Coming of Age in the Age of Awakening

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For my Family, who have ceaselessly supported me through this weaving and winding journey.
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Introduction

From my travel journal:

Driven insane by this system seeking sanctuary in an asylum of mind. But dwelling within the safe confines of the circle is not enough, was never enough. Dammit. So long as the world spins crazy, distracted and diminished I know I’m not finished... Just staring at my mission, holding this vision as my lifeline of sanity. The only thing left that matters to me, my friends and family, every possibility, every seed and tree, bird and bee, shit man, I just wanna be free...

Maybe you’ve read Into the Wild by Ron Krakauer (or seen the movie). Krakauer tells the story of Chris McCandless and his liberating yet tragic foray of detaching from mainstream society and disappearing into the margins.

Chris was born into a mundane middle-class life, but he couldn’t ignore the contradictions and tragedies of normal existence in the modern United States. As a teenager, he would buy bags of sandwiches and deliver them to the homeless. Deeply troubled by the status quo, Chris left. He took off into the wild after graduating college. He didn’t have a plan, but he left anyway. He explored the margins. He met new people and people loved him because he was real, a real wandering, troubled soul. Along the way, Chris left his car in Arizona. He made it to the wilderness of Alaska, alone, where he met his end after eating poisoned potatoes. He died in an abandoned school bus. Scrawled on the wall of the bus was his last lesson: “Happiness is only real when shared.”

I share about Chris because I too left the normal confines of society to go on a trip. To be fair, I had already strayed into the margins. Ten years ago, I departed from my dream of working on Wall Street. I was an A+ economics student in college; then I ate mushrooms.

More recently though, I disappeared into the wild. In November 2017, I got in my car and drove south. I knew roughly where I would go, and I knew I would come back, but the rest I would make up along the way.

Like Chris, I made new friends. Like Chris, I left my car in Arizona. Like Chris, I gained a deeper appreciation of the lesson,
“happiness is only real when shared.” Unlike Chris, I didn’t have to come within sight of my final breath to realize this. Rather than ending my journey alone, distraught, and finally dead, this chapter of adventure ends with me returning home to old friends and dear family.

~

I had a rough plan. I would leave my friend’s seaside cabin in Georgetown, Maine and drive south all the way to the tip of Florida, circle round the coast to Texas, make it to Central America by plane, and round out the tour of the United States by heading southwest before the return home.

I would leave with my recently self-published poetry book, *Imagine the Future*. I paid a few hundred bucks to order a box of 100 books. I planned to perform my stuff on the streets as often I could. By performance I would commit to the path of poet.

What follows is part of my coming of age story, my rite of passage through a long dark night of soul. Through my journey, I took note as the motif of the hero’s journey emerged. A psycho-spiritual transformation was not the conscious goal of my travels, and neither was the actualization of my vocation or the partnering up with a mate, but in retrospect, I see these coming of age aspects as emerging from my psyche, as calling me and pulling me onward.

Living in the Maine cabin, an incessant voice within told me that I must go beyond my familiar comfort zone or else I would wither in the Maine winter. I was living alone and isolated from community, struggling to get my creativity out, grimly aware of the stark truth that winter was coming. With enough online writing work to keep me paid on the road, I figured it best to heed the call to go beyond.

~

In the way of this story I speak my narrative perspective on the world. I use my experience as an opportunity to delve into the systems and structures that caused Chris McCandless so much angst, using insights gained from my voracious search for meaning and understanding that began after I first touched base with psychedelics, Eastern philosophy, and theories and practices of nonviolence and activism.
In the pages to follow I discuss the social-cultural matrix and nature matrix; how Lyme Disease and other crises of health, finances, or relationships may be wake up calls for us to return to a deeper awareness; the struggles of finding purpose, meaning, peace, community, companionship, and a vision and livelihood that benefits the world; the bewilderment of coming of age in the midst of the “great turning”; the role of psychedelic plant medicines in aiding us to wake up and heal; and in many ways, I explore a hero’s journey framework of reality.

In the ten years since I started to wake up from the my get-rich-quick dream, the relationship between the personal and collective struggle has fascinated me. As I became aware of the gross injustices, violence, and other senselessness in our modern world, I began to see that the struggles I have endured through my life are reflections of our world’s conditions. Through this story, I intend to demonstrate how my personal coming of age story mirrors the collective coming of age process of our time. Though I relate a story often fraught with despair that emphasizes the soul-deadening aspects of our decaying social order, I hope that the metamorphosis into the butterfly is apparent both on the personal and collective scale. I’ll say no more here, but let you see for yourself. Let’s depart.
Part One: The Departure

I had two more trips of baggage to the car before heading out. I looked out the window and saw a truck approach the driveway. They pulled in to Justin’s grandparents’ house just across the road. A young lad dressed from 1950 hopped out to go knock on their door. The grandparents were home, but they didn’t come to answer. The young man got back in the truck to continue onward. I waved to them from my car, loading the last of my things. They crept to a stop in front of the house so the dapperly dressed fellow could make his approach. I noticed the Good Book in his hand: Jehovah’s Witnesses.

I voiced a greeting to the young Witness and he responded in kind with a tip of his beret. Jacob explained the purpose of his mission. I understood his cause and would not think to deter him from his noble path, so long as he remained nonviolent and tolerant. He asked me what I thought God was. I smiled and stopped a moment to think. Then I said, “Well, my favorite poet, Saul Williams, has a few lines that I really like about God. Would you like to hear them?” He nodded.

“Never question who I am, 
God knows, 
And I know God personally. 
In fact, She lets me call her me.”

He looked back at me nonplussed, unsure for a moment how to rescind on this disillusioned try at identifying God. As polite as he could, he insisted on sharing God in his terms, straight from the book. I assented, pleased to have a blessing spoken at the Christening of my trip. “All that you see,” and my pilgrim friend paused to wave at the tall pines just beyond the field, “God is there…” And something on about that. I looked at the pine trees swaying in the breeze and nodded. I thanked him and said I really should be off now.
Sharing the Lyme-light with my Brattleboro Brother

The first stop on the journey was Amar in Brattleboro, Vermont. Amar takes part in the yogic tradition of Ananda Marga, which translates from Sanskrit to “Path of Bliss.” In college I became acquainted with the Margis when I lived with Jon, a kindred spirit and I’m sure a brother from a past life. Margis are fun because one of their primary meditations is singing various chants and songs of Baba Nam Kevalam, which I understand to mean “all is love.” When anyone is chanting about all being love, whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Orthodox Jew, I’ll be there singing along at the drop of a hat.

I came to know Amar through “Just Yoga,” a group which encourages yoga practitioners to consider yoga’s deeper intention in recognizing Oneness with all, cultivating Love for all, and working toward a collective awakening. Hence, it’s “Just” yoga, free from the extras of Westernization, and also “Just” in that we insist upon the merging of yoga and justice. We believe yoga people should take their practice off the mat and use their inner peace and realizations to work for a peaceful and just planet, thus accelerating the rate of collective awakening and uplift. Also, if you want to learn about the deeper philosophical and spiritual tradition of yoga, which is worth doing since it offers a doorway to a much greater game than just body management, check out what we’ve got at Just Yoga.

Amar is good people. In addition to jamming, playing, laughing, and talking heart on a lot of stuff, Amar dropped a clue about Lyme Disease. Amar had been struggling with the Lyme, and I told him I knew all about that, plus a guy he should see: Dr. Deutsch in Portland, Maine. A chiropractor with mixed modalities, Dr. Deutsch muscles tests for Lyme and prescribes the right homeopathic remedies. I had Lyme for probably 10 years. I didn’t know that’s what it was before I saw the Doc., but after a year of treatment I was a different person. From feeling tired, sloggy, heavy and achy all the time to not being stamped with those brands of suffering really helps one open to other avenues of life.

