism, and lethargy.

Individual growth and planetary evolution retard under the influence of this market motivated frustration. Personal initiative often gives up to empty promises and baseless blind hope. Empty promises and baseless blind hope direct us to emotionally worthless material goods, prescription drugs, salvation by the dollar, and a vast collection of distractions, toys, and gimmicks that have been made readily available to replace our painfully raped confidence and authenticity.

Status quo knows that when important goals are made to seem unobtainable, many folks will relinquish partial control of their lives to forces that claim the ability to carry them toward those goals. Hollow religion, repressive governments, industry that is motivated by greed, and all the jackals that feed on scraps from these institutions then cash in on public insecurity while the wise wait patiently for the rest of us to figure out that all we need to do is cash in our own chips.

It is ironic as hell that most of our heroes, teachers, and even gods placed all the responsibility in the world on singular humans in nearly all of their rhetoric! Most of them advised us to get to work. They did not advise us to find a politician, televangelist, or other form of middleman to do our negotiating for us.

"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

"The kingdom of heaven is within you."

"Seek and ye shall find."

This whole process of becoming the cultural image of a self instead of being our own selves shows up way too blatantly in many women that compare themselves to magazine fashion models. These "regular" women may be intelligent, good-hearted, beautiful in demeanor, and physically cute. They are most likely all-around much better people to be with than the sleek models with the glorified bodies. Nonetheless, many doors are closed to them that are left open for the slinky genetic celebrities in lingerie, alcohol, and perfume ads.

Sadly, some of the lovely women that society has labeled ordinary, regular, plain, too short, tall, thin, fat, narrow-lipped, big/small breasted, or in other ways physically imperfect will drive themselves to bizarre and at times expensive and unhealthy lengths while striving for shallow goals that are genetically impossible to reach. "I should be like that model but it is not possible for me. I am an undesirable failure," is a widespread and tragic side effect of images that commercial advertising has convinced us to define as physical perfection. Many naturally beautiful people have lost their self-respect surrendering to unnatural standards of beauty.

One strong similarity between these two scenarios is that the fashion model photos and the spiritual

model propaganda have both been airbrushed, but differences between the spiritual and fashion model scenarios are much more important than the similarities. The most important difference is that people can't get taller or change their bone structure but anyone *can* make giant strides in the direction of their spiritual role models. Becoming happier and of more benefit to those around us is always possible wherever a human mind has a serious intention to do so. Few people can become a fashion model but anyone can become a happier camper, a nicer human, and a smarter person if they exercise their own authenticity in a positive direction with diligence and determination.

All humans have ability for great accomplishment. Most of our famous wise folk never denied that they themselves were everyday people like you and me. They worked hard to develop expanded awareness, at times used a bit more courage than sense, and earned some enhanced perception—but they were born the same start-from-scratch babies as everyone else. They each had a bit of not-all-the-way-there-yet in them, just like we do.

We may consider a neighbor or work mate or our selves to be too stupid, smart-assed, fat, thin, sloppy, compulsively clean, oversexed, undersexed, straight, gay, loud, mousy, weird and unfocused, or just plain too damn lazy to accomplish any benefit for themselves or

the world. Haven't there been many saints with similar qualities? Shantideva was considered so lazy that he was called "Eat, Shit, Sleep" by other monks. He wrote some of the most revered and utilized texts in Buddhism. Saint Francis and Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche were very, very wild people by any culture's standards. JFK and MLK were unapologetic sex addicts. Many of our greatest musicians, artists, and authors made no secret of the fact that they were consistently intoxicated. Many of our greatest modern wisdom teachers initiated their spiritual advancement with LSD and other drugs.

None of these questionable actions and qualities negate the contributions that these people made. Being authentically, honestly human (while maintaining the all-important do-no-harm base station) doesn't disturb anyone's ability to grow personally or make meaningful contributions to the world. It facilitates both.

The courage to face our own inadequacies and our own potential with an equal and non-judgmental clarity is the base station of honest introspection. This honest introspection is the base station of spiritual and emotional progress. This spiritual and emotional progress is the root system of evolution.

Being authentic is a good part of what makes wise people wise. It helps them stay aware of what pieces are still missing in their goal to be whole, as well

as what trash needs to be dumped. It keeps them aware of what things need to be exercised and what things need to be exorcised.

Do you know anyone that has sacrificed being who they really are in order to fit into an externally manufactured and induced image of whom they "are supposed to be?" If so, you have a friend, as well as a planet, that is in trouble.

The popular expression "Keep It Real" may become the calling card of the 21st century.

Not There Yet

A friend of mine in America was interested to find out more about Buddhism. He wrote to me from the small town we both used to live in. I gave him directions to the meditation center there and told him the day and time to catch the best meditation for beginners.

We spoke a week later. He said, "The meditation was cool. Some of the people were very nice but some weren't nice at all! I thought they all were supposed to be Buddhists, and mellow and friendly all the time ?!?!"

I asked him, "Does everyone from your church act like Jesus all the time? People are going to these places because they want to become something. They want to be somewhere but they aren't there yet. If everyone was

already there, there wouldn't be a need for churches or temples or mosques or synagogues. There wouldn't be much need for police forces, armies, jails, or mental wards, either!"

His eyes opened wide. It never occurred to him that everyone in a Buddhist center was not a Buddha!

He is not alone in this innocent ignorance.

Many folks take it for granted that people within their own faith have, to say the least, not attained the exalted spiritual stature of their icons. They figure that falling short of the spiritual high mark is normal and that being forgiven for this comes with the package. But for some reason it is harder for many to accept it when adherents of other faiths aren't successfully living up to their own creeds.

This sort of judgment seems heaped upon Buddhists a little more than it is heaped upon followers of other faiths. Perhaps it is Buddha's serenity, his reputation for unsurpassed wisdom and peace of mind, or the mystical, exotic nature of the East that makes people think that every sheep in the flock is actually wearing Buddha's own wool.

People are just people. All of us. We may work hard in our attempt to approach perfection. We may succeed to a degree, but everyone has some days that are better than others and some moments they are not proud of.

No one is on point all the time.

Here is a bit that proves that. It is not my proudest moment. I figure you'll get a laugh from it. It is a good example of an angry person that is not there yet.

Go Fork Yourself

If you think some mythical cartoon character from someone else's ancient imagination will ride in on a white horse or fly in on a cloud at the last minute to save us from the results of things we knew all along were wrong but kept on doing anyway,
go fork yourself.

If you care when The Cowboys torture The Redskins on the football field but don't care that it happened in real life,
go fork yourself.

If these phrases are part of your life: "Ethics don't apply to business," "That's just the way it is," "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em,"
go fork yourself.

If you would step over a hundred hungry and homeless people to get to a charity benefit at the country club,
go fork yourself.

If you like Black music, clothing, slang, style, and cool, but you distrust or despise Black people whom you pass

on the street—even though you have never personally met those individuals,
go fork yourself.

If you have never given a thought to the big difference between being self-centered (in the negative sense) and being centered-in-self (in the positive sense)—well, that happens. A lot of us just don't get exposed to those kinds of notions. But if you don't think about it now,
go fork yourself.

If you work all day at a job you don't like to make a lot of money you don't need to buy things you don't want in order to impress people you don't really care about,
well, you've already forked yourself.

