



Overcome  
personal  
challenges  
and  
obstacles to  
achieve a  
higher level  
of spiritual  
awareness.

Cristy

# THE TAO OF THE SPIRITUAL WARRIOR

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# The Tao of the Spiritual Warrior

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*Spiritual Warrior*

## The Tao of the Spiritual Warrior

OVERCOME PERSONAL CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVE A HIGHER LEVEL OF SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

A spiritual warrior is someone who strives to live in harmony with the natural world and to cultivate inner peace and balance. The term has been used in various spiritual and religious contexts to describe those dedicated to personal transformation and living a higher purpose. The emphasis is on the importance of living in accordance with the natural flow of the universe, known as the Tao. Tao (also spelled Dao) is a concept in Chinese philosophy that translates to "way" or "path." It refers to the natural way in which things work in the universe. This means letting go of the ego and the desire for control, and instead allowing oneself to be guided by the natural rhythms of the world. Ego is a Latin word that refers to a person's sense of self-esteem or self-importance. It is a psychological term that describes an individual's belief in their own abilities, importance, and achievements.

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To achieve this state of spiritual harmony, one must cultivate certain virtues, such as humility, compassion, and inner peace. The spiritual warrior must also be willing to let go of attachments and ego-driven desires, and to embrace a life of simplicity and mindfulness.

In addition to these internal practices, the spiritual warrior emphasizes the importance of living in harmony with others and with the external, natural world. This means treating others with kindness and respect, taking care of the environment, and caring for all living beings.

By following this path of virtue and harmony, the spiritual warrior looks to achieve a state of enlightenment and inner fulfillment.

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*The Tao of the warrior is living by design, not by accident.*

—Dan Millman

As a spiritual warrior, you are purposeful and intentional in your actions. Instead of simply reacting to circumstances or going through life by accident, you are guided by a clear set of principles and values, and you make conscious and deliberate choices to live in alignment with them. Through living by design rather than by accident, you can navigate the challenges and opportunities of life with greater clarity and purpose.

A spiritual warrior is dedicated to the pursuit of spiritual growth and development. This means that you must work to overcome personal challenges and obstacles to achieve a higher level of spiritual awareness. You may also engage in spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, and self-reflection.

As a spiritual warrior, you are mentally and emotionally resilient, and willing to confront and overcome obstacles and challenges to grow and evolve spiritually. You are also committed to living in accordance with your spiritual beliefs and values, and willing to defend and protect them against external threats or challenges. In essence, you are dedicated to personal growth and development, both on a spiritual level and in other areas of life. Being a spiritual warrior is about striving to become the best version of yourself.

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If these concepts do not currently describe or resonate with you, you need to better understand the principles you must adhere to put you on the right path—the way of the spiritual warrior.

### In the Beginning

As children, our brains are still developing, and we have limited cognitive abilities compared to adults. At this young age, we don't yet have the ability to think critically or evaluate information, making us more susceptible to indoctrination. Because of this, it is important for adults to provide children with accurate and balanced information, and to encourage critical and independent thinking skills from an early age. This can help prevent children from being easily swayed by biased or misleading information as they grow older.

Indoctrination is the process of teaching someone to accept a set of beliefs or values, or presenting ideas as absolute truths, without any opportunity for questioning or critical thinking. For children, indoctrination can occur when parents, teachers, or other authoritative figures in a child's life attempt to shape their beliefs and values in a certain way, often without providing them with the opportunity to question or challenge those beliefs. This can happen in various ways, such as using propaganda in religious and ethical teachings, or through other forms of persuasive language and behavior. Shaping their beliefs and values in a certain direction can lead to the development of deeply held convictions that may be difficult to change later in life.

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*Although children are susceptible to indoctrination, it can happen to someone at any age.*

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Although children are susceptible to indoctrination, it can happen to someone at any age. You are particularly susceptible to indoctrination if you lack critical thinking skills, are emotionally vulnerable, or if you have low self-esteem. Other contributing factors include isolation from family and friends, anxiety or fear, a lack of access to diverse viewpoints, and strong ties with a religious or political group.

Positive words and teachings are generally thought of as education, while negative words and teaching is thought of as indoctrination. Indoctrination can have

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both positive and negative effects, depending on the beliefs and values being taught. In some cases, it may help to instill important moral values or principles such as honesty, compassion, and respect. However, it can also be used to propagate harmful or misguided beliefs such as prejudice, intolerance, or extremist ideologies. It can also limit a person's ability to consider other viewpoints and to engage in open-minded and respectful dialogue with people who hold different beliefs.

### Every Journey Starts with a Single Step

It is important for everyone, especially young people, to think critically for themselves. It helps you develop your own beliefs and opinions and analyze and evaluate information and ideas, rather than simply accepting them at face value.

To set yourself on the path of a spiritual warrior, start by encouraging yourself to think critically. It's an important part of becoming an independent and open-minded individual who can make their own decisions. It is a valuable skill that can help you throughout your life.

No matter how old you are, if the influential people in your life do not encourage you to think critically about your decisions, you must find the courage to think for yourself and challenge any negative thoughts or emotions that may be holding you back from finding the best path for you.

### The Purpose of Life

*The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.*

— Mark Twain



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The search for purpose or meaning in your life is an ongoing journey that may not always be clear or easy. You must be open to new experiences and opportunities, be willing to seek out what truly resonates with you, and ready to find your own unique path and purpose in life. Ultimately, the reason for existence is different for each person, and it is up to each of us to discover our own unique purpose in life.

The reason for our existence is a fundamental and complex philosophical question that has been debated by thinkers, theologians, and scientists throughout history. From a biological standpoint, one could argue that the reason for our existence is simply to reproduce and ensure the continuation of our species. From a religious or spiritual perspective, the reason for our existence may be to fulfill a divine purpose or to achieve spiritual enlightenment.

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*Ultimately, the reason for existence is different for each person, and it is up to each of us to discover our own unique purpose in life.*

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From a philosophical perspective, existentialists argue that there is no inherent meaning or purpose to life, and that it is up to individuals to create their own meaning and purpose through their experiences, relationships, and personal growth. Ultimately, the reason for our existence is a deeply personal and subjective question that everyone must grapple with and come to their own understanding.

Many people have the belief or assumption that their existence will extend forever in some way, whether it be through the continuation of their consciousness in an afterlife, their legacy among those who will survive them, or some other form. This belief or assumption can be influenced by various factors, such as cultural or religious beliefs, personal experiences, or philosophical perspectives. However, it is important to recognize that mortality is a natural part of life, and that everyone will eventually experience the end of their existence in some form or another. If we are focused on the rewards of the afterlife, we could face a less fulfilling life now. We are influenced by the beliefs and values of those around us from birth, and we make choices based on these influences. Eventually, we all pass away. It is the choices we make during our lifetime that determine whether our lives are filled with discord and suffering or are healthy and happy.

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## The Ten Tenets

Indecision and poor decision-making can significantly impede our efforts to live a fulfilling and healthy life. To overcome this challenge, it can be helpful to establish a set of personal guiding principles that are specific to you and that you have developed over time. These principles should be mutually exclusive so that they make decision-making easier. When faced with a decision, consider whether it aligns with one of your guiding principles. This can help you make choices that are consistent with your values and goals.

Our ancestors also had a system for guiding their actions and decision-making that persists today. Many believed in a deity who provided a set of rules for all people to follow, one example being the Ten Commandments from the Bible. These rules function like guiding principles, but they apply universally and are not specific to everyone. For example, one of your personal guiding principles might be to give back more than you take in any given situation, while another could be to gain experience and share knowledge with others. You could also include cultivating a sense of humor as one of your guiding principles, trying not to take life too seriously since we will all eventually pass away. In the meantime, let the path of the spiritual warrior provide you with not only happiness, but exuberance.

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There are many different sets of principles or values that people may choose to live by, and what is considered most important or essential can vary greatly. Even so, some common principles or values that many people may find helpful to live by include:

- **Honesty and Integrity:** Being truthful and transparent in all your actions and interactions and treating others with respect and fairness.
- **Compassion and Empathy:** Showing understanding and concern for others and being willing to help those in need.
- **Respect for Others:** Valuing the dignity and worth of every person and treating them with kindness and consideration.
- **Responsibility and Accountability:** Taking ownership of your actions and decisions and being willing to accept the consequences of your choices.

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- **Perseverance and Determination:** Staying focused and committed to your goals, and never giving up, even in the face of challenges or setbacks.
- **Gratitude and Appreciation:** Being thankful for the good things in your life and expressing gratitude to others for their help and support.
- **Humility and Modesty:** Recognizing your own limitations and flaws and being willing to learn from others to improve yourself.
- **Forgiveness and Understanding:** Letting go of anger, resentment, and bitterness, and being willing to forgive others and yourself.
- **Courage and Bravery:** Standing up for what is right and what is just and being willing to take risks and face challenges in pursuit of your goals.
- **Love and Kindness:** Showing love and affection to those around you and being willing to extend kindness and generosity to others, even when it is difficult or inconvenient.

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*These are just a few examples of principles or values that people may choose to live by.*

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Again, these are just a few examples of principles or values that people may choose to live by. Ultimately, the specific principles or values that are most important to you will depend on your own beliefs and priorities, and what you consider to be most meaningful and valuable in your life.

Suppose you choose honest and transparent communication as one of your guiding principles. This principle can help you make decisions about whether to tell the truth or not. Similarly, if one of your principles is to prioritize your physical and mental health, it can help you make decisions about whether to engage in activities that support your well-being.

Having a clear set of guiding principles can also help to reduce cognitive dissonance, which is the psychological discomfort that occurs when we hold conflicting beliefs or values. Ultimately, having a small set of guiding principles can help you make life choices easier and lead a healthy and productive life. It can also provide a sense of direction and purpose, and help you stay true to your values and goals.

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## Living Deliberately

*The greatest power we possess is the power to choose. We can choose our thoughts, our actions, and ultimately our destiny.*

—Unknown

We have the power to shape our lives through the choices we make. By cultivating awareness and mindfulness, we can learn to direct our thoughts and actions in a way that aligns with our highest selves and deepest values. This empowers us to take ownership of our lives and create the future we desire, rather than being controlled by external circumstances. Ultimately, our power lies not in what happens to us, but in how we respond to it.

“Living deliberately” refers to the idea of intentionally choosing how you live your life, rather than allowing external circumstances or other people to dictate your actions and decisions. It involves being conscious and aware of your choices, and taking responsibility for the direction of your life, instead of simply reacting to events or following the path of least resistance.

Living deliberately requires a certain level of self-awareness and self-reflection, as well as the willingness to act and make difficult choices in pursuit of your goals and values. It also involves setting clear intentions and priorities and making decisions aligned with those intentions rather than simply going along with the status quo or following others' expectations. Living deliberately can have many positive benefits, including a greater sense of control and agency over your life, as well as increased fulfillment and satisfaction. It can also help to reduce stress and anxiety by giving you a sense of direction and purpose. It allows you to focus on the things that are most important to you.

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*The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.*

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—Henry David Thoreau

Many people go through life feeling trapped and unfulfilled, simply going through the motions, and not living with purpose or intention. The quote above, from Thoreau, encourages us to live deliberately, to make conscious choices about how we live our lives, and to find meaning and purpose in our pursuits. By living deliberately, we can break free from the “quiet desperation” of a meaningless existence and find greater fulfillment and happiness in life.