Amar’s synchronistic experience with Lyme clued me that my stuff may be flaring up and that maybe I should go back to Maine before really tripping on the trip. The next stop in Albany, New York added more clues, like looking down at the car radio and seeing the band “Deer Tick” playing. After stopping by Long Island and New York City, I did go back and was rewarded for my correct intuition. I got the new goods
from Deutsch and left feeling confident that I would soon squelch those microbial suckers.

Lyme taught me the importance of health. A few years before I learned I had the illness, I had become so dissatisfied struggling every day with fatigue, depression, foggy mind and other slog that I decided to explore diet, fitness, and energy work. My body and health were previously uncharted territory, a dark jungle I knew of only through concept. Thank you, Lyme. But now that I know to tune in and take care, we need not dance in that way anymore.

My main philosopher man Charles Eisenstein suggests that autoimmune conditions like Lyme, as well as other issues of finances, relationships, and health, could be part of our wake up call. These buggers may be here to help us stop and face the suffering we’ve been hiding from. Crises like Lyme and other autoimmune conditions that old models of medicine can’t heal can halt the momentum of our conditioning by rendering us immobile and forcing a reconsideration of life values and identity. With Lyme, one cannot participate in the Go-Go-Go-More-More-More grind of espresso-charged capitalism. Perhaps Lyme is a guardian who pushes me back into the arena of right intention if ever I waiver.

Nature itself is a guardian. I write this from a cabin surrounded by nature. To my left and back are forest, cut into a neat perimeter around a large square field. The walls of tree trunks, leaves, and other wild greenery encroach upon the space. To my front is the ocean, another wall along the shoreside. To my right is grassy space, trees, and then a pond. Nature has me surrounded. In the open space of our society, in the house or car, on the public beach or in the supermarket, I am merged in the cultural matrix. In those spheres I carry the cultural baggage of being. Our postures, gestures, tones of speech, choices of diction, where we place our eyes, and countless other ways we interact to exchange energy are forms of the matrix coding, the scripts that we play.

The roads, streets, and highways are like a circuit board. So long as we are on the road system, in cities, connected to the grid, we can never be truly free. What we see in the grid reflects back to us in feedback loops, perpetuating a capital matrix mode of being. Freedom entails dropping the cultural baggage and entering the sphere of nature, naked. We don’t need to be totally “free,” if such a thing even exists, but freedom is worth venturing outside the culture matrix into nature to keep
the mirror clear. We are in fact nature, so we can also connect to the
natural self at any time simply by tuning in, breathing, and scanning
what’s going on. The big Nature of forests, beaches, rivers, oceans,
jungles, deserts, waterfalls, and mountains are ideal for bringing us
home, but we can connect to our nature anywhere.

Under the cultural matrix, nature reflects a matrix of deeper
truth—the primordial matrix of Being. The consciousness of nature
created the myriad forms of life that have persisted and evolved over
billions of years to get us to our present self-conscious, ultra-creative
state. Deep in the center of this process is the will of Spirit, God,
Universe or whatever name you prefer. Nature represents
God/Consciousness because it is a raw expression of it (us), as seen in
the sun, stars, moon and oceans that teem with life.

Do you think it is by coincidental clusters of lifeless matter
randomly smashing together that the universe has arranged itself in
countless billions of galaxies, endlessly aligning the perfect conditions
for life to emerge and complexify to this point? Embedded in material is
the will to take this dynamic process further into more subtle, complex,
aware, creative, and loving expressions of itself, because it’s all one
thing: One unimaginably nuanced, ungraspably intelligent mystery of
existence.

Nature is complex, multi-dimensional, awake and aware, but our
society has dissociated from the original matrix. Instead, we have super-
imposed something else over nature. We have created a detached
psychic sphere which keeps us from merging with the original matrix.
We think of ourselves as separate from everything. We feel separate, tell
stories of being separate, build fences and isolate in personal rooms to
separate from others, and in many other ways act as if we are separate.
We organize society and economics around endlessly exploiting nature
as if nature is not a living, breathing organism composed of countless
beings who experience so much suffering from our ways of life. Our
blinders of separation also preclude us from seeing how the loss of the
biosphere will inevitably lead to our species’ loss.

I believe Lyme Disease is one of Earth’s mechanisms for waking
us up. Nature bites us and says, “Hey! Stop it! Wake up!” Nature has
many ways of bypassing the firewall of our cultural matrix. To halt the
momentum of the world destroying machine, sometimes we must stop
and take a break. Sometimes stopping to rest and reflect is necessary to
face what we have hidden and open to what we have forgotten.
The Pursuit of Happiness in Albany

After chewing on ideas of revolution and yoga with Amar over breakfast, I headed off to Albany to stay with my dear friend, Jon. I arrived at his apartment at the same time as his girlfriend, Shannon. Jon wouldn’t be back from work for some time, so Shannon and I sat in the kitchen and talked about life. As can happen, Shannon and I reflected to one another the same predicaments and bewilderments of our age.

We talked about our values, hopes, and dreams and how they fit into the collective struggle of awakening. We talked about the advantages of pursuing a solo trip of freedom and self-determination as opposed to rooting in with a community. We talked about our gifts we want to share. Shannon loves growing food and is a natural healer. She wishes to set roots, grow healthy delicious food, and support the celebration and integration of community.

We talked about the great uncertainties of our futures. Should we acquiesce to the norms of society, get the 40-hour job and earn enough to achieve that oft sought but ever diminishing “security?” With a decently paying role in the world, one can provide for others, build a home, start a family, donate to good causes, and all that jazz. But are we sacrificing something if we take the job? Will the job reflect our soul’s purpose? Will it grant us the freedom and empowerment to be ourselves and live our values?

Also, how much longer will those old stories and structures remain intact? The story of social security and retirement savings is from an outmoded operating system leading to the destruction of the planet. The emerging operating system of trust and security through loving connection, community, simplicity, common sense and giving our heart’s gifts will give rise to structures that grant true security for all.

I outlined for Shannon my argument about why us young folk shouldn’t worry about our student loan debt. I’ve got $55,000 and she has a bunch too. We’re both on the Income-Based Repayment Plan, which means our monthly and yearly payments amount to goose eggs—we don’t make enough to have to pay anything. Not yet anyway, but interest accumulates daily and will compound over the years to exceed the principal of the loan. However, the system cannot sustain long enough for it to come due.
Let’s crunch some numbers and break it down before the swallow. Fair warning to you reader: This may be a lot to digest. About 45 million people have student loan debt. Total SLD is $1.5 trillion and rising while my generation is downwardly mobile. Compared to the past, we have less real income, less savings, less jobs, and more debt. Defaults on SLD are steadily increasing.

By the time our “grace period” for the Income-Based Payment Plan has passed, which for me is in about 15 years, then the system will have surely imploded and transformed. The most incredulous possibility, the least likely scenario, is that in 2030 everything will be business as usual in a functional enough state so that our debts could possibly be paid. In other words, capitalism is hitting the fan (refer to economist Richard Wolff’s excellent documentary lecture by the same name, *Capitalism Hits the Fan*, to see how we have arrived at this point and how “democracy at work” is our future).

If somehow this system perseveres, heavily indebted folks like me can rest assured that we will not be “a-loan”: We will be among tens of millions of others also defaulting on their loans. And that’s not even to mention the other forms of mounting personal debts.

Okay, so what happens when you have one or two thirds of society immersed in hellish cycles of defaulting debt, without savings, without the means for surviving retirement? I don’t know. What kind of society is that? It’s a society so dysfunctional that it cannot function. The solace of our time is that if I fail financially, then at least I will fail with everyone else. If all goes well, the ongoing fallout of capitalism will continue to bring more people together to create the truly sensible, sustainable, and satisfying society that is the emergent next level process of our evolution. *Ordo ab chao*: Out of chaos comes order.

Some may argue that never paying back debts is immoral and perhaps karmically dangerous, as to energetically rescind on loan repayment is to invite a future payment plan which will not be fun. If we receive energy, we must reciprocate. Such is the nature of the game. However, the picture ain’t so clear cut.