If you are a person who would write up a venomous bit called "Go Fork Yourself" in what would otherwise be a perfectly good book,
go fork yourself.

Here is something much nicer.

"Why Don't You Tell Your Face?"

With love and thanks to the world's favorite uncle,
Mr. Leo Buscaglia

I ask how you're doing and you tell me you're fine, but you're staring out off into space. The look in your

eye tells me something's awry. You're not sitting in your favorite place. You appear to be thinking that to speak your true feelings would surely result in disgrace. If you're feeling fine, I'll kiss my own behind. "If you're happy, you should tell your face!"

No one feels perfect all day and all night, and if you have a problem then you've got a right to share it with people who care about your plight and can help you to recover, recycle your sight.

But you don't.

You just sit there with that frown covering you. Isn't that kind of silly?

If someone sincerely asks how you are, that's a sign of your luck and their grace. They can help wash your clothes and straighten your wrinkles, pull joy through the holes in your lace. Do not just sit with your head up your butt wishing you were in some other place. Open up the damn door when friends come 'round knocking. Let them help you stabilize when you are rocking. You can't tell them anything that is quite as shocking as "If you're happy, why don't you tell your face?"

Anger

The book Chapter One and its author have been life preservers in a stormy sea for many. I am one of them.

Thank you, Stephen Gaskin.

I used to get angry a lot. Anger was more fun than depression and seemed a functional way to vent feelings that could turn ugly or dangerous if repressed. We have all had a lot of good reasons to get angry, including:

trusting someone and being betrayed.
doing something stupid (self-directed anger).
being powerless to prevent injustice.
the dog eating your work or school project.
a lover drinking up all the rent money
or sleeping with the neighbor.
being sober and having a drunken stranger
throw up on you.
having your last dollar stolen, heart broken,
a foul disrespect spoken…
The list goes on endlessly.

There's a good reason to *not* get angry that overrides all the reasons that make anger appear logical. Anger is toxic. Unlike any other type of poisoning, anger is often more of a danger to the person feeling it than it is to the person being fired at—but it is damaging to everything that is anywhere near it. Adults, children, and animals can feel someone else's anger. Anger releases chemicals in bodies and brains that can damage the well-being of participants and innocent bystanders alike.

Everything that people love about us and most of what we love about ourselves runs away when anger

shows up. Almost any other emotion we can feel is an improvement over anger and its consequences.

"He made me angry!"

It may seem that way, but it isn't really true.

Compassion, tolerance, and patience are the best substitutes for anger. Forgiveness is very productive even when approached from a selfish angle. It needn't necessarily be done for the sake of the person who has been a jackass to us. Forgiving a jackass prevents us from poisoning ourselves with anger. There is no more sensible option. Once you are already wronged, why breed more harm? A simple decision to stop the bleeding works better than any other decision.

"Holding on to anger is like drinking poison and hoping someone else will die from it." Author unknown

Appropriate countermeasures are necessary in many of the situations that stir our anger. But if these countermeasures are themselves based in anger, they are not appropriate.

This is an inside job. We can not deny the existence of anger that has risen, but we can tell anger to leave as soon we become aware of its presence. It is best to tell it politely. Getting angry at anger doesn't work well.

Calmly waving anger away may not be easy, at first. It takes some practice. Attention to our own thoughts, actions, and attitudes allows us to be aware of the anger as it is rising. Then we can practice releasing anger as

the bad choice that it is. After enough of this type of mental practice, anger will start showing up less often. When it does arrive, it won't stay as long as it used to.

As Mr. Gaskin has said, "The trick isn't to not act angry, the trick is to *not be* angry." Trying to deny or bury existent anger invites explosive failure, but simply realizing the damaging effects of anger and putting our attention on something better could succeed quickly and will succeed eventually.

Stress or exhaustion can thin out patience in even the best of humans. Anger gets hold of a person more readily when that person is stressed or exhausted. Most people try to stay as relaxed, content, and well-rested as possible. That's not good enough. We need to redefine our arbitrary and subjective definitions of "as possible." Staying as relaxed and rested *as necessary* is required.

The extra patience afforded by a relaxed mind and rested body can mellow out a volatile situation quickly. It helps us step away from life's most dangerously toxic and downright unpleasant state of mind.

One Way to Fix It

I rarely get angry anymore. Depression never was and is still not a smart option. Now I use a mechanism to escape anger.

This method works!

Using this method I am about to describe reminds me that every action I perform is my own choice and creation. It reminds me that I am not a prisoner, pawn,

or puppet on a string of anyone or anything that tries to push negativity on me. It also reminds me that I am the captain of my own emotional ship and how important it is to exercise my serious obligation to adjust my sails so they are pointed in the right direction—that direction being away from anger and toward happy sanity.

If I feel anger trying to make a disturbing entrance into my life, I immediately stop whatever else I'm doing and do a Mexican Hat Dance while tickling my own, or another consenting adult's, genitals with my left hand. (Not in public.) While doing this I whistle Beethoven's Fifth Symphony through either nostril. I like to go fishing with my free right hand, especially if there is a body of water nearby. If not, casting my line into the bath tub or living room rug works just as well.

Doing this keeps me out of trouble.

It is almost impossible to be angry in that position.

Got a better idea?

I'll bet you do.

Answers

Very few people in the world have done as large a volume of intensely stupid things as I have done. I am smarter now than I used to be but still far from being the brightest bulb in the fixture. Much of my life is spent smoking things and staring into space for hours at a time. I have watched a lot of smart people's videos and

gone to many Lama teachings and wise-folk lectures. Luckily, some of those ideas got stuck in my head, but basically I'm an average stoner.

Nonetheless, for some baffling reason, young folks have recently been asking me some deep questions and requesting personal advice. Is it because of my age? Maybe I remind them of Grandpa? After suggesting to them that they really should try to find more intelligent sources of information, I do my best to give them some semblance of an answer. I'm not worried about screwing them up. If someone is already daffy enough to ask a walking THC molecule like myself a serious question, nothing I can say will confuse them further.

Folks seeking my answers to complex personal problems and deeper questions seems ironical to me. Life certainly can be experienced. Whether it can be understood by me, them, or anyone else is questionable.

I tell most of these people that I don't think there are any answers to life except maybe that we do not control anything external to ourselves, and internally we make the whole forking thing up. Changing a personal attitude about life will change the way we experience it. Changing how we experience it will open up greater possibilities of enjoying it and helping others to do so.

The thing most folks seem to understand the least is that trying to bend life on Earth to personal desires doesn't work. As the very old expression says, it makes

a lot more sense to put shoes on your feet than it does to try to cover the whole planet in leather.

Knowing the "secret" to happiness doesn't require a rocket scientist's IQ. If you do not like what you are doing or thinking, do and think something different. Make up something better. You often can't change what goes on around you but you can change how you react to it. You can change what you do and how you feel about it. It is your head. You make the final decision as to what you house in there and how you want all that to direct your actions.

With some problems it may take effort to dig out from under less immediately recognizable, more deeply buried, more strongly-habituated thought patterns and the reactions they hide under. But it still just amounts to getting out the physical and psychological shovels and going to work.

Anyway, here are a few short ones. I hope some of my "answers" helped these people, or at least did them no harm. The same hope goes out to anyone reading them now.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE?