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*The allure of ease often steers individuals towards the path of least resistance.*

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The allure of ease often steers individuals towards the path of least resistance, a natural human tendency that promises the most benefits with the least amount of effort. However, this seemingly effortless route lacks purpose and often leads to an unremarkable life of unfulfilled potential and unchallenged mediocrity. Choosing the path of the spiritual warrior and striving for excellence requires embracing challenges and persevering through obstacles. It is a path that, while arduous, ultimately leads to a life of greater fulfillment and personal growth.

## Always have an Edge

“Gaining an edge” in life, at work, or in other areas of your life refers to gaining an advantage in a particular situation or context. This can take many forms and can involve a variety of different strategies and tactics. Some common ways of gaining an edge in various situations include:

- Developing new skills or knowledge and constantly striving to improve your abilities in your field or area of expertise. By staying up to date with the latest developments and trends and continually learning and growing, you can give yourself an advantage by increasing your knowledge and skills.

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- Building strong relationships with others, both inside and outside of your organization. By establishing positive connections with key stakeholders and influencers, you can gain access to valuable resources, information, and opportunities that can help you succeed.
- Taking initiative and being strategic in your approach to challenges and opportunities. This can involve anticipating potential obstacles or issues, developing plans to overcome them, and finding and pursuing opportunities that others may not have noticed or considered.
- Maintaining a cheerful outlook and mindset, even in the face of challenges or setbacks. By staying focused and motivated, and by staying resilient and optimistic, you can give yourself an advantage over others who may become discouraged or lose sight of their goals.

By improving your skills, knowledge, and relationships, and being initiative-taking and strategic in your approach to challenges and opportunities, you can give yourself an advantage in life and increase your chances of success.

Perhaps the most promising edge in life is to embark on a path to financial security. This can be achieved by investing a part of your income—even a small amount—and reducing job-related stress. This proactive approach builds a financial safety net over time, safeguarding you from unexpected challenges like unemployment or unforeseen expenses. By diversifying your income sources, you gain financial independence, empowering you to make confident decisions and pursue opportunities aligned with your long-term aspirations. Investing also fosters mental well-being by alleviating the constant worry about job security. A consistent investment strategy secures a more comfortable future while enhancing your quality of life with both financial and psychological resilience.

## Losing Self-Importance

Losing self-importance refers to letting go of the belief that you are superior or more important than others. This can be a difficult and challenging process, as our egos often crave recognition, validation, and admiration from others. However, letting go of self-importance can have many benefits, both for us and for those around us.

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It can help us to develop a more realistic and humble view of ourselves. When we are consumed by self-importance, we often exaggerate our own abilities, accomplishments, and qualities to dismiss or downplay the achievements of others. By letting go of self-importance, we gain a more balanced and accurate perspective on ourselves and our place in the world.

Losing self-importance can also help us to develop greater empathy and compassion for others. When we are consumed by self-importance, we tend to see others as inferior or lesser than ourselves, and to treat them with disdain or disrespect. Without the clouded judgement of self-importance, we open ourselves up to the experiences and perspectives of others and develop a greater understanding and compassion for their struggles and challenges.

Through this effort, we can build stronger and more authentic relationships with others. Instead of seeing others as objects to be used or manipulated for our own gain, we can see people as individuals with their own needs, feelings, and desires. By letting go of self-importance, we can develop more genuine and respectful connections with others, which can be personally and socially enriching.

The spiritual warrior does not seek power over others but empowers themselves and others through compassion, understanding, and kindness. They understand that true strength comes from within, and they look to use their inner power to create positive change in the world.

We have a choice in how we approach our lives and the challenges we will inevitably face. If we focus on our own ego and self-importance, we will likely feel miserable and be easily overwhelmed by life's challenges. However, if we let go of our ego and focus on becoming stronger and more resilient, we can overcome challenges and find meaning and purpose in life.

The concept of removing ego and avoiding confrontation unless necessary is based on the idea that ego can be a hindrance in many situations. Ego is the sense of self-importance or self-esteem that individuals often possess, and it can cause them to behave in ways that are selfish or aggressive. In some cases, ego can lead individuals to engage in confrontations that could have been avoided, simply because they felt the need to assert their own importance.

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*One way to avoid confrontations is to remove ego from the equation and to focus on finding peaceful solutions to conflicts.*

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One way to avoid confrontations is to remove ego from the equation and to focus on finding peaceful solutions to conflicts. This might involve things like compromising, negotiating, or simply walking away from a situation if it appears that it cannot be resolved peacefully. Of course, there are times when it may be necessary to engage in confrontation or fight. In these cases, it is important to do so only as a last resort, and to approach the situation with a clear head and a calm demeanor. By staying focused and composed, you can better defend yourself and others. The best choice is still to remove ego from the equation and focus on peaceful solutions, so you can avoid getting caught up in unnecessary conflict and instead focus on finding mutually beneficial solutions. Here is an example:

Callie blasts through the door and demands, “You can’t park there, that’s a visitor spot.” Driven by ego, you might consider confronting her, which could lead to escalation and an unpleasant experience for both of you. Instead, you remove ego and respond: “Callie, I understand that you need to enforce the rules about parking in visitor spots. I apologize for parking there earlier. I was unable to find an available spot and didn’t mean to cause any issues. In the future, I will be more careful to make sure I park in a designated spot.”

In this scenario, a potential conflict was resolved by showing humility. Avoid approaching others abruptly; a spiritual warrior employs strategic communication to build meaningful connections. They keenly recognize the subtleties of social dynamics, fostering positive interactions conducive to mutual understanding and collaboration.

Another way to avoid conflicts is to avoid engaging with people who have negative intentions. Here is an example:

As Elena sat in the team room, working on her laptop, a coworker she barely knew sat down next to her and said, “I don’t like you.” Elena simply replied, “It doesn’t matter to me,” without even looking at her colleague. Her coworker stood up in anger and left.

Elena’s response may seem impolite, but she understood that her colleague had bad intentions. If Elena had reacted differently, the person would have given her a list



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of reasons why they did not like her, which would have made Elena defensive and upset. If the person had approached her in a respectful way, Elena would have asked why they did not like her and tried to clear up any misunderstandings.

Individuals who aim to harm, intimidate, or coerce will often try to control the conversation by setting the topic, tone, and pace of the communication. In order to disarm them and minimize this risk, it can be helpful to disrupt their cadence. For example, if they ask you a question, you could ask them to clarify their intention. If they speak quickly, you could slow down your response to break their rhythm. By disrupting their cadence, you can increase your chances of having a positive outcome for yourself.

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*Never allow a person to tell you no who doesn't have the power to say yes.*

—Eleanor Roosevelt

When faced with a conflict, always keep in mind that a person's character and identity are not defined by a single action, but rather by the sum of all their actions over time. One mistake or misstep does not define a person. Rather, it is important to consider someone's overall patterns of behavior and the context in which their actions take place to truly understand them. Remember that people are complex and multifaceted, and that they have the ability to change and grow over time. A person's actions should be evaluated in the broader context of their life rather than as isolated incidents.

Losing self-importance leads to a sense of being "freer" or "lighter" as the burden of the ego is lifted. This results in taking life events less seriously and finding more reasons to laugh and smile as you discover humor in your own foibles and in the people around you.

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## Erasing Personal History

*By erasing personal history, the warrior stands free of self-pity, envy, and all other human emotions and vices.*

— Carlos Castaneda

Within the spiritual warrior's journey, one of the deeply profound and transformative principles to wholeheartedly embrace is the idea of shedding one's personal history. Personal history encapsulates our prior experiences, memories, traumas, victories, and defeats. It is the narrative we bear, and it shapes our self-identity and influences our perspective on the world.

In many respects, our personal history has the potential to transform into a heavy burden, akin to shackles, that restricts us within the confines of our past. It can confine us within repetitive behavior patterns, emotional responses, and constraining convictions that impede our personal development and untapped potential. As we clutch onto our personal history, we find ourselves ensnared in a self-imposed prison, unable to explore the expansive terrain of our authentic selves.

Erasing personal history does not entail forgetting or disavowing our past experiences; instead, it involves liberating ourselves from the limitations imposed by these experiences. It's the journey of releasing the stories and narratives that no longer contribute positively to our well-being. It is a profound act of emancipation to embrace these principles:

- **Break Free from Limiting Beliefs:** One of the most notable advantages of erasing personal history is the freedom from constraining beliefs it offers. As we release the narratives that suggest we lack adequacy, intelligence, or the right to happiness, we unlock boundless potential and possibilities.
- **Live in the Present Moment:** Our source of strength exists in the present moment. Through the act of shedding personal history, we liberate ourselves from the persistent influence of the past, enabling us to wholeheartedly immerse ourselves in the here and now. It is within this moment that genuine transformation takes root.

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- **Embrace Authenticity:** As we let go of the necessity to keep the roles and facades dictated by our personal history, we embrace our true, unfiltered selves. This transition leads us toward authenticity and fosters greater sincerity, compassion, and openness in our interactions with the world and the individuals we meet.

Erasing personal history fundamentally questions the concept of identity. From the perspective of a spiritual warrior, identity is not an immutable and inflexible construct, but rather a dynamic and evolving manifestation of the self. Through the act of erasing personal history, we strip away the deceptive layers of ego and societal conditioning that veil our authentic essence.

Becoming a spiritual warrior by erasing personal history requires immense bravery. It involves exploring unknown realms, pushing past your comfort zone, and wholeheartedly embracing transformation. This journey may not be suitable for those who shy away from challenges, but its rewards are beyond measure.

Ultimately, the aim of erasing personal history is to surpass the self, transcend the limitations imposed by our egotistic tendencies, and break free from what keeps us ensnared in suffering. It revolves around the realization that our true essence is not defined by the narratives we weave, but by the consciousness that sees and transcends those narratives.

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*The act of erasing personal history is a foundational principle for a spiritual warrior.*

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The act of erasing personal history is a foundational principle for a spiritual warrior, as it breaks the chains of the past, empowers us to fully inhabit the present, and ushers in a future brimming with boundless possibilities. This journey encompasses self-discovery, authenticity, and spiritual growth. It beckons us to embrace change, bravely venture into uncharted territory, and ultimately rise above the limitations of the self. Through the erasure of personal history, we appear as authentic spiritual warriors, forging a path toward liberation and enlightenment.

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### The Art of Spiritual Privacy

For the spiritual warrior, supporting a level of privacy about one's personal information can be helpful, as it aligns with the principles of humility and self-awareness. Sharing too much about oneself with new acquaintances, an action usually driven by ego, can come across as self-centered and may hinder genuine spiritual connections. In the spiritual journey, one looks to transcend the ego and connect on a deeper, more meaningful level with others. By keeping certain aspects of one's life private, a spiritual warrior allows others the space to share their own experiences and thoughts, fostering a more balanced and reciprocal exchange.

Furthermore, the practice of privacy can serve as a protective shield. Sharing too much personal information indiscriminately can make one vulnerable to judgment, misinterpretation, or even exploitation by others. By carefully choosing what to reveal and to whom, a spiritual warrior can support a sense of autonomy and protect their inner sanctum.

This guarded approach to personal information not only prevents unnecessary conflicts and distractions but also allows the warrior to focus on their spiritual growth—without entanglement in the superficial aspects of life. In this way, privacy becomes a valuable tool for supporting inner peace and making genuine connections on the spiritual journey.

### Seeking the Approval of Strangers

*Care about what other people think and you will always be their prisoner.*

— Lao Tzu

Seeking the approval of strangers can be a common and natural desire. In today's social media-driven world, it can be tempting to seek validation from others in

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the form of likes, comments, or followers. However, relying on the approval of strangers can be detrimental to your well-being and happiness in several ways.