First, the energy exchange of educational financing was done in a spirit of exploitation and energetic cannibalism upon a population still in a stage of pre-adulthood dependence upon parental resources. “Cannibalism??,” you may say, “isn’t that a bit extreme?” No, actually, the federal government is making 6% interest on my loans and they have profited by $100 billion or more from this racket. Student loan debt is
capitalistic society eating its children because it has eaten just about everything else on the planet. Do you know who else eats their young? Crocodiles. Our society is driven by reptilian impulses, and all I am suggesting is that we shift into our human capacities.

If a deranged and abusive parent tallied all the costs of providing essentials for their kids, and then handed those lucky kiddos $50,000 bills of debt when they turned 21 years, would we say those kids have a karmic responsibility to repay that energy to their parents? I cannot imagine the universe would work like that. Rather, children are expected to care for their parents in old age, thus completing the circle. Education in society works the same way: Young students receive knowledge and skills, and then as they age they reciprocate by serving society and passing the good juju on to the young.

Moreover, in our age, college is a survival need, a resource needed to liberate oneself from living a life of poverty in service to the machine à la Walmart or McDonalds. With such insane and violent arrangements of energy exchange dictating our lives, we must at once cease the barbarism of hyper-capitalism and truly clear ourselves of this dangerous karma.

True justice and balance will come through The Jubilee. The Jubilee is a Biblical event in which the Israelites, on each 49th year, would clear debts between people, free prisoners, release slaves, and realign with the balance of spirit by being of service to the ever-present and infinite gifts of Life. When we reach a critical mass of awakening, such a course forward will be clear as day.

The sense behind my parachute plan compounds if we consider the wider situation of “This Cannot Possibly Endure Much Longer.” Allow me to expound upon the specs of this vision. I am sure you will either find my pitch rather convincing or will want to block it out in favor of pursuing your preferred perception for the present. Whatever you wish is fine, as I understand denial is a natural response in the face of the apocalypse. But my dear fellow pilgrim, we must not turn from the light.

Ecology: We are losing 100-150 species a day. Billions of years of evolution gone extinct, forever disappeared every 24 hours. The web of life can only lose so many strands before it unravels. Beyond that, we can either stay on the tip of the iceberg of ecological crisis and helplessly shrug at carbon emissions and climate change, or we may dive into the chilly waters and expand our scope to include ocean
acidification, loss of coral reefs and fisheries, nitrogen runoff, the twice Texas sized plastic pile in the Pacific, the loss of rainforests and arable soil, methane emissions, and so on and so forth. Do you think I should worry about my student loan debt in the shadow of this ecological mega-crisis? What, are you nuts? That’s like worrying that the Mets are going to beat the Red Sox in the World Series while the asteroid that took out the dinosaurs flies toward Fenway Park.

**Health:** Mirroring the health of the biosphere is the decline of mental, emotional and physical health in modern societies. Average life expectancy is declining. We are dying of loneliness, half-living diseased lives detached from nature and fulfillment of our basic needs for loving connection and meaningful work. About 1 in 5 people report mental health issues, the chemical industrial food system is poisoning us, and autoimmune disorders are wreaking havoc much to the bewilderment of the dominant medical establishment. As above so below, as within so without: What we do to the world we do to ourselves.

**Economics:** The mortgage crisis of 2008 proved how unstable and illusory the world financial system is. Trillions of dollars were piled into a pyramid of speculation. It was false money, a house of cards built on a foundation of lies. It was bound to collapse, and collapse it did, just as the profiteers knew it would. The Wall Street guys hedged against the risk. *They made profits by purchasing insurance against their own deals because they knew the inevitability of the crash.* In other words, they screwed their customers through deceit and exploitation. In the words of a broker from Goldman Sachs, they sold loans packaged like “sacks of shit.” Speaking of shit, the banks were “too big to fail,” and so when the chickens came home to roost, the banksters knew the government would protect the nest. They were right, and nothing changed. The system took taxpayers’ money, bailed out the banks, gave bonuses to the criminals and then printed more money. For ten years we’ve been in an inflated period to prop up the illusion, but it can’t last forever. Many of the astute money masters recognize this and are planning accordingly. They have emergency bunkers in New Zealand and Alaska. This is real, folks. The richest of the planet know that the music will stop. Since they are deeply addicted to their roles as masters of our matrix, they will dance until the last note.

I know these are hard pills to swallow. The tendency is to not compute this information. How could it be that we are so perilously
close to a collapse? The usual business of society continues. Every day
the cars zip along, the suits go to work, “politicians” gather in Congress,
and by the jolly ring of the NASDAQ bell, goods and services are
bought and sold. Surely the signs aren’t as dramatic as I say. It may get
tough, but surely we are resilient enough to weather the storm.
Somehow, someway, normality will persevere, because it always has,
and because, well, because it must!

Actually, normality has never persevered; it has always been
subject to change. Even so, ours is a bewildering moment.

As I insist, the collapse of our matrix could be a part of a re-
emergence of nature’s primordial matrix into the collective
consciousness. Just like Lyme Disease, the breakdown of the essential
structures of society may be nature’s way of sending the wake-up call.
In fact, I insist that we are together unconsciously creating these crises
to force our next-level growth. Shannon’s and my desires to manifest
our gifts indicate this emergent framework of nature, and we are
certainly not alone. Rather, hosts of people, and especially the youth, are
seeking deeper meaning. Dissatisfied with the roles and stories of the
past, we are seeking connection and paths of purpose. This is inevitable
because we are all unavoidably part of the nature matrix. So long as we
stay in the illusory programs of the capitalism matrix, we will face
dissatisfied longings to reconnect.

As Eisenstein says, it is time to enter the Age of Reunion. The
many beautiful visions and paths related to sustainable economics,
empowering politics, renewable energy, regenerative agriculture,
community building, psychic work, healing, body work, artistry, and
other expressions of people’s love are in the warp and weft of this new
tapestry. This new story is not a pipe dream: It is consistent with sense
and reason, heart and soul, joy and freedom, and most importantly, truth.
We are learning that

• our lives must be in holistic partnership with nature;
• we do not exist separate from others;
• there are vast frontiers of mind and being to explore;
• the external world reflects our inner world;
• there is only One of us!
• relationships and sharing our gifts are what really matter;
• there is abundance if we live appropriately, and among other
  things,
• shared power and universal uplift is preferable to hierarchal power structures.

It may be part of its purpose that the metamorphosed future world remains out of overt sight. If it presented itself as an iron fist of necessary change, then it would not embody the creative, nonviolent, unpredictable, flowing energy of what is emerging. But sure enough, this new web of psychic and material being is spreading like mycelium. As the old growth dies, we are decomposing of its form and recycling the energy into a new psychic-eco-social system. In the next level to come, nothing will be destroyed or defeated, but rather, all will be reintegrated.

To ambition oneself toward the old models of success and security is foolish. Just because the alternative structures are not yet fully apparent does not mean that the best course is to continue forth in the direction of everyone else just as we always have. It is better to be idle than speed off in the direction of death and destruction. Tom Bilyeau, founder of the protein bar company “Quest Nutrition” has expressed the opposite view, that he would rather sprint in the wrong direction than be immobile, and maybe his is a valid response too, given that one may find through that journey how and why a certain excursion was fruitless. But in the scope of our society, we’ve gone far enough down this path to sense its wrongness.

We must now do what feels right, and that means living aligned with the giving of our innate gifts, aligned with our nature as the endlessly creative, infinitely loving, always expanding mystery.

Shannon and I talked about the importance of this “living one’s purpose” and of “being true to oneself.” The stuff I just rattled on above could be construed into a box of rational necessity to change arising from the inevitably of our world’s collapse. For instance, I could say, “follow your heart or else we’re all going to die!” But the truth is I’m doing what I’m doing, i.e., straying from the path of normalcy in pursuit of my dreams, because it is the only course that feels good and true. The path of a beautiful future is not one of sacrifice, but rather fulfillment of what we’ve long been seeking.