We can look at it this way. Let's say me and you are sitting in a room smoking a doobie on the couch. The room measures 20 x 20 feet. What makes it that size? It is the walls, isn't it? The walls actually define the size of the room—but the room is not the walls! The actual

room is the space we are sitting in. So when the house and those walls disintegrate from age or get knocked down by a hurricane or whatever—what happens to the room? The space that is the room, the place we are sitting, is still there, isn't it? No matter how good the weed is, we're not going to think that space disappeared just because the walls have. The essence and content of the room hasn't gone anywhere. Only the walls that defined the physical boundaries of that room are gone.

The situation might be the same with humans. Our body is the defining wall of the material creature that we walk around as in much the same way that walls define a room. Just as the space within those walls is what the room really is, Consciousness is what we really are. Our bodies give our material selves physical definition but more importantly they are the motorhomes that house and transport Consciousness. Our fleshy bodies carry our non-physical substance and allow it to come into play within the confines of the physical world.

Who knows exactly what "non-physical substance" and "Consciousness" mean?!? There seem to be a lot of theories about our personal consciousness and a link to a great Universal Consciousness, or whether there is even a difference between these two. Nonetheless, most people realize that there are such things. People take a nearly unanimous stance of "I know something that I don't know" regarding Consciousness and the non-physical. Most folks talking about such concepts will readily

admit that such ideas transcend language and cannot accurately be described in words. Most also agree that we are each really a much bigger deal than can fit in a body—any body.

Consciousness is everywhere, so when we lose the body we reunite with our bigger self in perhaps a similar way as the room does when it loses its walls. Both the room and consciousness reunite with the universality around them.

It may be that these notions, like many other things, are beyond a human being's ability to understand without first experiencing them. Of course, everyone will experience them eventually.

Don't worry about it! There are more important things to think about right now. You are currently alive on Earth. If you live well, you will be happy and make others around you happy here and now. If that works out, whatever happens after death won't be a problem for you.

WHY AM I FEELING OLD AND WORN AT 26 YEARS OLD?

Have you been: doing a lot of stuff you don't want to do? dealing with people you don't want to deal with? watching a lot of violent, inane, commercial bullshit on the computer and TV? working a job that does nothing for you except pay the bills and piss you off? gulping

down processed "food" that even a smart dog wouldn't touch instead of taking in healthy, tasty, sustenance at a comfortable pace? Do you feel trapped with no options and no possible relief or escape?

Nothing will age you more quickly than constantly doing things that you don't want to do while not doing the things your heart, brain, and gut truly want you to do. It's like stepping on the gas and brake at the same time. It'll burn your engine to a cinder!

You can start getting more energetic, motivated, and feeling more alive by making a conscious decision to do so. You cannot deny what parts of your life suck but you can recognize what good things you have going on. Take steps to change what you don't like about your life into what you do like by taking action on your own behalf instead of claiming to be a victim of circumstance. Define what is not working for you. Make effort daily toward either releasing or repairing it. Define what is working for you. Strengthen it daily. Feel grateful for what you do have instead of wasting energy in anger or grief about what you don't have.

It helps to know that you cannot control anything outside of yourself. This is planet Earth. There are a lot of people on it. Not all of them are nice. A few of them are dysfunctionally selfish and mean-spirited. Shit can happen even if you did nothing to deserve it. If you give up and lay down in it, you are going to smell doo-doo

forever. If you keep getting up, taking showers, and then go looking for situations with less ca-ca attached to them, things will improve. "Life isn't fair" is not a reason to give up. It is a reason to keep overcoming adversity.

When you realize that the attitude/energy/happiness you are aiming for isn't going to get shipped to you from somewhere else by Fedx or UPS, things start falling into place. You will naturally and automatically take better care of your mental and physical health. You will nurture good relationships and get away from bad ones. You won't let any crap that other people throw at you influence your happiness in any significant way.

In order to do anything about any situation, you first have to recognize it. A person has to be aware of what is going on in his or her mind before it becomes at all possible to make beneficial adjustments there. Look at your mind and not your thoughts. You are not your thoughts. You are the mind that is observing all those thoughts. Give your mind plenty of still-&-quiet time so it can move what really needs attention up to the front of the line while moving gibberish away. The more you practice doing this, the better you get at being it. The phrase "Practice doing this" means to stop, look, listen, figure, and recognize what is truly going on as opposed to what preconceived notions try to tell you is going on, and then improve the way you deal with it. Making any possible improvements you can in external situations is great but the real power is in adjusting the internal ones.

You are altogether capable of making your life more rewarding through your own mental efforts! Remind yourself of this constantly!

Be who you want to be. Sure, we all have coercive influences that can steer us in the wrong direction but the final truth is that you are the only one steering your ship. I used to want to find the guy who gave me my first shot of heroin so I could cut off his pecker and sledge hammer it through his teeth. Then I realized that I was the one who said yes to it. Considering that I kind of like my own pecker and teeth, it seems best not only to face the truth but also to be a bit more compassionate about it with myself as well as with him.

No one else has permission to "make you" feel any certain way or do a certain thing unless you give them that permission. Where I come from, trash goes into the incinerator. Put yours in there. If during the process a few self-limiting bridges in your mind and heart or the straggling memories of a few damaging relationships also burn, that fire may provide the lighting you need to get where you want to go.

Instead of being pissed off at someone else, you can substitute more productive thoughts that recognize your personal and ultimate control of your emotions, keeps those emotions comfortable to live with, and pre-

vents any errant emotions from hijacking your intelligence and your life.

Constantly and consistently recognize and remind yourself that your feelings, actions, and the results of those actions are yours to control.

Don't die of thirst while standing in the middle of a nice clean lake! Great stuff is all around and within you! Your way of seeing things may have been poisoned by some sad experience, a few bad decisions, unfortunate circumstance, or staying in an unsatisfying, frustrating rut for too long. Right now maybe you can't see all of the better possibilities, but they exist and you know it. You must know something you don't know or you wouldn't have asked the question. Whatever happened before, you now have the power of final decision as to how you are going to think, feel, and live. Have patience with the process. Appreciate all of those small positive developments as you make them part of your life. Treat every morning as if you are waking up on your birthday or New Year's Day. Recognize every new day as yet another opportunity to dump old concepts that aren't working well for you, develop new ways of being and doing that benefit yourself and others, make some better decisions that are more conducive to happiness, and act out of your own positive motivations instead of reacting to someone else's bad influence or your own. Don't take shit from yourself or anyone else.

Any difficulty that you may experience from the process of getting where you want to go is better than staying where you don't want to be. If you find yourself on the wrong road, no matter how far down that road you are, turn back. Do the work. It may seem strenuous at times but it will always be better than remaining in a shit-storm life because you were too lazy or faithless to do the work. Hang in there, Bubba! Things can improve quickly if you point yourself where you want to go and stay consistently moving in that direction. Rest is great but quitting the effort is not a good option. That puts you back where you were. You left there for a reason.

If you don't control yourself, someone else will.

HOW DO YOU MAKE MEDITATION ACTUALLY WORK?

Practice, practice, and more practice! Consistency and perseverance are the answers. If you want to be a good guitar player, practice every day. If you want to be good at basketball, play every day. If you want to be good at life, meditate and do yoga every day.