For one thing, it can lead to a lack of authenticity and vulnerability. To gain approval from others, you may be tempted to present a carefully curated image of yourself rather than being open and honest about who you really are. This can lead to a disconnect between your online persona and your true self, which can be emotionally and mentally exhausting to keep. It can also lead to a lack of self-esteem and self-worth. When your self-worth is based on the approval of others, you become dependent on outside validation to feel good about yourself. This can make you vulnerable to the whims and opinions of others, and it can leave you feeling empty and unfulfilled if you do not receive the approval you crave.

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*Seeking the approval of others can be a time-consuming and distracting pursuit.*

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Seeking the approval of others can be a time-consuming and distracting pursuit that takes away from other more meaningful and fulfilling aspects of your life. When you are constantly seeking approval from others, it can be difficult to focus on your own goals and priorities. You can become distracted from pursuing activities and experiences that are personally enriching and fulfilling. Instead, you may find yourself constantly checking your social media feeds, obsessing over your appearance or public image, and comparing yourself to others, which can be emotionally and mentally draining.

Seeking the approval of others is a futile pursuit, as it will never truly satisfy you. Instead, it is important to find approval and validation within yourself, and to focus on your own values and goals. This can help you build self-confidence and self-worth and live a more authentic and fulfilling life.

## What's My Protocol?

As human beings, we often follow routines and form habits in our everyday lives. These routines and habits can help us to function efficiently and effectively, and they can make our lives easier by helping us make decisions about even the smallest

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things we do. However, we can become so accustomed to following these routines and habits that we do so without thinking, almost like we are following a script. In some cases, this can lead us to behave in ways that are not necessarily in our best interests or that are not in line with our values and beliefs.

One way to think about this is to consider how we often follow protocols or rules in different situations, such as at work or in social settings. Just like we often follow these large-scale protocols without thinking, we can also fall into the habit of following our smaller, everyday routines and habits in a similar way. This can be especially dangerous when it comes to our beliefs and values, as we may not even realize that we are being influenced by outside forces or that we are behaving in ways that are not true to ourselves. It is important for us to make a conscious effort to think for ourselves and to question the rules and routines—both large and small—that we follow.

### Life is Finite

One of the keyways in which we can live optimally is by compressing time. This means making the most of the time that we have available to us, and not wasting time on activities or pursuits that do not bring us joy or fulfillment. Life is finite, and there is no time to waste on living in mediocrity or unfulfillment. Instead, we should strive to fill our lives with friends, activities, and experiences that bring us joy and meaning, and that allow us to make the most of the time we have.

There are several ways in which we can compress time and make the most of our lives. One way is to prioritize the things that are most important to us and focus our time and energy on these pursuits. This can help us avoid becoming bogged down in activities that do not bring us joy or fulfillment and ensure that we are making the most of our time.

Another way to make the most of our lives is to eliminate or reduce the amount of time we spend on activities that are not beneficial to us. This can include things like watching TV or scrolling through social media, which can be time-consuming and do not necessarily add value to our lives. By cutting back on these activities, we can free up more time for the things that matter most to us.

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*Life is a journey, not a destination.*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Life is not about reaching a specific end point or goal, but rather about the journey and the experiences we have along the way. We should make the most of the time we have, rather than focusing solely on the result. This can be a helpful perspective to adopt, as it can help us appreciate the present moment and find meaning and purpose in our daily lives.

## Passionate Indifference

Imagine it's the start of a karate class for beginners, and the students are lined up around a large mat. The instructor calls a random student forward, and then tries to lightly strike the student in the chest. The result is dramatic—the student flies backwards and ends up on their rear end. The instructor pulls the student back into a standing position, but this time asks the student to bend slightly at the knees and to gently sway back and forth. The strike is repeated, but this time the students do not fall from their stance. Instead, they gently move their upper body backwards and then return to their original position.

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*Often, our natural stance is to be rigid in life and face adversity head on—to our detriment.*

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This scene illustrates an important lesson. Often, our natural stance is to be rigid in life and face adversity head on—to our detriment. Instead, like the karate student, we should be flexible, absorb the impact, and bounce back. This true-to-life metaphor introduces the spiritual warrior's tenet of passionate indifference.

Passionate indifference may seem like an oxymoron, as *passionate* and *indifference* are two words that seem to contradict each other. However, it is possible

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to be passionately indifferent about something—meaning that you are deeply committed to a cause or idea, but not attached to the outcome of your efforts. This can be a helpful mindset to have when tackling challenges, as it allows you to approach a situation with determination and focus regardless of the outcome.

A person who is passionately indifferent about a particular challenge is fully committed to giving their best effort and working tirelessly to overcome any obstacles. However, they are also willing to walk away from the situation if it becomes clear that the challenge is not worth it or if they are not making any progress. This allows them to focus their energy and resources on more productive pursuits, and to avoid becoming overly invested in a situation that is unlikely to yield any benefits.

In the face of challenges, embracing a sense of passionate indifference can offer a strategic mindset. This approach empowers individuals to engage with determination and focus, while keeping a healthy distance from becoming overly fixated on the outcome. This strategy proves valuable in preventing excessive investment in situations unlikely to yield rewards, enabling the redirection of energy and resources toward more productive endeavors.

### Governing Dynamics

John Nash suggests the best result comes from everyone in the group doing what is best for themselves taking into consideration what the rest of the group has done. He was an American mathematician who made significant contributions to the study of game theory, differential geometry, and partial differential equations. In his seminal work, Nash captures the idea that the best outcome can be achieved when both individuals and a group act in their own best interests, while also considering the needs and interests of others. By working together towards a common goal, the outcome can be beneficial for everyone involved.

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*The concept of looking out for both your own self-interest and the interest of the group is an important one, as it recognizes the interdependence of human society.*

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The concept of looking out for both your own self-interest and the interest of the group is an important one, as it recognizes the interdependence of human society. In order to thrive and prosper, we may need to sacrifice a little bit of individual freedom to help the group.

Consider a situation in which a group of people are working together to achieve a common goal. For the group to succeed, everyone must contribute their time and effort and be willing to sacrifice some of their own freedom to support the group's efforts. This might involve things like following certain rules or procedures or giving up some personal time. By doing this, everyone can contribute to the group's success and achieve their own goals and interests in the process.

The best path forward is one that looks out for both the individual and the group. By considering the needs and interests of both parties, we can work together to achieve our goals and to create a better future for everyone. In the long run, this can lead to greater success and fulfillment for both the individual and the group.

## Tuning Your Spiritual Energy

*If you're depressed, you're living in the past. If you're anxious, you're living in the future.*

*If you're at peace, you're living in the present.*

— Lao Tzu

Taking time to “tune” your spiritual energy is a valuable practice for keeping balance and resilience in life. Engaging in activities such as mindfulness and meditation or going on retreats can help recharge your spiritual energy and enhance your overall well-being. Here are some insights and suggestions to tune your spiritual energy:

- **Prioritize Self-Care:** Recognize the importance of self-care and make it a priority in your daily routine. Allocate time specifically for activities that nourish your mind, body, and spirit. This can include meditation, yoga, journaling, spending time in nature, or engaging in hobbies that bring you joy.
- **Take Mindful Breaks:** Taking regular breaks throughout the day, even if they're short, can help you recharge and refocus. Find a quiet space, close your eyes,

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and practice deep breathing or mindfulness exercises. This can help calm your mind, reduce stress, and increase your energy levels.

- **Practice Visualization and Relaxation Techniques:** Visualizing a scenario where you are in a peaceful situation, such as being on a beach, is a powerful tool for relaxation. Combine this with calming music and allow yourself to fully immerse yourself in the experience. Engaging your senses in this way can help shift your focus away from stress and rejuvenate your spirit.
- **Build Resilience:** Challenges are a natural part of life, and having a strong spiritual foundation can help you navigate them with greater ease. Regularly tuning your spiritual energy through practices like meditation can increase your resilience, inner strength, and ability to respond to challenges gracefully.
- **Seek Support and Guidance:** Connect with like-minded individuals or seek guidance from spiritual teachers or mentors who can support you on your spiritual journey. Surrounding yourself with a supportive community can provide encouragement, inspiration, and a sense of belonging.

Remember that everyone's spiritual path is unique, and it's important to find practices that resonate with you personally. By consistently nurturing your spiritual energy, you can cultivate a greater sense of happiness, well-being, and abundance in all aspects of your life.

As we acknowledge the profound importance of the mind-body connection, it is imperative to emphasize that the spiritual warrior lifestyle ought to transcend mere social interactions and meditation. It is crucial to incorporate the recognition and healing of mental health issues—such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and cognitive dissonance—into the fabric of this lifestyle (alongside medical interventions) to achieve best and holistic benefits. A seamless integration of mental well-being and lifestyle interventions is essential for nurturing overall health, achieving balance, and mitigating chronic diseases effectively.

## The Tethers that Bind

Our past experiences can sometimes tether us to an event, preventing us from moving forward and being free. This can happen when we become stuck in negative

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thought patterns or behaviors that were developed in response to past experiences, and these patterns and behaviors continue to hold us back even though the original experiences are no longer present. Here is an example:

The weight of her secret was a constant companion, a heavy shadow that trailed her every step. Isabella's emotional distance and carefully constructed walls were born from a childhood marred by the unspeakable betrayal of a family member. The abuse she endured, a dark secret she kept cloaked in silence, had left her wounded and distrustful. When Ryan asked her about the source of her emotional detachment, she opened up, revealing the painful truth that had shaped her life. The revelation was a watershed moment that broke the chains that had bound her for so long. He encouraged her to confront her family and shatter the silence that had protected her abuser for far too long. With a newfound courage, Isabella faced her family, her voice trembling as she laid bare the truth. The air hung heavy in the room as the weight of her unspoken pain was finally acknowledged. As tears streamed down her face, the burden lifted, replaced by a glimmer of hope. In that moment of honesty, Isabella reclaimed her narrative and broke free from the shackles of her past. The dark secret that had haunted her for years was finally released, and with it, the shackles of her emotional distance fell away. She was ready to love again and to embrace life without the burden of her secret.

One way to break free from emotional tethers and move forward is to engage in a process called “recapitulation.” This involves revisiting and reexperiencing past events in a safe and controlled environment, with the goal of gaining a new perspective on the events and letting go of any negative thoughts or behaviors that developed in response to them. By doing this, we can gain a new understanding of the past and free ourselves from its hold on us.

Another approach that can help us move on from our past experiences is cognitive processing therapy (CPT). This type of therapy focuses on helping individuals change their thought patterns and behaviors in response to past experiences. Through a combination of cognitive and behavioral techniques, CPT can help individuals develop healthier and more adaptive ways of thinking and acting that encourage them to move forward from negative experiences and live more fulfilling lives.

Once you find a behavior that doesn't align with your values, avoid regretting your past actions. Instead, strive to ensure it doesn't reoccur. After breaking free from the experience that has been hindering your progress, it's important to keep moving forward and tackling the next challenge. By resolving your past issues, you will

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experience a newfound sense of freedom—and you can channel that energy towards advancing on your journey to becoming a spiritual warrior.

### Attitude is Everything

*We either make ourselves miserable, or we make ourselves strong. The amount of work is the same.*

—Carlos Castaneda

A positive outlook on life is a vital element of spirituality, and humor can play a significant role in cultivating it. By finding humor in challenging situations, we can keep an optimistic attitude and stimulate creative thinking. This enables us to approach problems and challenges in new and innovative ways. A positive attitude is particularly relevant for spiritual warriors, who aim to expand their consciousness and understanding of the world.