While we’re on this thought train, we may trip down other philosophical tracks that led me to another dimension of thought and being. One of the stops along the way was with Karl Marx and Professor Doug Allen of the University of Maine’s philosophy department. Doug’s
course on Marx affirmed the value of human dignity and freedom of choice. Marx explained to me how selling your time for an hourly wage is exploitative and demeaning of the human soul. You bet your top dollar it’s demeaning of the soul! How much money is the freedom of the soul worth? Certainly, more than $8.00 or $13.00 an hour. However, even $1,000 an hour is not worth the freedom of the soul. Marx also talked to me about self-actualization.

He said, “Dan, there’s a deeply fulfilling state of self-actualization through self-directed engagement with reality through one’s sense faculties and mind in such a way as befits one’s natural tendencies and inclinations. In fact, you can only truly know yourself through self-directed creative and relational conduct. You are reflected in what you create.”

I replied:

“Oh, that’s interesting, Mr. Marx. So, I can only actualize my potential and develop my character through an active, creative process over which I have self-determination in guiding and completing? And through this process I become real as not only me, but as a relational entity who only exists in a social context, a natural biological entity who only exists in relation to nature, and even a spiritual being who only exists in the context of consciousness and creativity?”

“Close enough.”

“Rad, man!”

Marx fused into my moral hardwiring the value of staying true to self. The 9-5 job not of my passion would be sacrilege. It would harm my soul to allow the system to keep me down and constrained with my creative energies spiraling around control systems and interests extraneous to my core values.

When I worked 40 hours per week doing things I didn’t like doing, my resources were always drained to the point that my creative gifts and true passions could only exist as “hobbies,” or pieces of life to practice now and again to maintain a positive enough mood to keep the systems running. I know that as a writer I differ from many who need a regular full-time schedule in order to work with their teams and get stuff
done. Even so, a 20- or 30-hour work-week would bring us all closer to sanity. Wouldn’t we benefit from 20 extra hours per week to spend with loved ones? Or relaxing in the sun, mastering arts, growing spiritually, or whatever else we choose?

When we don’t choose what we do or how we do it for 40 to 60 hours a week, our full potential personality is stunted. There is a greater dream of creation that wishes to be born through us. This is the dream of the beautiful next level planet. It calls to us. We are here to serve it. We are here to become it. It will play us like instruments if we allow, but when we are not in control of the creative process, the dream is lost to the droning monotone of capital efficiency survival mechanisms.

In many ways the regular control schemes of work restrict us from bearing forth the inspired vision and serving it. First, the work may not even be in service to this vision, because most work must be fashioned toward the purpose of making dollars for survival. If the goal is to make as much as possible as quick as possible—and that could also mean delivering the best products with the best customer service—then the dream of a harmonious, energy efficient, nature thriving planet may be completely absent from the company.

Second, the organization of the company may inhibit the full range of intelligence, creativity, and vision from each person. In order to efficiently and effectively meet the goal of maximizing money flows, most companies operate with vertical hierarchies of power. The superior position calls the shots, the lower ranking drones carry out the orders. This mirrors the hierarchy of the feudal system in which the royal receives the divine inspiration from the heavens and then orders everyone accordingly. But we are all spirit, we are all nodes of inspiration. Some may think that most people do not have a worthwhile contribution, but this is a mistaken perception. If you do not believe you have anything worthwhile to contribute, I would look at your experience in school and in your family setting and examine how adult figures and systems restricted your voice, patronized your expression, or, in countless other ways, limited you.

Third, when work is fragmented into assembly line pieces, we cannot see our reflections in the wholeness of the final products, and so we remain psychologically fragmented. This last point is important for Marx, that we come to know and actualize ourselves through the creative process, starting with the initial idea blueprints and on through the chaotic process of creation and finally in the fine-tuned final product.
I want to note here that Marx’s forms of creative expression are not limited to what we usually conceive of as “work” in the sense of activity we do in exchange for payment. Rather, the way that a mother raises her children is also a form of creative action. Ideally, a mother has self-determination in how to relate to her kids, and through the process of parenting, she comes to know herself through the reflection of her children’s development. Relationships are co-creations of self—we exist through each other: My mother is really a mother-son, or, in fact, a mother-son-daughter.

Just as economic work is fragmented in capitalism, so too are other aspects of life, thus preventing people from seeing their reflections in the essential parts of life. When parents must work as they do, they often send their children to daycare, thus detaching from the process of creative and relational dynamics with their kids. The same is of course true with school in general—parents have no idea what it is like for their kids at school, of what their kids are learning or what their social, emotional, and other inner experiences are like. In a society fragmented into the ill-logic of capitalism, such detachment from one’s children is inevitable. In a sane society, the whole village rather than just the parents would be involved with raising the children, but this would be very different than today because individual parents would also know their communities much more intimately through other cooperative, inter-relational and non-violent social structures and norms. I focus on child-rearing as one example among many to illustrate how our society is based on impersonal, anonymous, and fragmented ways of life.

Indeed, the product of capitalism’s laws, property arrangements, meaning of money, and system of labor and production is “alienation,” says Marx. Alienation refers to many aspects of our society, but one of the most common experiences is the feeling of not being at home in the world or in one’s skin. Rare is a feeling of belonging in a city or suburb, and a general state of awkwardness defines most people’s experience in public. We don’t know how we relate or fit in amidst an anonymous crowd. If I’m fragmented in my primary creative energies, then my psychological fragmentation will extend to the social sphere, and I won’t feel that other people are relevant in my life. Capitalism’s structures and principles perpetuate this alienation in the way that we live separate and private lives in personalized boxes and in how workers are disposable and replaceable. With money, you don’t know need to know or depend upon others, not really. You can still get your milk from the store if you
alienate a cashier, or you can just go to a different store. That we exist separately and don’t need each other is built into the logical structure of our social systems.

In Marx’s ideal, through engagement with nature, other people, the world of ideas and so on, one becomes a relationally widened and realized individual. The Eastern approach also describes the more awakened, realized, or authenticated person as more cognizant of the nature of interbeing or oneness.

Based on this philosophy, the forced situation of getting a job is existentially wrong because it opposes, limits, and degrades Life. Martin Luther King Jr. identified this during the civil rights movement. King said each person deserves dignity because of the natural law of the universe: Creation is special—more life, beauty, intelligence, complexity and full expression of personality is good. It’s self-evident: To constrain a group with violence by proclaiming them inferior and then seeking their extermination is opposed to the natural law just mentioned—it diminishes the truth and value of the sacred.

The same is true with working a demeaning job that stifles one’s individuality and fullest free expression of being. There are variations of oppression at various gradations, and the socio-economic scheme of “fall in line to get the paper to pay the rent and buy the vehicle and bigger TV and newer vehicle” is an entire framework of oppression. It may take time to flesh out all the ways our society’s baseline normalcy is oppressive, because it is the air we breathe. In the future, a morally developed civilization will look at our means of social and economic organization as incredibly backwards and oppressive.

Charles Eisenstein reinforced my beliefs about the justness of following one’s nature and living one’s dreams. He told me that by not following the old codes of right and wrong and instead embarking on the soul’s journey, one can participate in manifesting the “New and Ancient Story.” Charles writes about how the current system is based on control and conquest, management, discipline, obedience and other programs perpetuating the illusion of our separation.

For instance, the nature of a child is to be wild and free, curious, adventurous, and exploratory, but school in the modern social matrix is a 13-year process of bending the child’s will to serve the system. Sit still. Stay seated unless otherwise instructed. Copy this information. Follow these directions. Memorize and regurgitate. By the end of the schooling, the individual has left the wild, expressive, playful, laughing, innocently
curious and adventure loving spirit and embraced the cold rationality of adulthood in which all matters are serious, and playtime is an idle fancy of the lost Garden, a paradisiacal time before the fruit of knowledge. In adulthood we do what we must. We’re not supposed to like it, but that’s just life.