The famous classical piano player Franz Liszt said, "If I don't practice for one day, I know it. If I do not practice for two days, my teacher knows it. If I don't practice for three days, everyone knows it!"

That being said, neither should you over-amp, get all stressed out, or push yourself so hard that the circuits

in your brain start smoldering. A relaxed and consistent installation of, familiarization with, and preservation of constructive thoughts and feelings will result in much improved mental patterns and physical habits. Changes in patterns, habits, and the positive redirection that those changes effect in your brain chemistry will soon become your very close friends. They will eventually need less effort to maintain, give much love, and can remain a blessing to you forever.

THIS IS ALMOST THE END OF THIS BOOK (*except for some don't-miss-it Bonus Material after the promo). THIS IS A LAST LITTLE SINGLE PAGE REMINDER THAT ASKS YOU TO PLEASE SHARE THIS BOOK WITH OTHERS. THANKS!

FREE 5* BOOK! No strings attached.

Actually, the reviews aren't in yet. Did you like it? Reviews are welcome, if you feel like writing one. Since my first two books got dozens of five-star reviews on Amazon and this book is a much better offering, I hope it will receive solid five-star reviews as well.

The book is yours free! I will not be sending it off to corporate commercial publishing houses or dealing with self-publishing's promotion and distribution. I trust

the public more than I trust these other avenues. So here you have it, a possible masterpiece at no charge. That doesn't happen every day!

If you like what you have read, please consider helping this effort in these two very simple ways:

1—Please forward this book through your mailing lists and all social networks possible. At the least, please send it to a few receptive friends. There is content within that many people will be entertained by and others will find helpful—and I need the exposure. Circulation is the most essential thing anyone can do to help.

2—If you feel so inclined, send a contribution to keep a starving (sometimes literally!) artist going. Any amount helps and can be sent to the Fearless Puppy account at Community Bank NA, 205 Main Street, Brattleboro, Vermont, 05301, USA. My income otherwise totals $445 a month of Social Security money.

Questions? If so, jahbuddha13@hotmail.com is the address. I'll answer as many emails as possible.

Thanks so very much for your kindness, attention, and for taking the ride with me—and thanks very much for passing it on.

Please stay well, Tenzin (Doug Ten Rose)

OTHER BOOKS BY THIS AUTHOR

ALL AUTHOR PROFITS SPONSOR WISDOM PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR EFFORTS

"Once you accept the universe as being something expanding into an infinite nothing which is something, wearing stripes with plaid is easy." Albert Einstein

Reincarnation Through Common Sense is a book of stripes and plaid in the most entertaining sense of Einstein's words. Westerners have written many books about living in Asian temples. None are like this true story.

The rural Buddhist Monks and Nuns of a forest temple in Asia adopt a very troubled soul from Brooklyn, New York. He can't speak the language. No one there speaks English. He is penniless, has no intention of studying spiritual discipline, and is amusingly psychotic. This author is not a theology student! He is nonetheless given access to the ancient roots and spiritual wings that define the Wisdom Professionals who have rescued him. He redefines life and reports the details in a manner so intimate and natural that you'll think you are having coffee on a barstool in the temple with him. You may laugh a lot on your way to Nirvana! You may say "Ouch!" a few times, too.

Magic is redefined as objective reality and common sense. Spirit is presented as a functional friend, without the fairy dust. Moods run from adventurous psychosis through enlightened bliss as writing styles run through ancient prose to sharp modern internal rhyme. The main character's life runs through death into reincarnation without ever leaving his body—and he describes this process in vivid terms and living color.

This down to earth treatment gives a clear view in simple terms of truths that we more often find fossilized within concretized symbols beneath rusting metaphor. For an experience unique in comedic drama, spirituality, adventure, and sheer creativity, buy and read

Reincarnation Through Common Sense $21 in print

e-book $5.75 ISBN#978-0-692-01952-8

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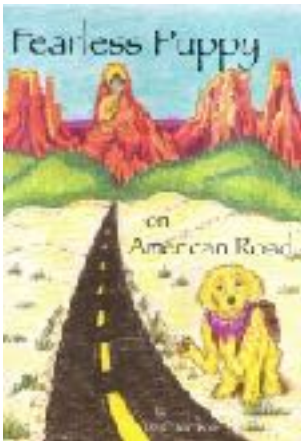

Fearless Puppy on American Road This amazing (mostly) true story reads like a fantasy. Fearless Puppy is a transfictional self-help book. It is both comedic and dramatic—a butt-kicking, page-turning adventure story that makes deep spiritual impressions.

Within this book you will meet several

saintly Tibetan Lamas. You will also meet a man who is his own uncle, specialists in smoke, mirrors, and invisibility, spirited sex, oxygen orgasms, heavenly Hell's Angels, phony preachers, domestic violence/domestic solutions, racist killers in America, Canadian race wars, Native American wise men, a bit of Christian ethics and Jewish ritual, angelic witches, benevolent heroin addicts, magical birds, an all-lesbian band playing a rock concert for the deaf, the musician raised by multi-ethnic golden-hearted prostitutes, martial artists battling neo-Nazis, the modern-day Robin Hood, and many other strangely wonderful people.

Buckle your seatbelt tightly, take a deep breath, and enjoy the ride. Fearless Puppy runs on rocket fuel!

*Please forward this through your contact and friend lists, and to anyone you think might be interested. Help us raise funds through book sales to sponsor Wisdom Professionals. Your effort is important! Thank you.

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Doug "Ten" Rose may be the biggest smartass as well as one of the most entertaining survivors of the hitchhiking adventurers that used to cover America's highways. He is the author of *Fearless Puppy on American Road* and *Reincarnation Through Common Sense.* He has survived heroin addiction and death and is a graduate of over a hundred

thousand miles of travel without ever driving a car, owning a phone, or having a bank account. Ten Rose and his work are a vibrant part of the present and future as well as an essential remnant of a vanishing breed.

About the Author

See the About the Author and Media sections at www.fearlesspuppy.info

BONUS MATERIAL

A few friends have seen this section already. All of them said it was "well-written," whatever that means. Other comments ranged from "too esoteric, too political, too opinionated, redundant/repetitive, caustic in places, preachy in spots, good stuff but it belongs in a different book" and "a little too pie-in-the-sky" all the way to "brilliant, electrifying in spots, loved it, it's about time someone said it so plainly and clearly, inspiring, made me think" and one person said that it "helped me to change for the better."

I think it may be the most important few pages in the book and I think you will enjoy it—but even if a million people are disappointed and a few are repulsed by this section, if just one more person says it "helped me to change for the better," I will be very happy to have included it here.