Humor relieves stress and tension. The path of the spiritual warrior can include challenging and demanding pursuits. Humor helps alleviate stress, lighten the mood, and provide a much-needed break from the seriousness of the spiritual journey. Additionally, humor can help us recover quickly from setbacks and challenges, which is a crucial trait for spiritual warriors. When we can find humor, even in difficult circumstances, we can keep perspective and resilience in the face of adversity.

Ultimately, humor can help break down barriers and build connections with others, another crucial aspect of spirituality. By laughing and sharing humor, we can create a sense of community and support on our spiritual journey.

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### Not Doing

"Not doing" is an ideal practice to tune your spiritual energy. Not doing, or setting aside time for relaxation and mental quietude, can have several benefits for both our physical and mental well-being. This downtime can help reduce stress, increase focus, improve creativity, and enhance overall productivity. Meditation, a technique used to cultivate mindfulness and inner peace, can be a useful tool in achieving this state of not doing.

Through meditation, we can learn to be present in the moment, let go of stress and anxiety, and increase feelings of calm and relaxation. It can also help us develop a more positive outlook on life and improve our relationships with others. It involves focusing the mind on a particular object, thought, or activity to train your attention and awareness. It is often associated with spiritual awakening because it can help to increase self-awareness and understanding, and it can also provide a sense of inner peace.

During meditation, you can focus on your breath, a mantra, visualization, or spiritual ambient music. You can also use other techniques, such as body awareness or loving-kindness meditation. By focusing on these things, you help calm the mind and cultivate a sense of stillness and clarity.

As you practice meditation regularly, you will begin to develop a greater understanding of your own thoughts and emotions. You may also become more aware of the present moment and your surroundings. This increased self-awareness can help foster a sense of inner peace and understanding, and it can also provide a sense of connection with a higher power or spiritual dimension.

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*Meditation is not a way of making your mind quiet. It's a way of entering into the quiet that's already there—buried under the 50,000 thoughts the average person thinks every day.*

—Deepak Chopra

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Meditation is not about forcing the mind to be quiet, but rather about finding the quiet that already exists within us. By taking the time to sit in stillness and silence, we can tune out the distractions and noise of the outside world and tap into a deeper sense of peace and clarity within ourselves. Meditation can help to reduce stress, improve focus, and increase self-awareness, making it an important part of a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

### On Being Fit

*Movement is a medicine for creating change in a person's physical, emotional, and mental states.*

— Carol Welch

Exercise is an important practice for tuning your spiritual energy. First and foremost, it keeps the body healthy, strong, and better able to withstand the physical and mental challenges that arise on the spiritual journey. Exercise can also help improve mental clarity and focus, which are valuable tools for a spiritual warrior looking to understand their own inner nature and connect with a higher power. Exercise helps reduce stress and anxiety, improves mood, and boosts self-confidence.

In addition, exercise can be a form of spiritual practice in and of itself. Many spiritual traditions place a strong emphasis on physical discipline and the cultivation of physical strength as a way of cultivating mental and spiritual strength often with yoga or Tai Chi. For a spiritual warrior, exercise can be an opportunity to connect with the body and the present moment, and to develop a sense of self-discipline that can be applied to other aspects of life.

Some of the ways that exercise can help your health and spiritual well-being include:

- Reduced risk of chronic diseases such as obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Exercise can lower blood pressure, improve cholesterol levels, boost your overall fitness level, and help you to keep a healthy weight.

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- Reduced occurrences of stress, anxiety, and depression. and it can also improve your mood and self-esteem. Exercise can also help to improve your mood, self-esteem, sleep quality, and energy levels.
- Increased lifespan and reduced risk of premature death. Exercise strengthens your immune system and improves overall health, which can help you live a longer, healthier life.
- Improved cognitive function and delayed onset of age-related cognitive decline. Exercises improve memory, concentration, and problem-solving skills. It can also increase blood flow to the brain, which helps keep it healthy.

The amount of exercise you need each week depends on your age, fitness level, and overall health. In general, warriors should engage in at least 150 minutes (about two and a half hours) of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise or seventy-five minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise each week. This can be broken down into shorter sessions of at least ten minutes each.

In addition to aerobic exercise, you should engage in muscle-strengthening activities at least two days per week. This can include activities such as lifting weights, doing push-ups or sit-ups, or using resistance bands.

Exercise-induced autophagy is the body's ability to eliminate damaged cells and promote the generation of new, healthy ones. This cellular mechanism plays a pivotal role in preserving overall cellular health and serves as a protective measure against various diseases. The benefits of exercise-induced autophagy include cellular repair, anti-aging effects, support for the immune system, and the prevention of cancer. Autophagy is activated after approximately sixty minutes of moderate-intensity exercise.

## Learn First, then Teach

People will often espouse opinions on a given subject without having any real knowledge or understanding of it. This can be frustrating for others who are genuinely interested in learning about the topic, and it can make it difficult to separate fact from opinion.

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One way to address this problem is to follow the principle of “Those that know, teach; Those that do not, learn”, often attributed to Confucius, the Chinese philosopher. In other words, individuals who are knowledgeable about a given subject should strive to share their knowledge with others, while those who do not have a thorough understanding of a subject should focus on learning. This helps ensure that the information being shared is correct and well-founded, and that individuals are not simply repeating opinions without any real understanding of the topic.

Additionally, it is important for individuals to avoid trying to teach others until they have learned enough about the subject to do so effectively. This means taking the time to learn as much as possible about a given topic before trying to share that knowledge with others. By doing this, individuals can avoid spreading misinformation and instead focus on providing correct and helpful information to others.

### Personal Power

*The power within you is greater than any challenge in front of you.*

—Unknown

The spiritual warrior has an inner strength that can overcome any obstacle or challenge they may face. By tapping into their inner power, they can find the courage and resilience to face difficult situations with grace and determination. Our external circumstances do not define us, and we always have the power to rise above them. As spiritual warriors, we cultivate this inner strength through our spiritual practices and our commitment to personal growth and transformation.

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*A natural consequence of becoming a spiritual warrior is an increase in your charisma and personal power.*

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A natural consequence of becoming a spiritual warrior is an increase in your charisma and personal power. Charisma allows an individual to attract and influence others. It is often described as a *je ne sais quoi* or “certain something” that sets someone apart from others and gives them a sense of charm. Personal power refers to the ability



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to influence and affect others and to achieve your goals. When you have a strong sense of personal power, you may appear more confident, capable, and charismatic. This often can make you a leader in business or in your personal life. Others will likely follow your lead and be influenced by you.

However, it's important to remember that with great power comes great responsibility. It's important to use your personal power for the greater good rather than for selfish or nefarious purposes. Misusing your charisma and personal power can lead to negative consequences for yourself and others. To avoid influencing people for your own selfish reasons, it's important to be mindful of your intentions and to use your personal power ethically and responsibly. This may involve being transparent about your motivations, looking to understand others' perspectives, and considering the potential impact of your actions on others.

It's also important to recognize that personal power is not an end, but rather a tool that can be used to achieve positive outcomes. By tempering your personal power with empathy, integrity, and a sense of social responsibility, you can use it to make a positive difference in the world.

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*Do not let the hero in your soul perish in lonely frustration for the life you deserved and have never been able to reach. The world you desire can be won. It exists... it is real... it is possible... it's yours.*

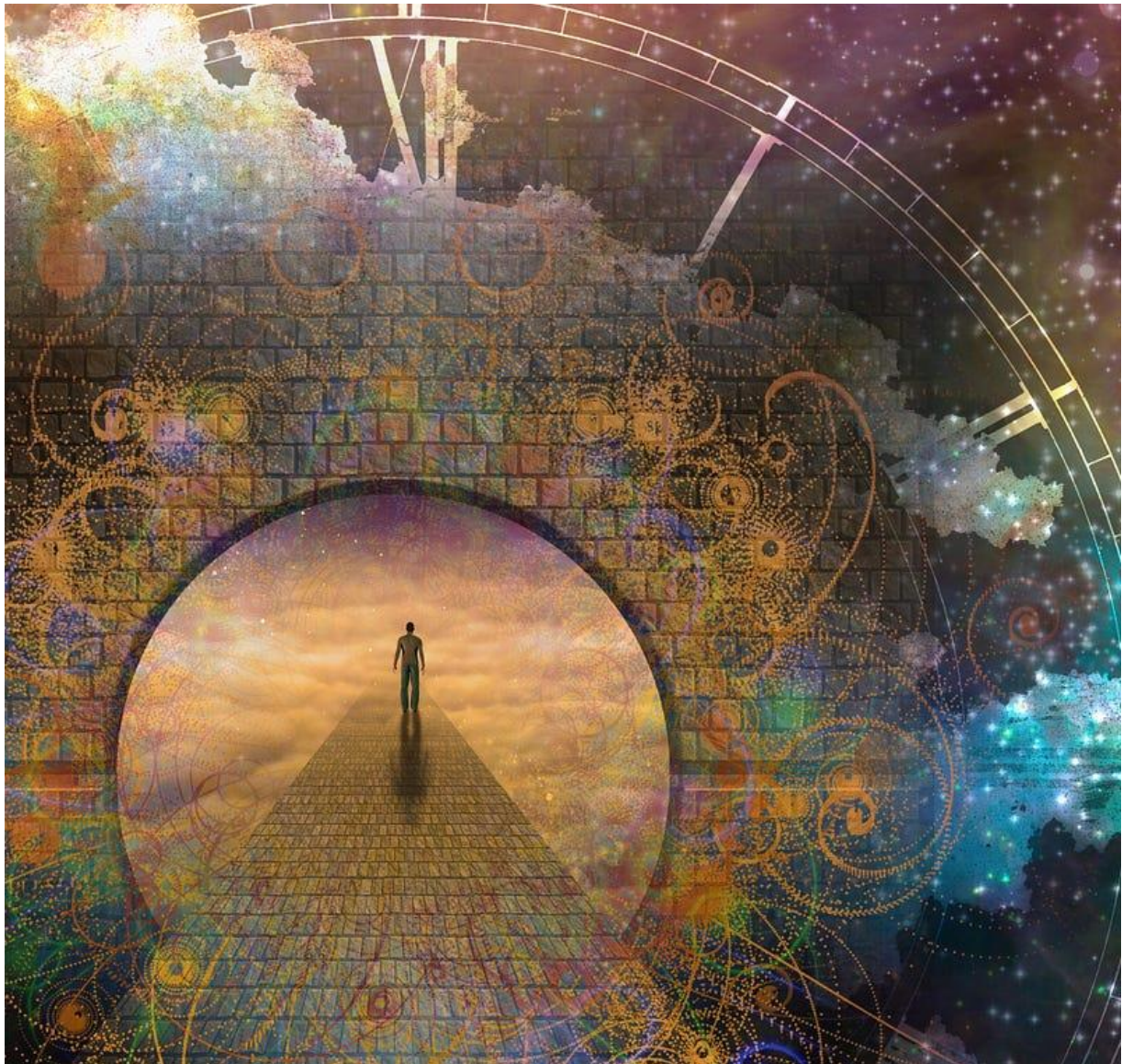
—Ayn Rand

The spiritual warrior's path encourages personal growth and self-improvement, and that involves overcoming challenges and obstacles to achieve higher spiritual awareness. The path is not easy, but it is a rewarding journey that can lead to a more fulfilling and meaningful life. Some common elements essential for all spiritual warriors include discipline, resilience, and commitment to inner peace. The spiritual warrior is not a passive being, but an active participant in the world. They are committed to using their strength and courage to help others and to make a difference in the world.