A successful schooling in modern capitalist society is a stifling of the spirit, and therefore an act of unreality and injustice. It is a burial of the living Tao of a being (aka, nature), an eclipse of the essence that makes that person unique, and a paving over on the soul an express highway on which one will spend a life of toil delivering and receiving products on the endless beltway of consumerism. Certainly not all jobs are expressly capitalistic or exploitative, but the vast many do exist in the context of a market way of life in which profits are the premier necessity, and systems of rational control and discipline are needed to keep the whole thing running.

If we didn’t fear not having enough, of being left behind if we “fail,” then we wouldn’t need control mechanisms of punishment. The corollary of “you will get detention if you don’t do your homework,” is “you will be evicted if you don’t pay your rent.” But wait a second, why must anyone be denied the basic aspects of a good existence? Why are we daily wasting enough food to feed the entire world? Why are there five times as many empty houses in the United States as there are homeless people? Why has increased technological innovation resulted in more and more hustling, bustling, and struggling to get by? How could it be that so many millions do not have access to health care, good food, secure housing and a decent education while so few have unspent millions or billions just sitting in banks and computer systems? What the hell? If it’s a matter of money, well, the money exists somewhere, which means we could potentially move enough resources around to get everyone what they need to live a good life. It’s not a matter of money. It’s a faulty operating system full of bugs and viruses. This system of beliefs cannot take us further on our evolutionary path. On the contrary, this system threatens to derail us from our destiny.

My friend once mentioned as we drove past some very expensive homes overlooking the water on the East End of Portland, Maine that he is fascinated to learn about those homeowners and how they earned their money, or how their ancestors got their dough. The unfortunate truth is that most people who made enough bread to buy an oceanfront house in Portland have done so through some shady enterprise. Someone was
probably exploited somewhere. Maybe other jobs were made. Maybe more products were made, more goods were sold, more consumers got their fulfillment, more wages were paid to the workers. But ultimately, whether it was an exploitation of nature or people, something shady probably went into that wealth creation. In our social system of values and norms, we may reward and praise those entrepreneurs or hard workers who got rich, but with different stories guiding us, their contributions and life aims may seem insane.

The money story rings into the same crazy narrative of make MORE and MORE and MORE than MORE. GDP is good. When we lose trade deals with China, that’s bad! Never you mind the huge environmental and social problems of international trade, less growth is bad! But what are we creating? Plastic crap just for the sake of MAKING MORE? Seriously, why the new TV? Why the new iPhone? The old ones were fine, were they not? Sure, the new ones are that much cooler, but are they worth the extra exploitation of Earth’s materials? The slave labor to get the rare Earth metals? People aren’t becoming happier. We are becoming more distraught. The more we separate and fixate on the material world of consumerism, the more hungrily alienated and unhappy we become.

The modern separate-self matrix is the world of consumerism. It is the world of appearances, of what appears to be real because of logo representations, entertainment-political spectacles with American flags waving and military jets flying over football stadiums, and of reality television celebrities becoming reality television presidents. The thing gets more and more unreal because it really is becoming more unreal—the spectacle world of appearances becomes the central focus of attention, and thus manifests in the actual world as Donald Trump. The unreality of Trump is the fulfillment of the unreal trip of the separate self—of the illusion that I exist as separate from you. In this illusion we are easily ruled by masters of illusion. Divide and conquer is the classic dominator logic going back to the beginning of empire in Babylon. The most divided part of this system is the self. We are psychologically fragmented in so many ways, tuned out from the greater forgotten parts of ourselves, and by extension, the world.

Fragmented, we are manipulated by the powers that be. Nike and the other corporate gods call the shots. They create the scripts and storylines that we take as reality. Their shoes make you into a certain person, they put you in a mythology narrative that gives meaning to life
via the godly influence of celebrities and the imaginary world of super-athletics, you know, the commercials with the ideal athletes training and sweating and leaving it all on the field. Those are our Olympian Gods. They are the embodiment of perfection and power. And through the shoes, we partake in the highest. When we all agree and scuffle for the latest, hottest model, we allow our shared systems of meaning to be defined and ruled by the corporate gods who are guided by corrupted values. As Terence McKenna has said, we are ruled by the least among us: The elite’s values and ethics are deplorable, certainly nothing worthy of our aspiration.

We are not created through our clothing and adornments. Adornments can be powerful as totems and power objects, as in jewelry can indicate magic and shine and shimmer with the sublime, but on an unhappy alienated person, jewelry loses its magic and becomes instead a sad compensation for the magic of spirit.

So, we have come to the breakdown of the illusion. The grand spectacle is born out of the egotistical consciousness—the consciousness that we are separate and alone. The grand spectacle says there are limited resources, that money must be limited and so we must compete among ourselves to determine who is the best, strongest, smartest, and most capable of producing value for society.

And we deserve our just deserts, do we not? For those who made more, they worked harder, they had the winning vision and they should be rewarded accordingly. But when we get to talking about where the money came from, what did they do to earn it, and if they need to be rewarded in the range of millions or billions of bucks while millions of people go hungry, then the logic gets fuzzy pretty quick.

Who are we? If we are separate individuals who thrive when left to our own devices and are mostly inspired by competition and drives to further our own power and wealth, then maybe there is little hope for us. But the awakening of our time reveals the foundational illusions undergirding the view of separation. Our higher potential and most fulfilling nature is as cooperative, nurturing, creative, communal and loving beings. Those who are most integrated in webs of community are the most secure; those who contribute the most to the uplift of all are the most fulfilled. We are not separate. We are One.

This underbelly of my conversation with Shannon reveals the junction at which I found myself. For a while I had been pressing on that alternative path. The path of the soul. It is a life of bringing forth the
unique gifts, those defining aspects of expression and creativity. It is a recognition of self and cosmos as sacred and a pursuit of truth as expressed through the potential of self, of Reality. The goal is to “Know thyself,” as Socrates is thought to have said. Yes, “know thyself and you are going to know the gods,” as Wikipedia says was printed on an Ancient Egyptian temple. There is no alternative. As the musician Immortal Technique says in his song “Point of No Return:”

“This is the point from which I could never return
And if I back down now then forever I burn
This is the point from which I could never retreat
‘Cause if I turn back now there can never be peace
This is the point from which I will die or succeed
Living the struggle, I know I’m alive when I bleed
From now on it can never be the same as before
‘Cause the place I’m from doesn’t exist anymore.”
Little India on Long Island

After the philosophical journey in Albany I went to Long Island to stay with Apurv, a new friend I had met through phone conference meetings with Just Yoga.

I arrived at Apurv’s house just as he was pulling in from work. Looking good in his jacket, he swaggered over to say hello. I quickly found Apurv to be as sharp as his attire.

When Apurv brought me inside his home, ushering me along, I felt as an honored guest, as perhaps is customary in India. I also felt that I was in the wrong place. My disheveled traveler appearance didn’t quite feel harmonious with Apurv the young professional in his middle-class house here in Long Island. But I soon found I was with good people.

Apuurv brought the Eastern worldview like (B)O O O M M M M M ! And the cool thing about hanging with Apurv on Long Island is that I got to hang with more Indians. They tend to stay connected in communities by living together, shopping at Indian markets, and going out for Indian food. I enjoyed the brief cultural immersion.

At dinner, Apurv said the path of the artist is one of the most sacred, because the gift is so direct. The artist manifests the divine vision and expresses the higher vibes straight out. Perhaps Apurv meant that the less one is immersed in the gross physical reality then the closer one is to the Love-God-Oneness flow. As we feasted on various delicious dishes, I personally felt that the path of Indian food must be the most sacred.

Seriously though, from the Eastern model, reality becomes more real the further from the physical plane you travel. Hindus say we have several subtle bodies beyond the physical, including emotional, mental and astral bodies. The Earth trip is a fall from the higher states, part of a cycle in which the flower closes and the darkness of ignorance sets in. Having reached the extreme of delusion, which I suspect is total immersion in the 3-D plane with no memory of the higher states, we begin again the process of awakening.