Quotes That Mean Something

"When I do good, I feel good. When I do bad, I feel bad. That's my religion." **Abraham Lincoln**

"What has become of the Golden Rule? It exists, it continues to sparkle, and is well taken care of. It is Exhibit A in the Church's assets, and we pull it out each Sunday and give it an airing...It is strictly religious furniture, like an acolyte, or a contribution-plate, or any of those things. It is never intruded into business." **Mark Twain**

"Noah and a few like him perceived that the continent was indeed finite, and that venal office-holders, and legislators in particular, could be persuaded to toss great hunks of it up for grabs, and to toss them in a way as to have them land where Noah and his kind were standing. Thus did a handful of rapacious citizens come to control all that was worth controlling in America. Thus was the savage and stupid and entirely inappropriate and un-

necessary and humorless American class system created. Honest, industrious, and peaceful citizens were classed as bloodsuckers if they asked to be paid a living wage. And they saw that praise was reserved henceforth for those who devised ways of getting paid enormously for committing crimes against which no law had been passed. Thus did the American dream turn belly up, turn green, bob to the scummy surface of cupidity unlimited, fill with gas, and go *bang* in the noonday sun." **Kurt Vonnegut Jr. from *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater***

"They don't want people who are smart enough to sit around the kitchen table and figure out just how badly they are getting fucked by a system that threw them overboard thirty years ago. They want people who are just smart enough to run the machines and do the paperwork, and just dumb enough to passively accept all the increasingly shitty jobs with the less pay, reduced benefits, the end of overtime—and the vanishing pension that disappears the minute you come to collect it. And now they're coming for your Social Security. They want your retirement money. They want it back so they can give it to their criminal Wall Street friends. And you know what? They'll get it! They'll get it all. They count on the fact that Americans will remain willfully ignorant." **The prophetic Mr. George Carlin**

"It's just a ride. We can change it any time we want. It's just a choice. No effort, no work, no job, no savings of money—a choice, right now, between fear and love. The eyes of fear want you to put bigger locks on your door, buy guns, close yourself off. The eyes of love instead see all of us as one. Here is what we can do to make this world a better ride. Take all the money we spend on weapons every year and use it to feed and clothe the poor of the world. There will be enough to help every person in the world, not one left out—and we can explore space, both inner and outer, together, in peace." **Bill Hicks**

"Try to learn to breathe deeply, really taste food when you eat, and when you sleep to really sleep. Try as much as possible to be wholly alive with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell. And when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough." **William Saroyan**

"Don't worry about how much time you've wasted in the past— begin to practice now. What you do from now on is more important. I personally have many pains, but if I do not fixate on them, if I meditate, I do not feel them. If you want to become free of suffering, you must change your mind, not your body. We have to purify our own minds. We should not insult each other, but rather uphold love and compassion. We must be

compassionate toward all, especially toward those with inferior wisdom. It is through negative thoughts about others that you are deceived. Everyone is a buddha." **H.E. Garchen Rinpoche**

"It is a bit embarrassing to have been concerned with the human problem all one's life and find at the end that one has no more to offer by way of advice than *try to be a little kinder."* **Aldous Huxley**

"To live only for some future goal is shallow. It's the sides of the mountain that sustain life, not the top." **Robert M. Pirsig**

"This is my creed: For man, the vast marvel is to be alive. For man as for flower and beast and bird the supreme triumph is to be most vividly, most perfectly alive. Whatever the unborn and the dead may know they cannot know the beauty, the marvel of being alive in the flesh. The dead may look after the afterward. But the magnificent here and now of life in the flesh is ours alone, and ours for only a time. We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh and part of the living incarnate cosmos." **D.H. Lawrence**

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out that the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood. He strives valiantly, errs and comes up short again and again, because there is not effort without error or shortcomings, but he actually strives to do the deed; he knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion. he spends himself in a worthy cause. At best, he knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat." **Teddy Roosevelt**

"We are social animals. We have to live within society. So it is very necessary to have the right kind of relation with and attitude toward the society."

"Please pay more attention about inner value. That is the ultimate source of happiness and success for life." **The Dalai Lama**

"You can't know wisdom, you have to *be* it." **Ram Dass**

"We may look to saints and role models for inspiration, but we are the ones who make our own effort and our

own progress. We may lean on heroes and deities but the person whose hurdle it is must always take the final and decisive leap over that hurdle. Our intelligently brave attempts will eventually result in successful leaps. Successful challenging leaps will eventually build enough well-earned strength to eliminate fragility."
Tenzin Kharma Trinley

"We do not want churches because they will teach us to argue about God." **Chief Joseph**

"The Zen expression 'Kill the Buddha' means to kill any concept of the Buddha as something apart from yourself. To kill the Buddha is to be the Buddha."
Peter Matthiessen

"There is no reality except the one contained within us. That is why so many people live such an unreal life. They take images outside them for reality and never allow the world within to assert itself."
Hermann Hesse

"Sustaining a working connection with power takes an unswayable conscious decision to do so that is followed by consistent effort on behalf of that decision. Getting high and seeing God is lovely, but the drugs wear off. Euphoric highs from religious rituals wear off too.

Sustained effort does not." **Tenzin Kharma Trinley**

"One day it will have to be officially admitted that what we have christened reality is an even greater illusion than the world of dreams." **Salvadore Dali**

"For a forest to be green, each tree must be green." **Maharishi Mahesh Yogi**

How To Love A Sociopath And Why It Is So Important To Do So

Some of us may have an extra drink or smoke more than what is a sensible amount of weed now and then. Others may fudge a number here or there on our taxes. We've all both literally and figuratively farted in public at least once in our lives. No one is perfect. That's part of being human.

Each of us know people that we think are further away from perfect than we are. That also seems to be part of being human.

Some folks make their imperfections more obvious than others by voicing what are considered regressive, or impractically progressive, opinions. Many of the more regressively-minded folks turn a blind eye to the cruelty and consequences of their personal as well their national actions. Several of them hate people they have never met. Many progressively-minded folks turn a

blind eye to the realities of current circumstance. They insist that Earth turn itself into Utopia overnight. Some display schizophrenic contradiction by hating Haters.

This all happens in mind-bending contrast to the great personal kindness and generosity that these same people on both sides of the breach often show to friends and family!

My progressive friends ask me "How can you hang out with "psycho-patriots?" What common ground could you have with people whose attitudes resemble those of witch burners centuries ago!"

I have answers for them.

The common ground I have with friends of what is often called a regressive mind set is the same common ground I have with you. We are all human. We all want, and we all have the right, to be free from unnecessary suffering. Recognition and respect of the common desire for happiness is humanity's directional signal. It points toward global sanity. We can honor this common ground by making an effort to be as kind to everyone as we are to ourselves. "Everyone" includes folks we think are politically insane. Kind doesn't mean compliant. It means kind.

Many otherwise wonderful people are negatively programmed, brainwashed, damaged, and shaped since birth. These people once seemed evil to me. They now appear lit up with the same injured glow too often seen

on the faces of abused children. We do not throw our suffering children away. We help them to get as well as they will allow themselves to be.

The nonsense that influences an innocent child to become a regressive or an impractically progressive adult ranges from being as relatively harmless as the Santa Claus and Tooth Fairy myths all the way to fatal notions that God wants us to kill people on his behalf or that Nature is here to be dominated by humans. This nonsense has been reinforced over many generations, as well as during each individual's lifetime, by a stream of constantly hypnotic misinformation.

Many folks understandably lack sensitivity to the suffering of their fellow humans. They have never been brutalized, or hungry and homeless, had bombs dropped on their city, or suffered addiction. They don't have the type of knowledge or experience that compassion and empathy come from—and they don't want it! And who can blame them?! No one wants to feel bad. Most folks would rather stay willfully ignorant of the suffering of others, even if it means swallowing bullshit explanations of why that suffering happens. We often go to great lengths, be they conscious or subconscious, to white-wash over sympathetic pain and guilt.