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At their core, the spiritual warrior is not afraid to face their fears and to stand up for what they believe in. They are a force for good in the world, and they are committed to continuous improvement and to making the world a better place.

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*Barriers of Perception*

## Reality by Consensus

PERCEPTION AND INDOCTRINATION DEFINE OUR REALITY. BOTH CONSPIRE TO ENSURE YOU OVERLOOK THAT THERE IS MORE TO OUR EXISTENCE THAN MEETS THE EYE.

“I saw this young boy on a bike,” Robin Williams once joked in his stand-up act. “He could do all sorts of tricks with that bike that I thought were impossible—until the day he learned about gravity.” This comedic moment highlights an event that people don’t usually think about or consider deeply. With this casual comment, Williams pointed out an important truth about life: it is full of mystery and wonder, but our understanding of its possibilities is limited by what is considered socially or culturally acceptable.

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Consensus is created through a constant reinforcement of ideas about life that conform to the majority opinion—even though these ideas may not necessarily reflect reality. Your view of the world is shaped by the consensus of your family, friends, peers, and other influential figures. Their ideas can be based on insecurity and fear. They may be afraid that others will view the world differently than they do, or that they will be exposed as wrong about their worldview. As social animals, we often seek the approval of others and want to be liked, popular, and feel as if we are part of a group. If we don't conform to external indoctrination, we fear being ostracized or rejected by our social group.

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*Many belief systems are just a common language for people seeking meaning in life.*

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Many belief systems are just a common language for people seeking meaning in life. From the moment you were born, you have had other people's interpretations of life's meaning imposed on you. You are repeatedly told how you must view the world. If you challenge or reject this view, you may hear responses like "You're wrong" or "You shouldn't think that way." If your ideas differ from those of your peers, you may be reprimanded and pressured to conform. In extreme cases, if your worldview is significantly different from others', you may be viewed as radical, in need of therapy, or even mentally ill. You may face consequences like being "canceled," seen as unstable, or possibly institutionalized.

As social creatures, humans have a natural desire to keep their social connections. This desire can prevent people from thinking differently from the group for fear of being ostracized. To be accepted into a group, people often sacrifice some of their individuality to the will of the collective. However, this acceptance comes at a cost—the loss of individuality. Additionally, fear and insecurity create a barrier to our perception, ensuring that we overlook that there is more to our existence than what we can see.

It is unclear whether what we call reality exists on its own, or if it is shaped by the act of observation. Our understanding of reality is often limited to our five senses, which are imperfect, and the information that others give us, so we may never know for sure. There are limits to what we can know. Gregory Bateson, English anthropologist, social scientist, linguist, visual anthropologist, semiotician, and

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cyberneticist proposed that to fully understand a system, one must view it from the outside (or from a "meta" level) to see the patterns and relationships that govern it. Since we are inside the system, we use perception to try to better understand our reality.

Perception refers to the processes that help us make sense of different stimuli. They are based on how we interpret various sensations, but our senses are not always reliable. For example, when light enters our eyes, the resulting image is projected onto the back of our retina, but it appears upside down. Our brain then compensates by trying to fill in any gaps in the visual information received to show us the image interpreted in the correct way. The brain also combines other sensory input, like emotional context from the vagus nerve, to complete our interpretation, or “description,” of the current moment. This interpretation is influenced by our senses, past experiences, past indoctrination, and current emotional state. To ensure coherence and stability, the brain tends to form an interpretation that is roughly fifteen seconds behind the present moment, rather than processing information in real-time. Consequently, the outcome is often ambiguous and subject to individual interpretation.

What we “see” is just a small part of what aim reality has to offer. What would happen if we allowed ourselves to consider the possibility that there is more to our existence than what we can perceive with our senses, and that anyone can access it if they choose?

If we don't look to understand reality after realizing what restricts us, we'll be powerless against the flow of life, much like a leaf carried away by a river. Many people have accepted this fate, giving up the effort to challenge relentless indoctrination and accepting what they are told about the world. They become another “brick in the wall,” and a cookie-cutter version of their family, friends, and peers. While some people may try to stand out by adding a little glitter, underneath it all, their view of existence is largely the same as those around them.

### Lazy by Design

Why do humans tend to be receptive to indoctrination? One reason is that we are naturally lazy, and our bodies try to conserve energy whenever possible. Thinking critically about reality at every step requires effort and a conscious expenditure of energy, and few people are willing to make that effort or push their bodies to do so. Fear is also a factor; we want to be accepted by our family and friends, but if we challenge their worldview, we risk being rejected, ridiculed, and isolated.

In recent years, psychologists have proposed that there are two systems of the mind: System 1 is fast, instinctive, and emotional, while System 2 is slow, deliberate, and logical. System 2 requires more energy and generates more heat, and the body resists using it. This is why people are often quick to adopt “reality by consensus,” since it is easier to accept what others tell us rather than think critically. This tendency to rely on System 1 could explain why memes spread rapidly in our society. They are often slick, prepackaged ideas that are readily accepted and rarely challenged. People pass them on to their social circle without realizing it.

If you want to remain lazy, go with the flow, and be the proverbial leaf on a river, you may have more friends and life may be easier for you in some ways. However, if you want to overcome ignorance and strive for enlightenment, you will need to become a spiritual warrior. This will require you to make strategic decisions and take the time to better understand the mysteries of life, all while challenging your own assumptions about the world. Don’t simply accept what others tell you. Instead, consider beliefs you have accepted based solely on the opinions of others and which ones you should continue to hold onto after critically examining them. The beliefs that you keep will define you as a unique individual.

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*We all seek happiness, and for a spiritual warrior, happiness is achieved by adhering to a consistent set of basic beliefs in life.*

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We all seek happiness, and for a spiritual warrior, happiness is achieved by adhering to a consistent set of basic beliefs in life. You should start by setting up a few

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axioms that you have faith in even though you cannot prove them. After you have a small set of axioms, you can include a limited number of tenets, or beliefs that you have thought about and decided have value to you. For example, you might adopt the tenet that in any situation, you should always give more than you take. Each tenet should be independent and not conflict with the others. In other words, no two tenets should be variations on the same theme—each should be unique. If these tenets are consistent with each other and you stay faithful to them, you will likely experience less stress, better health, and increased happiness. However, don't stop there—aim for exuberance. If your beliefs contradict each other or you waver in your adherence to them, you will inevitably experience disharmony, cognitive dissonance, stress, illness, and—ultimately—unhappiness in life.

Having a clear set of basic beliefs can make decision-making easier. Each decision you make should align with one of your tenets. This will make you more self-reliant and give you more control over your life and surroundings. Instead of drifting aimlessly, you will be living deliberately. As a result, you will experience less fear and conflict. The goal is to let go of your defenses and current understandings of reality and allow yourself to see the world in a new way, based on your own set of tenets.

Changing your worldview allows you to experience aspects of reality that may have previously escaped you. These non-ordinary aspects of reality are available for anyone to explore. To access these dimensions, you must connect with the “energetic being” within yourself, which most people are only vaguely aware of—if at all.

## The Philosophy of Self

People generally think of their "self" in relation to their physical body, which encompasses their identity, senses, emotions, and how they perceive the world around them. The formation of our physical self, or "I," occurs within a specific area of the brain known as the anterior precuneus. It is part of a network of brain regions that combine information about our location, movement, and bodily sensations to shape our self-awareness. Your sense of self represents you in the immediate here and now, with a particular point of view that is yours alone. It is your first-person perspective on the world around you. However, this perspective can be characterized as egocentric



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and self-absorbed because it perceives the self as the focal point of the universe, which limits one's view of the world.

By tapping into our spiritual self, we can transcend our narrow focus on our physical selves and set up connections with others and the world around us. Empathy plays a crucial role in this process by enabling us to better understand the feelings of others and gain a more objective outlook on our environment and ourselves. By trying to see the world through the eyes of others, we can expand our ability to understand their experiences and get a more comprehensive perspective of the world.

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*Each person has a distinct energy signature that sets them apart from others.*

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While most individuals may be conscious of their physical and spiritual selves, some may not be aware of a third aspect of the self—the energetic being. This vital energy emanates from the body and envelops us, pervading all animate and inanimate entities. Each person has a distinct energy signature that sets them apart from others. Have you ever experienced an immediate attraction to someone you've just met, or an inexplicable sense of ease while sitting on a rock? This could be because your energy signature harmonizes with that certain individual or object. This phenomenon is called “energetic synchrony”, and it explains why we may “click” (or not) with others. Conversely, if you find a new acquaintance bothersome or a new setting distressing, it may be due to a lack of compatibility between your energies.

Your body emits energy fragments that undulate, much like the energy emanating from the sun. This energy typically coalesces to form an aura that encompasses your body, extending about an inch from the surface. However, some individuals may have auras that span several inches or even several feet. Some people can even generate spontaneous outbursts of energy, akin to a solar flare. These occurrences can be seen in non-ordinary reality (explored in detail in the next section).

The energetic aspect of your being exists, yet often goes unnoticed or disregarded. This energy serves as a conduit to a segment of reality that may be neglected, and it provides a means to transcend the limitations of perception and access non-ordinary reality. Initially, this broader outlook on the world may be startling or daunting, but once understood, the sense of wonder and trepidation will dissipate, and you can easily integrate this novel perspective into your daily life. By

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tapping into the energy emanating from people and objects, you can get direct knowledge that circumvents conventional intuitive or cognitive thinking.

### Non-Ordinary Reality

“Non-ordinary reality” refers to events that may be perceived as strange or unusual by a hypothetical person who holds a limited view of the world. This could include things like accurately predicting the future or seeing someone disappear before your eyes. These types of events are often dismissed as coincidences or hallucinations, but if you are open to the possibility of non-ordinary reality and able to overcome fear, they can become a regular part of your experience.

According to Arthur C. Clarke, a renowned science fiction writer, any advanced technology can seem like magic to individuals unable to understand it. In essence, as individuals gradually understand and embrace new technologies, they may cease to be viewed as extraordinary or enigmatic. This same principle applies to non-ordinary reality.

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*By discarding the limitations of social conditioning and embracing inquisitiveness and openness, we can unearth the boundless marvels of the universe that extend beyond our everyday perceptions.*

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As explained by the titular character in Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*, “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” I, too, have experienced remarkable incidents that surpass our typical understanding of reality. These experiences are not exclusive to me; anyone can gain access to this broader perspective of reality, provided they are receptive to it and release their preconceived notions and anxieties. By discarding the limitations of social conditioning and embracing inquisitiveness and openness, we can unearth the boundless marvels of the universe that extend beyond our everyday perceptions.

### “Spidey Sense”

Sometimes I experience a strong intuition or “gut feeling” about future events, like the “spidey sense” described by the hero of the Spider-Man comics. This sense allows me to notice potential danger or other important information with a high level of accuracy and certainty.

*The distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.*

– Albert Einstein

This is different from intuition, which is just a feeling about a situation. My spidey sense has never been wrong in its predictions. Some of my friends ask me for guidance using my spidey sense, but it doesn’t quite work like that. I can’t control when I receive these flashes of knowledge. They simply pop into my head without warning. Some scientists believe that time is not linear, which could mean that my predictions are memories of events that have already happened.

I once had a moment of insight while watching the State of the Union address with a friend. Suddenly, a thought popped into my head that someone in the audience would stand up and shout from the balcony during the President’s speech. To my surprise, this prediction came true when the father of a high school student killed in a shooting was removed from the audience after shouting from the balcony during the speech. While some may view this as a simple coincidence, I have found that my intuitive flashes are always exact.