What we do with our voices or draw forth from our minds can be a higher-level expression of the energy. Since it is about service, the direct action of channel and expression is a “higher” path. In India, this worldview may be dangerously expressed in relegating sustenance
farmers and other manual laborers to lower caste levels and justifying their oppression based on karma or level of spiritual development.

I believe that every act can be a channeling of the higher stuff. It is true that the philosopher or musician deals with finer bits of data. A carpenter has his hands on the material world, but the writer has his mind honed on ideas, images, and mythologies, which can be stepping stones to the higher astral or etheric levels. However, must we invest in the “higher/lower” duality of energetic offerings? I doubt it matters what the hell one does, because we all follow the same path of transformation. The carpenter and the writer each activate their light bodies. Jesus was a carpenter. Light is light. Sure, practice in the light is probably necessary for all involved, and a mason can engage in meditation or prayer just as well as any other artist.

That’s the other thing: We are each the artist. We are creators. We are each constituent players in the game, actors on the stage of life co-creating the drama. What becomes is as much up to your imagination as it is mine. It is unnecessarily limiting to see the musician or painter as the artists while the rest of us are workers or managers or consumers or whatever. Rather, the nature of our reality is that we are made of the super-intelligent and creative substrate of mind that pervades this cosmos-dream.

We want a world where everyone can fulfil their roles as artists. Why live well? Because life is art and beauty is good. Beauty is pleasurable. Beauty reflects truth.

Apurv was a trip when he talked about the wisdom of India. India is ancient, but the United States is new. India is built upon sacrality. The Buddha and yogic masters and traditions of enlightenment cannot help but infiltrate deep into the culture. The wisdom of India has also crept into the west for the past century or so, and perhaps we owe a lot to the eastern pearls that have drifted here with the trade winds. Sure, and the west has gotten into India too. In obtrusive and violent ways, the west has gotten into India. But a sacred approach to life remains more commonplace, as I understand.

Apurv grew up in an environment where western capitalism has become interwoven in the sacred Indian model. His father is an executive dude. His people study companies, and teams of acolytes are sent in to mentor the workers of the other companies. From the perception of India’s sacredness, the corporation becomes the modern monastery. First, there is knowledge to be ascertained. These are the
questions of purpose, identity, service, efficiency, and success in the pursuit of excellence. Having identified this, there is the process of becoming Truth, in dropping away the pieces that are not That. The consulting team studies up on the knowledge. They do the meditation. They get the insights. Having transformed through their knowledge, they then go and stay with the corporate office, turning that space into a monastic training facility.

Whereas in the past, monastics had a definitive goal in mind, namely, truth, the modern corporate monastery only represents a pursuit of truth and love if the facts are stretched. The corporate monastery may intend to pursue the goals of transcendence, treasure, service, making creation the greatest it can be, or even just playing the divine game of lila. Maybe some people think if they can be impeccable as a business, being as efficient as possible and aligned with the wealth-generating principles of Spirit, then they will be moving along in the development and invocation of the energies of Shiva-Shakti (God).

More critically, the corporate argument for transcendence and being “all you can be” misses the mark because just look at all the suffering caused by the corporate pursuit of excellence. There is so much suffering, so many environmental and social issues. Even if the corporation’s operators are clean as a whistle, if the company is polluting, destroying, exploiting, or maintaining working conditions that demean the spirit, then we have a problem, Houston.

After a thoroughly lovely time spent with Apurv at beaches, in forests, at Indian restaurants, and watching the classic film ET with his roommates, I journeyed to the City to see Eric.
A Deer in the Concrete Jungle and Stranger Things

My friend Eric is living his life. His is a path of love and service. God bless this guy. During my visit, Eric’s job was teaching history to low income adolescents in a Brooklyn automotive vocational school. Eric is one of the kindest, gentlest, and most gregarious people I’ve had the pleasure of making friendship.

We met at the University of Maine. I never would have guessed that night we would become brothers in arms. My friend Isaac invited Eric and his girlfriend over to drink. Eric, upon seeing Isaac’s 40-ounce Stein which Isaac was very fond of as an object representing his phallic power of drinking a lot of beer, said with the utmost innocence and goodwill, “My Mom has the same glass.” My friend Derek and I caught each other’s eye, smiled and swallowed back laughter, sharing a moment of silent glee at the unassuming irony of the statement and in witnessing Isaac’s rare moment of silence.

Eric showed up at the Maine Peace Action Committee’s meeting a couple weeks later, and together we would become bonded as peace activist leaders on campus. For three years we organized and led meetings, film nights, protests, rallies, marches, discussion groups, and other events.

Now Eric is teaching African American and Latino high school students in Brooklyn. If nothing else, to consider the world Eric touches in Brooklyn adds a context of reality that appears absurd when placed alongside the other stops on my voyage: Sedona, Arizona; Tulum, Mexico; Jupiter Beach, Florida. Can these be parts of the same world?

At Eric’s, folks were watching the Stranger Things television series. Stranger Things is about a dualistic dimensional reality in which our material “here and now” world has a shadow side wherein dangerous entities live. The government tinkers with reality’s fabric and opens a portal to the other side. I got into it.

I felt a premonition with Stranger Things. It seemed to hint at something on the other side calling to me. And it felt dangerous…

If we look at my trip as a hero’s journey, which we will be doing often in this book, then this beginning phase was still in the domain of the “Known.” First, the hero is called to the unknown of the other side. The other side is not only an external trip beyond one’s familiar
boundaries of space and time, but also a trip inward. We journey into the wider field of the Self, into the Unknown of further dimensions.

The hero’s journey is an archetypal pattern that the mythologist Joseph Campbell found in studying stories from various cultures throughout history. In many myths Campbell found a common plot structure of a hero embarking on a quest beyond his homeland where he faces challenges, overcomes inner demons, claims a treasure and finally returns home to share the gifts. Slay the dragon, get the gold; trick the guardians of the underworld, get an elixir of immortality; become a jedi, save the free galaxy, and so on and so forth.

Following a (Carl) Jungian interpretation, Campbell suggests that this story is coded into our basic being. We each embark on our own Journey(s) if we are fortunate enough to heed the call. Everyone gets a call; we all have a calling to explore our deeper selves, but rarely in our secular, materialistic society is the journey truly entertained and followed. However, the idea that self-inquisitive attention activates the process of awakening is not new but rather has for millennia been the basis for many spiritual paths.

Most people shut the door on that nonsense thanks to hyper-rationalistic modes of thinking and controller structures of social organization. The hero’s journey, if it is to be enjoyed in its fullest, takes us to a Jungian universe in which the “out there” is psychically tied to the “in here.” In this “psychoid” reality, mind is the substrate of the universe, and is infused within material. Material is mind, and so my mind is not only my body, but also the greater body of existence. We all share this collective consciousness, and from this emerges the next-level vision of our being. Ultimately, a species like ours is bearing forth the dream of the greater Earth consciousness of which we are a part, which is bearing forth the greater galactic dream, which is bearing forth the greater universal dream, and we are all of it.

The journey reveals how the outer world is in a reflectional and manifesting dynamic with the self. You have a thought and the next moment that thought is made manifest. It becomes apparent that somehow the outer world is communicating with you. You see signs and synchronicities all over the place. You have a question and the answer appears. Ironies and jokes crop up in your surroundings as if something is *Winking* at you. There is a clear relational dynamic between yourself and the external world. The greater consciousness within and without that sends messages and guides is what some refer to as the
“Higher Self”—it is not separate from who we are, but in our ego point of awareness, we can relate to it in a relational dynamic, as if we are separate. Spirit plays this game of separation because it’s fun.

The hero’s journey is the ego’s dive into the ocean of unconsciousness, and when complete, results in an expansion of awareness and ideally a higher-level integration of self. The piece of the light that has forgotten it is one with the greater light journeys into the darkness to remember. Since there are gifts residing within the unknown dimensions, we may find new powers, abilities, or knowledge.