Denial of the painful moral inconveniences that are part of human reality has become a prime directive for many of us. Denying our dilemmas is convenient in

the short run but it kills any chance of finding solutions in the long run. It is much more comfortable to wear an inexpensive shirt if you block out or stay ignorant of the fact that the garment was produced by slave labor. It is much easier to enjoy gasoline-abundant automobile road trips if you convince yourself (or allow media-made "popular consensus" to convince you) that dropping bombs on the innocent civilians in oil-pimping countries is an effort to liberate victims of dictatorship.

Utilizing blurry amendments to objective reality and a logic-of-convenience allows for bending truth into shapes that fit our comfort zone. Much like everything else we delude ourselves with, it all makes perfect sense once you've bought the lie.

These types of moral malfunctions can be resolved with a little compassionate tactical adjustment but if they are not given attention, they grow into cultural cancers that can painfully chew up a society and crap it into history's sewer system.

How can a person who thinks in terms of us/them be helped to see *The Big We*? How can we communicate the realization that both Yankee fans and Red Sox fans, conservatives and liberals, progressives and regressives, strangers, friends, and even enemies all equally deserve to enjoy happiness and a release from any unnecessary suffering? What can we say that will make someone else

understand that happiness is more important than they think it is because almost no one kills while they laugh? How do we get folks to drop a little blind believing and exchange it for some open-eyed seeing? How do we help fellow humans to get past the fear, ignorance, and cultural hypnosis that so often control their attitudes and actions?

Maybe we can't. If we can, kindness and honesty presented in respectful, non-combative forms are the answers. Hatred and fear can't survive long-term doses of truth and love. These doses are most potent during the individual moments when we are actually honest and loving with each other, but the more profound and lasting effects of these moments require time to solidify in the hearts and minds of our regressive friends. Some valuable logic that practical, compassionate regressive folks may carry will also take time to solidify in the hearts and minds of many stubborn folks who label themselves progressive.

No one can change anyone else's mind for them but we can open new doorways of thought for each other.

The presentation of new ideas will rarely rate any attention from a listener unless it is done without any condescension or defensiveness. Any lack of respect for those we are speaking with; any anger, frustration, harshness or screaming feeds the counterproductive fire. Ignorance thrives on battlegrounds. Evidence needs to

be presented in a confident but polite way and with a genuine concern for the person you are speaking with as well as the people you are speaking about. Jokes that engage rather than insult can help!

Other valuable tools besides humor are available. There is plenty of evidence that might impress deluded brethren. It would be easy to show them where many respected public figures that they trust and admire have spoken against bigotry, war, impracticality, corruption, and the like. The right historical quote can relate well to present-day situations and make a big impact.

"Regardless of the source, any phrase of proven truth that serves a noble purpose should speak its truth and serve its purpose in a fashion that is amenable enough to others so that they pay attention to the content."

OK, I just made that one up, but in this modern age of search engines it is easy to find a quote that will fit almost any occasion.

All human beings have conditioned and therefore at least partially clouded minds. Communicating clear alternative points of view to a partially fossilized mind may require months, years, or generations. It can seem as frustrating as the proverbial process of shoveling shit against the tide but there is no better choice of action. Explaining the blatant facts of global warming or the political as well as moral disadvantages of coldly killing

civilians to some-one holding on to concretized beliefs to the contrary can leave us feeling like we are trying to kick water uphill.

Changes don't happen as or when we want them to. You can't take a cake out of the oven before it is done. Compassionately logical realities only ripen and surface in someone else's mind when that person is ready to accept them—the same as they do in your mind or mine. If we do not keep our brains, hearts, patience, kindness, determination, internal strength, love, respect, and common courtesy to the grindstone, improvements will not grow up within (ourselves or) others.

It took a long time for a strong enough attitude to spread through the American and French psyches in the 1700s before American colonists fired the first shot and Marie Antoinette had her date with the guillotine. Those gunshots and guillotines don't work any more.

Violence, even when that violence is backed by righteous indignation, is no longer an option in our age of nuclear weaponry—but boldly stating a logical case for decency, as Thomas Jefferson, Rousseau, and many others did for decades before their revolutions ripened, will never go out of style. Killing the greed in people makes more sense than killing people.

The results of the all too popular "fight fire with fire" mentality are what needs repair! Fighting fire with fire has never worked. It produces bigger fires sparked by more advanced arsonists. Ask any Fireman. You

fight fire with water. The flames lose oxygen and then suffocate out of existence. Sanity and honesty presented with patience and kindness can suck the oxygen out of fear and ignorance. They can repair the damage from traumatic experience and devastating misinformation.

Modern literal interpretations of things that were written long ago as symbolic references can be a severe test of anyone's patience—and a severe test of anyone's ability to successfully communicate sane logic. It can be mind-warping to attempt to speak sensibly with folks who hold a firm materialistic belief in a white-skinned, human-shaped, sky-dwelling God that is always on their side, loves America more than other countries, created Earth in only six 24-hour days, asked penguins to toodle halfway up the globe in order to catch Noah's boat ride, and through an adulterous affair with a virgin had a boy child that liked to ride around on dinosaurs.

I have heard folks defend the practice of locking children in cages and others defend police who killed a man although his weaponless arms were already pinned to the ground. I have heard impractical progressives say that we don't need police at all! Many folks of almost every political leaning defend the needless deaths of both innocent foreign civilians and American soldiers. Some people say that folks with a different imaginary

friend than they have are doomed to spend eternity in a flaming hell, that certain ethnicities are uncivilized and savage people that deserve abuse, and that all of our hungry and homeless people have created the plight they suffer. Many other people deny that an obscenely irresponsible and blatantly greedy industrialization has brutally damaged our environment. Many people don't know that they regularly eat foods containing a lot more petroleum and processed fillers than nutrition—or that such a diet is responsible for many of the serious health epidemics faced by the Western world.

People shamelessly announce so many strange and senseless things to rationalize their own fears, selfishness, and human frailty that it gets too easy for me to agree with the bumper stickers that say, "If Jesus was here, he'd slap the shit out of you" or "God must have had a sharp stick up his almighty ass when he created you." On a really bad day, it gets uncomfortably easy to think, "If someone would just bury this idiot in the hills, at least there would be one less idiot."

But I very quickly remember that:

1—becoming an asshole myself won't help.

2—truth, intelligence, patience, and real compassion are the only things that will help.

3—right now, the only things that matter are the things that will help.

Speaking sensibly to people who make little sense is what desperately needs to be done with patient smiles and long-term goals in mind! It makes more sense and is more accurate to think in terms of evolutions rather than in terms of revolutions. Anything that seems to happen spontaneously has actually been on a very long trail of grind-it-out activity that leads up to that event. Using our kinder, more helpful, more noble qualities while we are "grinding it out" allows for constructive communication with others. It also allows the best chance of keeping ourselves in tow!

Everything and everyone benefits when we stay loyal to our own goodness.

Being loyal to my own goodness protects me from being an angry jackass and lashing out at others, or myself. It answers the question, "Do I really want to help fix the situation or am I happy to just whine and moan about how stupid half the population is while the whole place goes down the crapper?"