Another time, as I was leaving my mother’s house after a visit with her and my cousin, I turned to say goodbye. I had a sudden feeling that something was not quite right. I hesitated before saying, “See you, Mum.”

“What’s up?” she asked.

I told her I had a feeling that I would meet a deer on my way home. I knew that I needed to be cautious and make sure not to hit it. My mother was familiar with my premonitions, as she had seen them many times before. However, my cousin was more skeptical and didn’t believe in such things.

## Reality by Consensus

Despite their different reactions, my prediction came true. As I neared my home at the top of a hill, I remembered the deer and cautiously slowed down. Sure enough, a six-point buck appeared by the side of the road just a few feet from the front of my car. It looked at me before calmly crossing to the other side, out of harm's way. Did I use my intuition or "sixth sense" to avoid a potentially dangerous situation on the road with a deer? Or was it the deer that communicated with me through energy to avoid the collision? Either way, I was able to avoid any potential harm or damage to myself, the animal, or my car. I found myself wondering whether the deer would have appeared by the roadside if I had, for instance, chosen to make a pit stop to refuel my car. Was it destined for me to meet the deer, or could a minor detour in my journey have the power to change the course of this encounter?

Another episode occurred recently when I experienced a hurricane (from the safety of my porch) with wind speeds of 100 mph and heavy rain. As I looked at the line of trees in my neighbor's backyard, I noticed one tree that I felt confident was going to fall. Even so, it stayed standing through the hurricane. A week later, another intense storm hit, and the power went out. I went to a friend's house to shower and as I drove behind my neighbor's home, I saw that the road was blocked by that very tree that I had previously identified would fall.

The most profound instance of my spidey-sense occurred as my mother suffered from health issues. She had a long history of smoking and several related health issues, including COPD and emphysema. Despite receiving oxygen treatment, the doctors gave her only a year to live. Five years later, I was visiting her and trying to figure out how to keep her at home instead of in a skilled nursing home. I lived too far away to provide much direct aid, but I had a friend who was unemployed and lived nearby. I thought about offering him some money to help with tasks like grocery shopping and banking for my mother, to help her stay in her apartment longer.

Suddenly, I had an unwavering feeling that my mother's health was going to take a turn for the worse, and that my friend's help in taking care of her would not be needed. When I next arrived at my mother's home, I was overwhelmed with emotion and told her that I believed she was going to die soon. Instead of dismissing my statement, my mother took it seriously and called her sisters to come and visit one last time and to help her prepare for her demise. Sure enough, a few weeks later, my

## Reality by Consensus

mother passed away. My past experiences with correct premonitions had led my mother to trust my advice and prepare for her death.

### Disappear From the Face of the Earth

During the daily hustle-and-bustle, it can be refreshing to take a break and escape into nature. Imagine floating down a river on a warm, sunny day with not a cloud in sight. It's a simple yet enjoyable way to relax and unwind from the responsibilities and stress of everyday life.

Lexy, a newly acquainted coworker of mine, and I were still in the early stages of getting to know each other when we decided to spend a leisurely day floating down the river near our homes. As the sun shone brightly and there were no clouds in the sky, we enjoyed the peaceful and serene atmosphere while gently floating down the river on inner tubes. After a few hours, we decided to head to the riverbank. We were surprised to find that there was no one in sight and the area we found ourselves in was surrounded by trees, a field of grass, and rows of corn rising up a hill.

As Lexy and I left the river and stepped onto the riverbank, the weather suddenly changed dramatically. Dark clouds rolled in quickly, seeming to hang just above us. The sun was blocked out and it became almost as dark as twilight. The winds picked up, making it necessary to shout to be heard. It felt like the clouds and wind were pressing against me, and there was a buzzing in my ear.

Lexy began to panic, shouting my name and reaching out blindly as if she couldn't see or hear me, even though I was standing right next to her. She became overwhelmed with fear and started crying. It was a scary and confusing experience for both of us.

Then, just as suddenly as it had started, the strange weather passed, and everything returned to normal. She looked at me and asked, "Where did you go? Why did you leave me?" Lexy was so frightened by this experience that even now, she refuses to talk about it.

### Ghosts Can Be So Mischievous

I once visited Lexy one evening after she bought an old home. The house came with all the usual features like hardwood floors, a dishwasher, and two bathrooms—but it also came with a ghost. Lexy said the ghost was an old woman who presumably used to be the owner of the house. As we walked through the house, Lexy showed me each room, except for a second-floor bedroom that was off limits. She claimed that room was where the ghost was said to live. As we made our way back to the first floor, we noticed that all the lights that had been on were now off. It seemed like the ghost was trying to make her presence known.

As I left Lexy's house later that evening, I discovered that the lights on my motorcycle weren't working. This was odd, since they had worked fine earlier that day and the engine started without issue, showing that the battery was charged. No matter how many times I tried flipping the switch, they still wouldn't turn on. I couldn't help but wonder if the ghost that Lexy had told me about was somehow responsible. Despite the lack of lighting, I decided to ride through the city streets anyway. I wouldn't allow a ghost to deter me from leaving.

I rode through the city with only the streetlights as illumination, occasionally trying the light switch to see if they would come on. When I reached the interstate several miles away, I became concerned about the danger of riding down the pitch-black highway at night without lights. Just then, the lights turned on and I had no further issues with the motorcycle's lights.

### I Know What You're Thinking

Sometimes, my energetic being produces a burst of energy that originates in my gut and searches for a similar burst from someone else. When these two bursts connect, I can access the other person's thoughts through a "direct knowledge stream." I may mention things to them that we have never discussed before, or reference things about them that I couldn't possibly have known. In some cases, this

## Reality by Consensus

energetic connection can last for hours, but many people are often frightened by it and break the connection after a few minutes.

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*Non-ordinary reality experiences, such as these instances of mind reading or energy connection, can be unsettling for those who encounter them.*

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Non-ordinary reality experiences, such as these instances of mind reading or energy connection, can be unsettling for those who encounter them. I have started this connection with others before, and in one instance, someone else started a connection with me and inadvertently tried to drain my energy. To protect myself, I ended the connection and told the person to leave. When they shared the experience with others, they were met with disbelief and doubt. However, finding just one person who can confirm the experience can help bring a sense of understanding and normalcy. It's important to remember that these types of experiences, while unusual, are not uncommon, and they can be a source of wonder and exploration.

The following day, the person who had started the energy connection with me wanted to learn more about the energetic being. However, since they had accessed it without any prior experience and readily became indulgent, I felt it was best to let it go. They were not ready to fully experience the wonders of non-ordinary reality. It is important to be prepared and have some understanding of the energetic being before trying to access it.

### Light up the Room

The energetic being can also manifest in a way that causes two or more people to “light up a room.” This does not mean that their auras literally emit light, but rather that energy from multiple individuals combines and expands to fill the entire room. This can be a very enjoyable experience if you are with the right person, as the energy that surrounds you can feel serene and protective, almost like being back in the womb. During this state, you likely will feel free of doubt, insecurity, and worries.

Sophie is a massage therapist who has experienced the phenomenon of “lighting up a room” with other therapists. This occurs during sessions when both

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people are relaxed and fully present in the moment, allowing the flow of energy between them to grow, expand, and fill the entire space. This energy can be visualized as a fusion of colors and is characterized by a feeling of peace.

I do not fear these unusual occurrences. I view them as something as typical as getting up in the morning to make breakfast. However, the scientific side of me likes to explore the limits of these events. One time, Sophie was sitting in the lotus position with her eyes closed, allowing energy to flow. I approached her and tried to move my hands in front of her body, however there was an invisible force preventing me from touching her. No matter how hard I pushed, my hands couldn't get within a foot of her. She was completely unaware of my attempt to enter her space. I was fascinated by this experience, but I let it go. After all, it's a non-ordinary reality, and it seems that anything is possible. Just relax and enjoy.

## You're Pregnant

My partner stepped off a plane after a two-week vacation. "You're pregnant," I said, right away. This was news to her, but it was confirmed within a few days.

"Sorry I had to reschedule our appointment," my hairstylist said to me.

"Did you have a doctor's appointment about your baby?" I responded.

With a look of bewilderment on her face, she said, "How did you know? I haven't even told my friends yet."

The body undergoes subtle changes at the start of pregnancy, and while it is possible that I could simply be more perceptive than others, I believe that the energetic being within us all radiates energy that some individuals can detect and interpret. Pregnancy is easy to spot in this way, as instead of noticeable physical changes in the woman's body, there are subtle shifts in her energy.

## Medical Intuition

"Remember how I told you I've been getting a pain in my stomach?" Dylan told me over the phone. "Well, a couple of days ago I bent over in pain on the elevator. I



## Reality by Consensus

couldn't get up off the floor. I saw a doctor and he has scheduled me for gallbladder surgery next week.”

“Dylan, it's not your gallbladder. There's something wrong with your lower spine.”

What do I know? Dylan was my close friend who lived hours away from me, but he had seen my spidey sense on multiple occasions. I hadn't seen him in a year, but I called him with a gut feeling that something was wrong with his health. He took it seriously and began frantically trying to schedule a second opinion about his stomach pain. He was able to secure a last-minute appointment with a doctor who was going on vacation the following week. After examination and a scan, the doctor discovered that Dylan had a tumor wrapped around his lower spine. Without surgery within the next month, the doctor said Dylan would likely be paralyzed for life. Fortunately, he was able to have the surgery and make a full recovery.

## Manifest Destiny

Our energetic being can connect with both living and nonliving things in the universe, both of which radiate energy. By manipulating this energy, we can influence our environment and bring about a desired outcome through the process of manifestation. This can be as simple as actively directing energy towards a particular goal with sheer will. While this may seem unconventional, many people have experienced the power of manifestation through intentional practices or prayer.

In my experience, when I manifest something, I feel a “click” that signals to me that the event I have manifested will come true. I have used this technique to manifest things like the gender of my child, financial resources when needed, and even good weather on a day when rain was predicted. While some may see this as pseudoscience, I have found that it can be a powerful tool for creating positive change in my life.

I am cautious in my use of manifestation, as manipulating energy can be draining for me. Additionally, I understand that manifesting certain events may have serious consequences for others. For example, manifesting a new job could potentially deprive someone else of the opportunity. Therefore, I try to be mindful of my

## Reality by Consensus

intentions and manifest sparingly, leaving room for others to have their own experiences in the world.

## Reality by Consensus



*Divenire*

## Paradise Found

NO ONE COULD HAVE IMAGINED THAT A SIMPLE TRIP TO RECONNECT WITH A FRIEND WOULD UNRAVEL THE MYSTERIES OF LIFE AND OUR VERY EXISTENCE.

It had been five years since Christian last saw Ilsa. He asked to be dropped off at the beach, much to his driver's disbelief.

"It's quite a distance from any hotel," the driver pointed out.

Christian simply replied, "I have a friend meeting me there. She has a car and will take me to the hotel afterwards. Thanks for the ride."

The driver just shrugged.

Ilsa had always had an affinity for the ocean, so much so that after all these years apart, she had wanted to meet him at the beach in Bodega Cove rather than at her new home.

Ilsa and Christian had a deep connection that went beyond the physical. They would often spend hours discussing spiritual topics and delving into each other's thoughts. They would take walks in parks and through the woods, and sometimes hold each other for hours. While they did have a sexual relationship, it was not a focus for them. Eventually, Ilsa moved away for a new job, and they lost touch, only seeing each other occasionally over the years when they could. They both went on to have other partners and marriages, but their bond remained strong despite the distance and changes in their lives.