In some stories the journey is part of a greater process of redemption for the whole realm. Consider the Quest for the Holy Grail. The heroic knights of the roundtable are looking for the Grail. The Grail is the Self. The land is in a state of disarray because the Fisher King has been wounded on his thigh, which signifies his area of fertility. The impotent, eros-divorced king is reflected in the Wasteland. No food is grown or harvested, no babies are born, and wars abound. Along the way to the Grail, the knights are met with two types of challenges: hostile enemies and seductive women. These paths represent the Freudian urges for 1) destruction (Thanatos) and 2) love (Eros). Those enemies and seductions represent distractions, fixations, or complexes that deter the self from knowing the higher Truth. Once found, the Grail heals the king and brings health and wholeness back to the land.

Side note: The Grail Quest I’m talking about should be contextualized in the medieval Christian framework, and so is seen to be a masculine style of transcending the senses and such.

The hero’s journey echoes the insight “as above so below.” If we are not psychically whole, then fractures and anomalies appear in the external arenas of our lives. The alienation of our age thus provides many opportunities for the hero’s journey. Since we are at a pivotal time of awakening, many are being called to step beyond their old stories and boundaries. By following our intuitive need to expand, we are called to engage with the external world and share our loving, healing, and uplifting gifts. By that process, we also heal the internal. Regarding the inner and outer journeys, it’s not one or the other but both/and: They are the same thing.

On the journey the hero often receives help from wise ones before embarking into the underworld. Such aids come to serve the hero, enabling successful confrontations with the dangers below. In my case,
the journey back to Maine to get the Lyme meds may be that point. Here are some notes from my journal about this stage:

*Should I go back to see Dr. D? Yes. I believe the answer is yes. That’s my inclination. It feels better than “No” and so I should honor that feeling.*
Home So Soon?

So, as ridiculous as it may be, I left Eric’s apartment in New York and drove the six hours back to Portland where I stayed with my good friend Calvin. Calvin and I met in college. We were in a Marxism philosophy class and soon after began to see each other in Maine Peace Action Committee meetings.

Calvin and his friend recently moved into a new house. They were still figuring out the layout downstairs, as evident by two couches lined up one in front of the other. Calvin and his roommate didn’t much care about the layout or state of their apartment. You could tell it was simply a place for them to dwell between work and play, and maybe between this and the next phases of their lives. Such is the way of our time—young adults in their late 20s and early 30s crashing here, moving there, financially unstable, emotionally alone and desperate, just trying to make it work.

Oh, am I projecting? Yeah, I am a bit, because Calvin is among the fortunate few with a long-term partner, meaningful work, and a healthy lifestyle. He just didn’t care for the apartment which brings me to another point about our generation: We are more interested in experiencing, participating, and sharing than we are with owning. My cohort generally doesn’t want to own a house, and if possible, we don’t like owning vehicles. We stay in apartments for one or two-year stints, we use Uber and Lyft, and we share and pirate online as much as we can. This is a loosening of the separate self, a step into the reembrace of interconnection and the deeper truth that no one owns anything.

So, the roundabout rendezvous with Witch Doctor Deutsch confirmed my intuition. Here’s the deal with Dr. Deutsch. You go in there and sit on the table. He comes in and asks what’s up. Testing for Lyme? Ok, he’s got a case with twenty vials of different viruses and bacteria like Lyme and its co-infections. You stick your left arm up in the air, straight forward. Dr. Deutsch applies some downward pressure on your arm. It’s not a lot of pressure, so you can resist. But if you have Lyme and touch the Lyme vial, your arm will not hold the push: It will cave and collapse.

Now, in addition to the Lyme vial, touch the right homeopathic concoction and your arm will hold strong. It’s not a placebo response. I got chaga mushroom tincture and herbal essences of a certain flower,
distilled from heavily diluted distillations. And that stuff causes the strengthening of the body and overcoming of the Lyme. Makes sense, right? No, I don’t really understand, but I trust the homeopaths do, and regardless, if it works, it works.

From some brief research, I’ve learned that homeopathy works on the principle of “like cures like.” Homeopathic medicines work because they mimic the problematic symptoms of the actual disease, thereby triggering the body’s healing mechanisms in response to one’s specific condition. Even though there may be nano-amounts of the healing agent in the final distilled product, that is enough. Homeopaths say that the process of distillations followed by vigorously shaking the solution causes the healing information to be imprinted in the water so that each distillation carries the fractal forms of the prior solutions.

Alternative medicine healings are one of the programs hacking into the dominant mainframe. The Western medical establishment, based on material reductionism and dualism between self and other, is increasingly futile at figuring out the causes to pervasive conditions like Lyme Disease. Lyme and other autoimmune conditions are a fly in the ointment of the prevailing scientific-medical framework: Though the promise of our culture has long been to overcome nature’s maladies and achieve perfect health and unlimited longevity through our cleverness, this worldview is crumbling along with the other structures of separation. When alternative modalities succeed, as they tend to do when the individual is willing, then they provide an opportunity to garner the fallacy of the dominant systems of knowledge and power, and to instead consider the emergent new stories and structures based on holism, alignment with self and nature, and love.

I have been referring to the emergent wisdom as “new” or “alternative,” but in fact, this wisdom is ancient as well as new for our time. Indigenous traditions all around the world have long understood the wisdom of interconnectedness and in the healing magic that flows through life. Thus, Charles Eisenstein speaks of the “New and Ancient Story.”

So, I got the meds, grabbed a latte and hit the road. At least a 10-hour drive awaited. This was the true beginning. I had puttered around the northeast, met with friends, seen some sights, pondered unknowns, and now it was time to burst beyond the tragic northeast sprawl of highway industrialism to find my friend Mark Cook in Maryland.
Part 2: The First Crossing

It’s Not Olney Me Anymore...

Arriving in Olney I was met with the most bizarre situation. My man Mark is living with his Mom and she’s a bit unsettled. Non-stop freak out about Mark, dude. The door opens and she’s freaking out about Mark right away, like exasperated freak out about Mark’s shortcomings, non-stop like a yipping dog on the verge of panic. Poor bro. I’m like, “Aw man, this is real.”

Mark’s totally still rooming in his Mom’s home and she doesn’t get that. She’s like, “Get a job you lazy piece of pudding pie!” And Mark’s like, “Yo! I’m pursuing my path of music and teaching piano and guitar to children!”

It’s not the get rich quick path but it’s the path he loves! He told me this, how much he loves to help kids learn music. Can you imagine that gift? What seeds are sown in these children, what potential lifetimes of beautiful expression and artistic cultivation, beginning there from teacher to student. And because he’s pursuing that path, we’re going to abuse him with judgments? Be critical of him for not having a house and car and all this? Woah, slow down America, slow down.

So, the Mom’s a bit nuts but she’s good at heart, and I know because I spend time and talk and feel it out. You know how we can just beam attention and be empty of judgment for a moment, just seeing the other person (I’ve since learned that this lady was very unimpressed with me. I of course fit the same model as Mark—“free loading” my way around the country, skirting responsibilities of adulthood, pursuing some nonsensical artist dream. She was afraid that I would be a bad influence on Mark. On the contrary, I encouraged Mark to do what he loves and save enough money to move the hell out of her house.).

Mark and I jammed. He plays real pretty guitar and has a wicked sweet voice. He makes good songs too. I tell him that if he keeps at it, and even digs in to chomp for the next level, he’ll emerge special out there on the stage.

In Olney I saw three rabbits in one night, three suburban rabbits lost in the labyrinth of the sprawl. I too was lost in the maze that night.
Walking around the cookie-cutter cul-de-sacs clueless, I saw other lost bunnies running across the road in front of me.

From my journal:

“Follow the rabbit. Matrix. Alice in Wonderland. If this be a journey, so be it. Let’s do it! Let’s awaken. Let’s meet someone magical. Sleep with her. Love her. Stand beside her. I Am no longer afraid of who I am. I am no longer afraid to share my gifts. Enough is enough. It’s time.”