Cleaning Up The Ca-ca

What can an individual do? Where does any real improvement start? Everyone's answer will be different but one thing is sure. Things work from the inside out, not from the outside in. Any real change takes place first

within individuals and later spreads to their institutions and culture.

"The only devils in this world are the ones that run around in our own hearts. It is there that all our battles should be fought." **The Mahatma Gandhi**

I am adjusting my attitude to coordinate with the possible survival of our species and the production of a better world. My individual drop needs to be cleaned for the whole ocean's sake as well as my own. I work on this every day.

This process, so far, has been similar to arriving at home after work to find out that a pipe burst on its way to the septic tank. I am standing in the bathroom, knee deep in metaphorical raw sewerage. On some days, neck deep. Psychological, spiritual, and philosophical as.well as informational and emotional sludge are bonded to my reality by a shit-load (excuse me) of bad conditioning in the form of lies that have been disguised as fact and an attitude of "that's just the way it is." I have spent my life digesting garbage cloaked as truth without knowing there were options. Not all of it was garbage! Some of the information was very good, but a lot of nonsense has also woven itself into our lives. There is no one to blame! The folks that fed us the lies all had similar lies fed to them. Metaphorical sewerage is as dangerous to ignore as any physically real, disease-carrying sub-

stance. Some of it stinks just as badly too. What can be done about it?

It has to be cleaned up, of course. The flow of this infectious mental programming needs to be shut off at its source. Change the channel. Leave the situation. Do not take to heart or internalize destructive, prejudicial attitudes and information.

After we recognize the problem and stop the flow at its source, the broken pipe needs to be either repaired or replaced. If more nasty material leaks through that same weak spot in the pipes later, it will mean starting repairs all over again and can cause damage to the whole house.

It may be smart to call in a professional. Good teachers help in such situations (as can a good plumber in a less metaphorical situation). There is an important difference between good teachers and good plumbers. Plumbers do the job for you. Teachers show you how to do the job yourself. You will not find very many psycho-spiritual plumbers. You will find many psycho-spiritual teachers. Ask them for a set of tools. Those tools will be valuable allies in fixing the cultural hole where mental toxins leak into our reality.

Psycho-spiritual home repair/improvement projects are not rocket science! They have been going on for-

ever. Much simpler folks than we are have accomplished them. This is the place where education meets evolution.

If I can train a puppy to use newspapers or a kitten to use the litter box, I can train my own little mind to properly rid itself of waste products.

Once the toxic flow is stopped and pipe damage is repaired, it is time to get out the mop and bucket. Some folks would rather do all the personal cleaning by them selves. Some call a cleaning crew. Most people do at least a little of both.

My friends and I like to help each other clean the garbage out of our brains in the same spirit that we help each other move a couch.

Some friends show up. Some do not. This can help you find out who your real friends are.

Many folks prefer the help of teachers or therapists. But whether you have a house full of friends, a troop of therapists, or a few dozen teachers, no one else is ever responsible for guaranteeing your successful cleanup. It is strictly a personal responsibility, in the end. If you have help in the middle, you are lucky.

Once everything is well fumigated and thoroughly cleaned, the source of ca-ca is shut off, and the hole in the pipe is patched up or the pipe replaced, it is time to fix and repaint the wall that had to be broken through in order to access the problem. Why not use the higher

grade sheetrock and slap on that nicer paint? Is there something you have always wanted to do, learn, or be? Isn't it something you could make happen once the old dirt, scars, cracks, obstacles, and holes in life are dealt with, cleaned up, and repaired?

With the brain cleaning in progress, better options become obvious and available. Many suspect attitudes start to change as we adjust toward a constructive type of cooperation and away from the destructive version of competition.

The destructively self-cherishing puppeteers that have been pulling our collective strings by way of their consistent, hypnotic propaganda make up a powerful but very slim fraction of our population. Their physical, mental, and financial bullying cannot prevail against a united public whose members share mutually beneficial motives and goals. A sociopathic minority that considers profits more important than the people who labor to provide them with those profits will vanish—*if we each turn our complaints into unshakable practical commitments and then act upon those commitments to produce constructive changes that bring about universally beneficial results*. We might express this same idea in Brooklyn by saying that our world needs to move toward getting its head out of its own ass and that cannot be accomplished unless each of us, individually, move as far as we can toward that same goal.

A lot of the internal work mentioned above can be done in one very fluid, if esoteric, step. Doing enough Vipassana meditation can loosen up bio-psychologically knotted energy and allow it to percolate to the surface.

It is important to turn any new understandings into constructive action as soon as we can after reaching them. It is equally important to consistently and also continuously govern ourselves by an iron, unshakable commitment to them. This may not be so difficult! A few simple things make sense. If they are adhered to in any serious way, these few simple things may be enough!

1) Wherever there is a choice—be nice. This option is almost always available.

2) The practice of persecuting scapegoats needs to be replaced by the practice of finding and instituting real solutions to problems.

3) Individuals need to share the responsibility of solving community and global problems while solving their own personal ones.

4) The words "cooperation" and "collaboration" need to gain the same importance that the word "competition" now enjoys.

5) The word "happiness" needs to be sanely redefined. A heroin addict may think himself "happy" after he stabs a person and robs enough of their money for a shot. A soldier may feel happy after murdering a civilian. A politician may be happy counting the bribe money he made by allowing corporate interests to destroy a river.

Functional happiness that isn't accomplished at the expense of other living things must gain dominion over the damaging interpretations of happiness that so many folks now use. If your happiness happens at someone else's drastic expense, it needs to be redirected.

Perhaps the most important part of this process is to keep consistently feeding oneself the right stuff. If there is enough positive, functional reinforcement practiced, there is no room for the negative to enter. That pipe won't burst again if given daily, diligent maintenance.

"… purifying the obscurations of our mind is a little bit like taking care of our house. If we clean and pick up a little every day, things will look pretty good all the time. If we only clean and pick up every few weeks, our place will look messy. If we are diligent with our efforts, there is no doubt that we will get results… and will begin to have more positive things happen to us. When our body or clothes get dirty we have obvious ways to clean them. But if our mental body is dirty, we have to find methods that are effective…but not much will happen with a

method of just wishing and hoping. Without sincere efforts at purification, Samsara (suffering) will go on and on for us." Lama Karma Rinchen

In many of us, good intentions have always been there waiting for the courage of our convictions to make a real commitment to them. When we back up our best hopes, aspirations, and intentions with a courageous conviction, we earn the ability to repair damage caused by the less likable qualities of humanity. All of status quo's errant positions will change in accordance with an improved strength of character and integrity on the part of the citizen majority.

Would You Rather Be a Finger or Part of a Hand?/ Make Your Self Comfortable

Waiting for God or Congress to fix things won't work. The Collective Human Attitude cannot change until the attitudes of the individuals composing it do. This has been proven many times.

Many great masters have come and gone. We may immortalize their words and images but the real purpose of their teachings was to inspire us toward functional application of those words in all our real-life situations. Much of humanity seems to have lost that

functional application part more easily than a teardrop gets lost in the rain.

Why?