The beach was down a flight of steps from the highway, over a hill. To the north, the foot of a steep mountain could be seen breaking across the sand, creating a rocky promontory that extended into the water. The trees on the mountain slopes were showing the colors of fall. To the south, the beach faded into a hazy distance.

## Paradise Found

The sand was deserted, as one would expect on a late October weekday. However, Christian saw Ilsa's green towel with a large, colorful parrot on it, just as she had promised. Ilsa had mentioned on the phone that she would likely go for a run up to the point before he arrived, and he could find her there if he wished.

He left his things by her towel and ran.

Although the sun was shining and the weather was relatively warm for a breezy fall day, there was no one else in sight along the beach as he made his way to the promontory. There were footprints visible, however—Ilsa's—slightly blown about by the wind, leading out but not yet returning.

The tracks led to a narrow cave in the rocky outcrop, just above the tide line. He thought it wouldn't hurt to look and see if the opening extended all the way through like a tunnel. He imagined he might potentially find Ilsa resting in the cove on the other side. As he ventured deeper into the cave, it became darker and narrower. He could no longer see Ilsa's tracks or much of anything else. He was just about to turn back when his foot slipped, and he fell into a hole in the ground. His head struck a rock, and everything went black.

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When Christian came to, he had difficulty remembering where he was or how he got there. The cave seemed bigger and brighter than before, and he wondered if it opened out to the other side of the point, with just a drop between two different levels. He was lying on his back in a few inches of water, but there was no evidence of blood, and to his surprise, he couldn't find any injuries. He struggled to his feet, his legs feeling stiff but stable, and followed the light up and out. As he neared the cave opening, he automatically reached for his phone, but it was not in its usual pocket. After searching all his pockets, he couldn't find it anywhere. He assumed it must have fallen out during his fall.

The cave opening was wide and tall. To his left rose the mountain—or was it even the same mountain? The ridge behind the cave seemed higher on this side, blocking any view of the ocean. He had to follow the cleft uphill. He could hear birds chirping and the faint sound of running water, possibly from a nearby stream. The sun was bright and unusually warm.

The trail gently descended, surrounded by blue, yellow, and purple flowers, before appearing from a line of trees and leading to a stone bridge over a river gorge.

## Paradise Found

The wooden roof of the bridge was carved to let dappled sunbeams cover the span with a checkerboard pattern of shadow and light.

At the head of the bridge stood a tall and muscular woman, gazing away from it. She was dressed in a burnt orange dress that reached the top of her leather shoes, and her long, jet-black hair was flowing in the wind. The dress was fitted at her waist, secured with a wide brown belt. In her right hand was a long staff that appeared to be made of glass, with a broad, round crescent at the top. The tip of the staff glistened in the sunlight, casting a rainbow on the bridge floor like a prism.

“Hello, miss, can you help me?” Christian called out as he approached. “I bumped my head and I think I’m lost.”

Nothing. There was no reaction from the woman. He stepped around in front of her to capture her attention.

“Hi, I need your help. I’m lost and I think I may be injured.”

She continued to stare straight ahead and without a word, she lifted her staff and pointed the crescent toward the other side of the bridge.

“I could really use your help, lady,” he said more forcefully.

Once again silence, and with a small flick of the staff, she motioned again for Christian to cross the bridge.

California, he figured. At least she didn’t seem dangerous.

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The trail on the far side of the bridge ran down through a field of purple, yellow, and blue flowers, leading to a crystal-clear lake surrounded by mountains stretching to the horizon. Christian saw no sign of the highway. However, there was a sailboat anchored in the shallow waters with two men nearby and what appeared to be a woman lounging on the deck.

As he approached the sailboat, he shouted out, “Hi, I sure could use your help.”

“Certainly,” one of the men responded as they both turned toward Christian “How can we be of service?”

“Hi. My name is Christian. I’m a bit confused. I came to visit my friend and was looking for her on the beach and...” He recounted the series of events that had led him here, including the silent woman he met on the bridge.

“Oh, that’s Nola,” the second man said. “She doesn’t talk. That’s not her purpose.”

## Paradise Found

“I’m Alexander,” said the first man. “That’s Stephane, and over there is Olivia.”

The woman glanced at Christian, then turned her face back to the sun and closed her eyes again.

“Forgive me, but where am I?” he asked.

“You’re in Divenire,” Alexander replied.

“Never heard of it. I was on the beach in Bodega Cove.”

“Can’t say I know it.” Stephane looked at Alexander and cracked a smile.

“Then how did I get here? How far is it from the beach?”

“Well, I can’t help you there, Christian. This is Divenire. That’s all I know.”

Alexander interjected, “Christian, it looks like you’ve been through a lot. Let me get you some food. We have wine as well. We can try to answer your questions as best we can.”

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*He must have wandered to the wrong side of the point and stumbled upon a cult compound.*

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This had to be a cult. He must have wandered to the wrong side of the point and stumbled upon a cult compound. Christian had read about these types of situations. He wondered if Ilsa had also fallen victim to these people—or if she was already a member and this whole plan was an attempt to get him to join. He thought it best not to show any of that, though.

“Sure,” he said, “I’d love some wine—but one question first, if you don’t mind. I told you I was looking for my friend. Her name is Ilsa and she’s about five-seven, blonde...”

Olivia suddenly sat up. “Ilsa! I loved her. She visited with us a bit ago. She’s fine. I have something to settle you and I’ll tell you how to get to Isabella and Sophia’s place. She went to visit with them. How lucky you are to have her as a friend, she’s sweet.”

Stephane went below to retrieve some wine and bread while Christian joined them on the deck, still wary but trying not to show it.

“So how do you know each other?” he asked.

“We’re from here,” said Olivia.

“You have homes on the lake?”

## Paradise Found

“No, we live on the sloop.”

“Well how do you know each other?”

“We met and just hit it off.”

“What do you all do for a living?”

“Do you mean work? We don’t work, we just enjoy sailing on the lake and soaking up the sun.”

“But what did you do before you decided to... throw it all away?” Christian asked, choosing his words carefully.

Alexander said, “Some time ago I was an accountant. Olivia was a webcam girl. Stephane was a bodyguard for CEOs, quite well known and sought after. But that was a long time ago. We never think of it anymore. We live in the moment now and just enjoy life.”

Despite further questioning, the most Christian could learn from the people on the boat was that Ilsa was at a cottage about a mile from the lake.

“You can’t miss it. It’s bright pink; there’s nothing else like it in Divenire,” they said. They didn’t mention belonging to a group, but Stephane did speak excitedly about “Simpson,” who often met with visitors. Christian presumed this was the cult leader.

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The path wound around the blue of the lakeshore. Christian could see fish darting just below the water’s surface, and the breeze gently brushed against his neck. There were more flowers here, the same as near the bridge, and the smaller trees up ahead were still in bloom. *How is this possible in October?* he wondered. There was even a hint of lilacs in the air.

Despite the oddity of the situation and the strange residents of Divenire, Christian found himself relaxing in the unseasonably warm and fragrant air. Work felt very far away. The cottage he found was exactly as described—bright pink and situated behind a stand of trees, off the path. It was a single-story building, about twenty-five feet wide and deep. The windows were open, with a potted flower on each sill.

He could hear voices coming from the back of the cottage, where Christian discovered a stone patio with a tall, wide rock wall that was comfortable to sit on. Beyond the patio was a flagstone path leading to a garden in the back, where rectangular and circular beds grew various plants—tomatoes in one bed, corn in



## Paradise Found

another, and peppers in yet another. Some areas had flowers, while others were bare and raked as if they were being prepared for new seedlings. In the center stood a pergola covered in blooming lilacs.

Three women were crouched down, working in one of the beds, accompanied by a small dog that barked and ran towards Christian. At the noise, one of the women turned around and exclaimed with delight, “Christian, you’re here!” and rushed towards him.

Ilsa flung her arms around him and hugged him as close as two humans could get. Then she turned and pulled him toward the other two, saying, “I can’t believe you’re here, too. What a surprise. Come meet my friends. Sophia, this is Christian. Christian, meet Isabella.”

Both looked harmless, if a little New Age in their hair and clothes. They seemed older than he and Ilsa. Isabella spoke first. “Ilsa’s told us all about you. In truth, I thought you’d be taller.”

Sophia laughed. “Not as geeky as I’d expected, though.”

“Nice to meet you,” he said. “Is it okay if I talk with Ilsa alone for a moment?”

Ilsa shook her head. “Christian, they’re fine. Whatever you say to me, they can hear as well.”

There was nothing in her eyes to suggest she was one of them, but he wasn’t wholly sure. “Fair enough, maybe Isabella and Sophia can help. I had some questions about this place and how I got here. And more importantly, how can we get—”

“Christian,” Isabella interrupted, “I can understand why you’d be impatient, but there’s no need to be hasty. Simpson is the caretaker of this place. He can provide answers to any questions you have. That’s his purpose. We promise. Let me show you our garden before you go.”

Ilsa took Christian’s hand, and they followed Isabella and Sophia around the growing plots, taking turns to describe each in detail until they came to the last one, and a wistful look came over Isabella.

“I planted this dwarf cherry when I arrived here,” she said, looking at the spindly tree heavy with blossoms in front of them. “Not much different from you, in some ways. I’d like to think someone, maybe Ilsa or yourself, would look after the garden when Sophia and I eventually leave.”

## Paradise Found

“So, people do leave?” Christian seized on her words. “Can we just get out of this... compound or whatever it is?”

“You should talk to Simpson now. There’s a skiff drawn up on the beach below us.”

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They made their way down to the water. From the beach, Isabella pointed to a building made of glass that rose from the mountainside across the lake, surrounded by trees. “That’s where you should go,” she told him. “He’ll explain everything.”

The skiff was long and narrow. It reminded him of the boats he had seen in documentaries about Vietnam. The thin paddle laid across its seats had the same crescent symbol he’d seen on the staff of the woman on the bridge, whose name he now knew was Nola.

“If you want me to help with the garden, I could stay,” Ilsa said, but the two women just shook their heads.

“You know you need to go with him. That’s your purpose right now,” Sophia replied. “We’ll be here when you come back.”

Christian was somewhat surprised when Isla initially expressed a preference for staying with her friends rather than going with him, despite him having traveled a long way to see her. Although disappointed, he was thankful she had changed her mind and would now be joining him after all.

Christian hauled the boat out into the shallows and helped Ilsa aboard. It was surprisingly easy to paddle. Behind, he heard Isabella call out, “See you two soon,” as the women turned away to return to their gardening.

Not wanting to upset them or Ilsa, he murmured to himself, “Hopefully not.”

---

He had a hundred questions he wanted to ask now that they were alone—who were these people? Why were they here, and how could they get out? But before he could speak, Ilsa reached out and gently took the paddle from his hands, placing it in the bottom of the boat to let them drift. She looked deeply into his eyes as she slowly sat in his lap and kissed him like she was savoring the sun.

“We’ve got all the time we need,” she murmured. “And it’s been so long.”

## Paradise Found

She removed her bralette and pulled her skirt to the side. Christian quickly undressed, the intensity between them growing. He gently entered her.

Afterwards, he lay with his eyes closed and counted his blessings. He was with Ilsa, who lay nestled in the crook of his arm, and under the sun with not a cloud in the sky. Despite being knocked unconscious and getting lost in a cult compound, it was a glorious day. He reflected that things could be much worse.

Ilsa woke him when the skiff's hull scraped against the far shore. "Christian, we're here," she whispered.

He opened his eyes, smiled, and said, "Maybe all's right with the world after all."

"We can keep it that way."