It may be true that some people are just too damn lazy to change their minds. The bigger problem is that many of us are too stressed out, distracted, and preoccupied to concentrate on the process of making this a truly better life for ourselves, and a better world for everyone. Inhumane stress levels numb many of us into surviving under comfortably fossilized lies instead of living with truths that might be disturbing in the very short run, but will save us in the long run.

The inhumane stress levels that modern people suffer are usually fueled by just two pieces of drastic misinformation. Most of us have been brutally misled regarding the qualities that define our most critical and meaningful human directions—the purpose of life and the meaning of success.

A more functional definition and a consistent practice of these terms are necessary in order for us to maintain peace and decency on an individual level. Only after plenty of that has been accomplished can peace and decency arrive, survive, and thrive at a community, national, or planetary level.

The bigger masterpiece can only be painted by combining the brush strokes that make up all our little self-portraits.

All of the great teachers, religions, and spiritual traditions seem nearly unanimous about their on-paper notions of the terms "purpose of life" and "success." Their notions—unlike the general public's questionable and constantly wavering standards for doing Earthly business—usually nail it. Of course, the big problem is the "on-paper" part. Installing these notions from the on-paper version into actual public practice seems to be a rare happening among humans.

The purpose of life is to not only achieve health, love, and happiness but also to assist whatever else is alive to do the same. Personal success is defined as developing the individual decency and courage to promote that universal well-being, and building the skillful means to turn that brilliant motivation into the actions that are realistically helpful to self and others.

No One can save humanity now. Salvation has been circling the planet for a long time. It has no place to land! We can provide that landing pad by moving toward what we are asking for, by actually becoming dynamic peace and cooperation, and by leaving a lot of old bullshit behind.

It can be difficult for a person to independently redirect his or her focus. Millennia of long-outdated conditioning and our present-day hypnosis by modern media only scratch the surface of what needs to be overcome. But we have to start somewhere.

The best place to start may be to simply make ourselves comfortable with our selves. It is a sad fact that pressures of life in our modern world make being uncomfortable in one's own skin a taken-for-granted condition. This condition seems to be an insurmountable obstacle to so many people.

There are very few insurmountable obstacles in life. What may seem like insurmountable obstacles at first are more often just challenges. We can victoriously rise above almost any challenge by making a consistent, stable, relaxed, focused, determined effort to do so. This is true whether the challenge comes from the darkest corners of the world—or the darkest corners of our own minds.

"There are no problems. Only solutions." John Lennon

We

We cannot simply lay all the responsibility for our damaged world upon "leaders." Pointing fingers at other behind-the-scenes hustlers, megalomaniacs, and morally

bankrupt shills that market evil for the sake of their own personal gain doesn't tell the whole story either.

You and I unwittingly bought into it all. We didn't stay awake enough to reject bullshit's influence.

At this point, it doesn't matter who co-opted our happiness, the religions, the Constitution, and Rock 'n' Roll. It is not important to blame and punish those who twisted all these sacred concepts into marketing and propaganda tools. Blaming and punishing will not help and, at the risk of being repetitive, the only things that matter now are the things that help. Fixing problems and having them stay fixed is the most important part of justice.

Even the most devout non-believer knows that karma is real and what goes around, comes around. Let karma do its job on those whom it sees fit to reprimand! If we turn ourselves evil in order to punish evil, then the cycle goes on forever. We would do best to forgive these deluded people, even the most toxic and murderous among them, as being a warped product of their times. If instead of showing anger we help them steer toward a more sensibly compassionate mindset, we can decrease the odds of backlash and relapse. That will help. If we figure out how the greed and lust for power of the very few has been able to manipulate humanity for so long, that may also help. Doing something constructive, and humane, and sensible about it will definitely help!

Having forgiven our most obscene trespassers, we can then afford the luxury of forgiving ourselves. A few very nasty people could not have damaged the world unless the rest of us gave them permission to do so. Self-consumed human vipers have many ways to control without majority approval—but they can do nothing without majority compliance.

There is another, more important, reason to forgive the blatantly guilty than gaining our own forgiveness by association. History proves that defeating one enemy gives rise to another whereas *involving* a former enemy as a co-worker, partner, and friend can be very successful. Japan and America now have economic and cultural ties that weld them together. France and Germany have a similar alliance. The chances of winning the lottery are better than the chances of ever seeing America and Japan go to war with each other again. Both Hitler and Hirohito are long gone. There is very little trace of their agendas left in Germany and Japan. The same is true of so many other villains.

What political agendas have survived and why? The agendas that looked to conquer and subject have never survived. All previous empires have fallen. We can be sure that similar forces currently in power will not survive either.

Flowing rivers may take a long time to do so but they will eventually cut through solid rock. Non-white

people and women can now vote in America. Formerly abused colonies, including Gandhi's India and nearly all of Africa, are now independent nations. In a cold world where charity is often confused with weakness, Mother Teresa's concern for the less fortunate was recognized as saintly activity even by the hardest hearts. Most people, regardless of political leanings, have lovingly accepted the Tibetan nation-in-exile. People of nearly all nations have great respect for the Dalai Lama's platform of non-violent resistance and compassion-based ethics.

How and why do such philosophical and political agendas succeed and remain indestructible in the face of the great odds against them? It is because the only agendas that can achieve immortality are the ones that plan an inclusive mutual benefit for everyone, *including* enemies. Not even the cold-blooded murder of saintly leaders can kill a process that helps all and harms none.

Christ, Buddha, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Susan B. Anthony, The Dalai Lama, John Lennon, and anyone else that has ever had lasting positive influence on the world has worked toward equal dignity for everyone while purposely inflicting damage on no one. They were strong and intelligent enough to love everyone, even their enemies. They knew that compassion is medicinal.

Compassion turns enemies into allies.

Our civilization has some wonderful assets. We can make sure those survive while the damaging liabilities are being repaired.

Please don't wait for a president, congress, captain of industry, parliament, Jesus, Buddha, Allah, Jehovah, Shiva, Thor, Aphrodite, or anyone else to do it for you.

Please help produce the positive thoughts, feelings, and actions—the causes—that will yield joyful, sane, and universally beneficial effects.

Any obstacles in front of us cannot survive the awesome power of the forces that stand behind us once we couple those forces with all the incredible abilities that, believe it or not, are waiting right within our own minds. Potent internal abilities are empowered as soon as they are recognized. They gain strength as they are given consistent attention. When you commit to them, they commit to you.

Human commitment bends history.

When warmongers grow as compliant with peaceful goals as so many of our peaceful citizens have been with the warmongering, the effort toward planet-wide sanity will become a cooperative voice of reason. When we get to that point, everyone wins.

We all need to live together on this rock. All of our fellow humans need and rightly deserve the opportunity to be happy—for our sakes as much as for theirs!

Please remember to be nice to yourself. You are one of those fellow humans.

"There is no need for temples, no need for complicated philosophy.
Our own brain, our own heart, is our temple.
The philosophy is kindness."
The Dalai Lama

"We don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory." **Howard Zinn**

OK, just one more time. If it wasn't important, I wouldn't bother you with it.
Thanks for whatever you can do. See you in the next book!

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Thanks very much for your kindness and attention. I hope you have enjoyed reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it for you.

Thanks for reading and for passing it on.

Please stay well. Love, Tenzin (Doug Ten Rose)