After a moment, she pointed to the hill just off the shore and the glass building they had seen from the other side. As they walked up the narrow path towards it, Christian could see directly inside. It wasn't a house so much as a single room, and in the center sat an old man, gently rocking back and forth in a chair. He had long white hair, deeply tanned skin, and a blank expression on his face.

As they approached, a door slid open to admit them, and the old man, who Christian assumed was Simpson, gestured at the floor as he rose smoothly, with no sign of age or stiffness.

"Sit right there," he said.

"Mr. Simpson, I'd like—"

"I know what you would like."

"You know, I wish just once someone here would let me finish a sentence."

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*I'm the caretaker of Divenire.*

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"Well, we do have all the time in the world, so I could patiently listen to your stories of misfortune, but why? I'm the caretaker of Divenire. It's my job to know everyone here. Christian, you want to know how you got here, what this place is, and how you can leave."

"That's right, I do."

"As I said, I know. First, there is only one way out of Divenire. And that cave you came from is not it. That was just your way in."

## Paradise Found

“That’s crazy.”

Ilsa touched him on the arm. “It’s not, Christian. It’s true.”

“There are people here,” Christian said. “They have food, homes, and lives. How did they get in?”

Simpson sighed. “All in their own ways. They come past Nola to Divenire, just like you did after your fall in the cave. She’s the guardian. That’s her purpose.”

There was that “purpose” nonsense again. Best leave it alone, Christian surmised.

“And you keep everyone trapped here once they get here?”

“Do you feel trapped? Has anyone trapped you?”

“I...” Christian stopped. “I don’t know.”

“Go to the bridge and see Nola with Ilsa. Then decide for yourself. I promise you, you won’t be able to return the way you came. I can’t explain why, but Nola can. You’ll have to understand it on your own. You need to so that your time will come. Ilsa understands better than you do.”

With that, Simpson went back to rocking in his chair and the door behind them slid open again, suggesting he was being dismissed.

“Do you?” Christian whispered to Ilsa as they left the house again.

“I remember the cave,” she said, linking her arm through his. “I remember what happened to me there. Better than you do.”

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They walked around the far side of the lake. There were many paths, but each either led back to the water or ended at a rock formation, cliff, or ravine. Eventually, they entered the familiar field of flowers, and Christian knew the bridge was just a short distance ahead. The sun was still high in the sky, though his arrival felt like it had been many hours ago.

Nola stood at the far end of the bridge, just as she had when he first crossed, with her staff still in her hand. He edged out onto the span, moving Ilsa behind him for her safety. Nola didn’t move.

“What is this place?” he said. “Simpson said you’d show us.”

Nola said nothing. When Christian cautiously stepped forward, she suddenly stamped the end of her staff on the ground and declared, “None shall pass this way.”

## Paradise Found

She could talk after all. Then, her staff lit up with a brightness akin to the sun and she looked up into the sky. As Christian had experienced since arriving in Divenire, the sky was always impeccably clear. However, in the direction that Nola was now gazing, a cloud appeared suddenly and rose above them. The cloud displayed an image of a woman in a delivery room, along with a nurse and midwife in scrubs, holding a newborn baby that had just appeared from the woman's body. The infant could be heard crying as it inhaled its first breaths of air.

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*This is for each of you, to be born again.*

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He heard Simpson's booming and thunderous voice roll from above and proclaim, "This is for each of you, to be born again."

As Christian pieced everything together, he realized that the cave, the fall, and Ilsa's comments about him remembering more than he initially thought all made sense. It was peculiar to consider that they likely passed away close together in time. He pondered what the person who discovered their corpses would make of the situation. He found that he felt no sadness at all. He already knew what came next, where he was, what his existence in Divenire would be.

Ilsa slipped her hand in his. "You knew already," he said.

"I remembered a lot more of what happened to me, and I worked it out much faster. They told me everyone needs to come to terms with Divenire in their own time. Are you okay?"

He smiled at her. "I couldn't be better. This place couldn't be better. Let's go swimming. Afterwards, I want to plant some sunflowers in Isabella's and Sophia's garden."



*Solitude*

## The Awakening

FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS, SHE'D LIVED AT A LOW INTENSITY AND BUILT AN INNER WORLD TO WHICH NO ONE COULD ENTER—UNTIL SHE MET HIM.

Anna sits on the floor with her legs spread wide as she sorts through a stack of papers in front of her. The sun is just beginning to rise, casting beams of white and yellow light into the room through the floor-to-ceiling windows. Anna is still wearing her nightgown, a sheer, white garment that glows in the sunlight. She looks relaxed and peaceful as she works.

She is alone, with no plans or appointments for the day. She takes slow, deliberate sips of her coffee, savoring the rare, quiet moment to herself. There is no need to rush today, and no one depends on her or demands her attention. She can simply sit and enjoy the peaceful solitude.

Pinning up her hair, she thinks she hears a noise. She sits attentively and cocks her head, listening. The only noise she can discern is the ever-present sound of the street below: cars speeding away from red lights or honking and people greeting each

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other over the din. The sound had become all too familiar, and she had, over time, learned to ignore it.

There it is again. Not in the street, but right there in her apartment. In her hallway behind her. The muted sound of footsteps approaching. How can this be? She lives alone, she's single, free of attachments, and has plenty of acquaintances but few friends. She has never been one to ask people to her apartment, save for her friends, and this is an intruder.

Her first instinct is to turn around and face this unexpected presence—but she doesn't. There is no malevolence in the footsteps. Their gentleness signals that there is no danger, and that this person will not harm her. She's filled with euphoria and panic at the same time. *It must be him*; she thinks. But how? They've never met other than the occasional video chat with her spiritual meet-up group.

She knows only that his first name is Christian; last names aren't allowed in the group chat. She had never even seen his face. She reveals herself to the camera, but he does not, so only his voice is known to her. They had often talked of philosophical and spiritual matters, both intrigued by the scope of each other's reading and the depth and quality of their minds. Yet there was an energy on a level beneath that conversation, their minds and spirits touching even with the substantial distance separating them. After many hours of chatting with Christian over the days and weeks, she had been touched by his patience, kindness, sensuality, and respect. Anna has tried to think of the right words for everything she feels about him, but some have probably not been invented yet.

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*She could never have imagined herself in a cyber-romance.*

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She could never have imagined herself in a cyber-romance. It's far from real, but certainly doesn't feel that way. She feels the same as she had in past romances, with intense feelings of tenderness, elation, closeness, and even occasional disappointment. She enjoys her free time and living alone. But at the same time, Anna is grateful to be touched by a soul who lives more in their own interior world and can understand her beyond words, without physical touch. It hurts when she thinks that it will remain at this distance.

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Anna let herself be driven by his energy. She would love to feel his hands embracing her from behind, but every chord of his that touches her has the same effect. She feels protected, but also free and encouraged to feel.

She imagines Christian on a precipice, facing an approaching storm, clothes clinging to his body under the force of the wind. But the storm is no match for his power within. He is stronger, more confident, and more capable of realizing all his potential all at once.

When she chats with Christian, she enjoys knowing he looks longingly upon her face and her body. He often asks her to reveal herself to him, and she does. She relishes his sighs when he realizes he can see but cannot touch, cannot smell that scent that is uniquely hers. She enjoys this power she has over him. But now it's his turn. He has found his way to her.

But wait! He's a gentle soul, but it can't be him—he's a world away. Thousands of miles separate them. She starts to turn, but it's too late. He is behind her; his legs parallel hers and his body pressed against her back. Christian's hands hold her face forward to prevent her from turning, but gently; just enough to tell her she is safe, that it is him, and that now he is in command. He wants her to surrender to him. Now that he is here in her apartment, she doesn't care that she feels naked, as if her life and all her secrets are laid at his feet.

How can this be? She feels his warm breath on the back of her neck. It's an inviting warmth and her body stirs in response. It is a stirring she has not felt for some time, if ever. The exquisite feeling starts at her neck and then spreads to her breasts and down to her root chakra. As Christian holds her, it is as if he is holding on for the life inside them. No words are exchanged. Wait, it can't be him. It's not possible.

He suddenly kisses her. It is a tentative, innocent pressing of the lips. She understands at once that in accepting and returning that innocent touch, she has crossed a boundary. She has passed through a turnstile from which there is no way back. Nothing in her life will ever be quite the same. And, realizing it too, grasping the weight of her feelings, he quietly laughs.

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*Anna gives herself permission to succumb, and she embraces him with all of her being.*

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He moves his hands along the sides of her body. She melts, no longer in control. Her gown is thin, and she can feel every micro-movement. She can feel his muscles and his strength as his arms press against her—muscles that do not come from his job sitting at a desk and typing. His hands lightly touch the sides of her breasts, and she gasps. Anna wants more than anything to feel the uncompromising sexuality that washes over her as she presses herself against him. This is the proverbial decisive moment, both spontaneous and ephemeral. In the past, she had let the moment pass until it was lost, never to be found again. Not this time. Anna gives herself permission to succumb, and she embraces him with all of her being.

Her breathing quickens as his right hand moves across her stomach, then along the top of her legs. His breath continues to lie upon her neck, becoming shallow now with his own arousal.

His hands reach the inside of her thighs, starting at her knees. He moved upwards, and she began to arch in anticipation. In the past, she would not have enjoyed this seduction. Too much would be swirling in her head: shame brought on by endless indoctrination that sex is bad or worrying about this man's intentions. In the past, there was only muted joy in the act. Not this time—not with him.

She feels the moistness between her thighs increase as he inches closer. He suddenly grabs her by the arm and twists her toward the floor. She instinctively closes her eyes. Her fear is gone. He has made love to her before—with his words, with his poetry, and with his music. No one quite understands her like he does.

Christian lays her gently on the floor, her eyes still closed. She feels his hands move her nightgown toward her stomach. He kisses her thigh, again and again, and she can feel his hot breath on her pudenda—but he passes and moves to her stomach. Anna knows that he knows she wants him, but he lets the anticipation build. Right then, Christian kisses her squarely on the mouth. It is a gentle kiss, a prolonged kiss.

She can feel Christian's manhood between her legs seeking its destination. She reaches down and grasps its enormity as she gently guides it into her. At first, their movements are slow, back and forth, then quicker. Her breath becomes deeper and louder and faster. Her body aches as the pleasure and pain of his thrusting rushes toward her and converges into a body-shattering orgasm.

*Bang!* She opens her eyes. Anna sits up in bed, disoriented and confused. She hears a trash bin lid slamming shut and realizes it was just her neighbor in the alley. As

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she comes to her senses, she realizes that Christian was just a dream. She sighs, feeling a sense of disappointment wash over her as she remembers their deep conversations and the strong connection they shared, even though they had never met in person. She lies back in bed, trying to recall the vivid details of the dream and the energy that had flowed between them.

She lays her head upon her pillow once more and desperately tries to recapture his presence. Anna falls asleep easily, the way sleep used to come to her as a child, innocent and dream filled. There is no remorse and no doubt that being with Christian is good and right. She still feels his arms around her, her head cushioned against his chest as she drifts off, her body completely empty of tension.

When she wakes later and rises to face the day, to shower, to work—she thinks of him again and cannot bear the thought that this seduction was just a dream. She needs the physicality of his touch. Christian is animalistic in his innocence and ethereal in his purity. Anna can feel it surrounding her, and it makes her strong.

She must see Christian, she thinks. She must directly experience the passion that his sensuality has stirred in her. She smiles knowing she can make it happen—it must happen. Until then, she will reluctantly settle for Christian's words, his poetry, his music, and virtual visits in cyberspace—and in her dreams.