This was followed by more musings on becoming and sharing myself. I suspected all along the trip was working its mercurial psychoid process.

“So... is this a coming of age trip? A rite of passage? Am I going to become initiated into the greater realms of awareness? Other dimensional activity? Is this about to become a truly bizarre and mind opening trip? Will I meet with my community, my people? I hope so. Will I be presented opportunities that next level my mission, take me where I need to be, allow me to share my gifts? I hope so.”

“What beliefs are in me? What beliefs are in me. I am free. I am special. I am open. I am allowed to be who I am, I am allowed to be who I am. I am am am am am, I am that I am, I am that what I am, belief so be granted liberty to become.”

There you are, look at how self-initiating this quest was for me. What an affirmation of identity. Here I Am.

Yes, this is a classic adolescent coming of age narrative. I wanted to “meet someone special” and “sleep with her.” That’s the seeking of partnership that almost always accompanies adulthood, and then the sharing gifts bit is about the process of self-actualization through full expression of self which comes through contributing in some valuable role for the community, a.k.a., vocation. Yes! Both of those things, please!

On this note, I can identify my desires in context of the psychospiritual stage of coming into adulthood. From a general Hindu/Buddhist perspective, the soul flows through an endless array of body incarnations through eternity. In each human incarnation, the soul evolves through infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age, and death, with the
last stage being the gateway back to the spiritual loading station whereupon the soul chooses another incarnation.

A Hare Krishna fellow recently gave me the book *Beyond Life and Death* by Paramahamsa Nithyananda. The cover of the book alone was enough to inspire recognition. It shows a blue-white charge of light flowing through different phases of life ranging from infant to child to adult to elder to skeleton before flowing into the next lifetime. I recognized that the soul’s stage of adulthood is the peak stage of “being here” on Earth, as depicted on the cover by a man standing tall and present. After the “prime of life,” the stages of elderhood reflect more introspective and contemplative forms increasingly focused on the departure back home to spirit.

Seeing this process clarifies my recent obsession with the term “self-actualization:” The soul will not be satisfied until it fully manifests in this physical plane as the form it chose. Doing so is a main reason of the trip! The full, free expression of the self is the full arrival of the soul, and anything that thwarts this expression is going to make the soul feel hurt and diminished. This is why the very simple meditation instructions of Thich Nhat Hahn are so powerful: Thay (pronounced “tie”) as his students call him, tells us to repeat mantras such as “I am here,” “I have arrived,” and “I am home.” The soul needs to fully arrive here so it can do its thing, get the experience and lesson it wants, and then bring it back to the other side. The whole thing is a hero’s journey.

Mark would join me for the next week or two of the southward adventure to Florida. We planned to perform together in as many cities as possible along the way, staying with people from the network on couchsurfing.com or at Airbnbs. After a few days of gathering ourselves, we packed for takeoff and set out for Richmond, Virginia.
Descend and Send it

We planned to perform as soon as we landed. This was the date of the deal. The performance box was set with a blanket, lion statues, rocks, crystals, signs, and dozens of poem books. On the way there I prayed to my determined warrior spirit. I didn’t know where we were going or what we would do when we got there, but I felt the fear of uncertainty as a test to see how much I wanted it. I committed to “trusting” the universe, even if that meant playing the act of trusting.

After a short ride from Olney, we parked in Carytown, the part of Richmond where people do their performances and sell their wares. With many deep breaths, I walked my box of performance down the sidewalk, feeling out for my “spot.” We found it. We set up. We grooved. Mark played some guitar and I raised my voice in poetry, serenading the scene.

Perhaps the high point of my performance was speaking an entire poem into the eyes of a homeless man. He spoke me lines from his mind too, something about knowledge being the diamond of the mind. Then he asked for money. I reached in my pocket and gave him ten dollars. With dusk turning twilight we wrapped up the show. First performance: -$10 and a handful of books given out for free. If I’m ever going to make it as an artist, I’ll need someone to handle the business end of things.

After that considerable success, we made plans to connect with our couchsurfing host. Couchsurfing.com is a network of travelers who offer each other the convenience of couchsurfing in their homes. Major cities usually have dozens of hosts who will at the least offer you a couch or blow up mattress in their living room, and many have guest rooms or will even insist on giving you their room. There are no membership fees, and hosts offer their spaces in the spirit of the gift, knowing that what goes around comes around. Mark and I found our host for the night, a none too chipper fellow from Kazakhstan.

This guy was nice, but tired and kind of jaded. He was sharp, a computer programmer young man living in a lavishly simple loft transformed from an abandoned warehouse or factory. Nice polished wood with warm tones. Brooklyn-esque.

He was not impressed by the racism of Richmond. He seemed to be grappling with his position as a yuppy living in this trendy dig while institutionally impoverished darker skinned folks abound just over the
train tracks. He felt powerless to effect change. I could have expressed my view that how he feels and how he relates to others is of the utmost importance, but I did not. I was struggling to understand him because of his accent and I did not want to offend him.

My warrior artist spirit sustained to Asheville. We weaved up and through the green misty-cal mountains of North Carolina and arrived. We parked and scoped out scenes to play. My friend Ruby met us and joined the mission. We found the spot and I began to broadcast. Immediately people stopped to listen. One beautiful lady from Israel stopped to listen and gave me $20. Other people listened. Ruby’s friends stopped to hug and chat. A small circle of people formed. A crazy guy in the military stopped by to rap intensely at me. A policeman with a southern accent told us to enjoy ourselves. Not a bad gig, Asheville.

After performance we went to a raw gourmet restaurant where I spent too much money. It was good though because we were buzzing happy from the day. After crashing in Ruby’s abode, we arose early and continued to Savannah, Georgia.

We did not play in Savannah. We relaxed a bit, decompressing in their big park. I took note of the Confederate statues nearby. Savannah has an old-town feel to it that speaks southern hospitality and pride. I don’t know how black people feel about it and its history, but I would understand if they saw it as less than favorable.

We stayed in an Airbnb called “The Hippie House in the Hood.” It was in the hood. The house had three guest bedrooms, each with its own locked door. Essentially it was a three-bedroom hostel being run on Airbnb. The guy who owns it likes to travel and create video documentaries. He is black, and he had recently interviewed a bunch of people at a rally to protest the removal of the Robert E. Lee statues in various southern cities. He was also working on a project called Sleeping with Strangers which looks at how Airbnb hosts feel about opening their homes to strangers coming and going. He expressed an attitude of “Whatever man, it’s all good; you do you and I’ll do my thing too.” We talked a bit about life purpose and following passions.

In Savannah, I reflected on the mission of performing. At this point, I was still in the perform challenge. Performance was supposed to define the excursion. Even though I did not expect to win hearts and minds or sell many books, I knew that I should show up and do it, at least go through the motions and put in my best effort. As a matter of fact, in the weeks before leaving for this trip, I would practice my poems.
and record them with hopes of getting some audio files and video clips ready for the internet. This became such an aggravating experience that I dropped the whole thing. I recognized that I was not where I wanted to be in the performance field. For example, consider the following story.

A month before the trip I reserved a sidewalk spot in the monthly art walk of Brunswick, Maine. I was dressed to impress with tight yellow corduroys, a funky blue button-up shirt and a funkier motley hat. I had my poetry book manuscript. I brought a small deskside table on which to put my business cards, an email sign up list, and a donation jar. I thought it would be funny to draw with blue marker on one paper sign, “Like!” as one would find on Facebook, and on the other paper, in red marker, “Subscribe!” as found on Youtube. “Like!” would be for the donations and “Subscribe!” for the e-mail list.

After setting up the whole scene, I nervously accosted the first person to stroll by, a young middle-aged man pushing a baby in a carriage. He pointed at my table and said, “Suck?” I thought he was making fun of me, so I demanded, “What!” and turned to look at the table. The wind was blowing the “Subscribe!” sign so that only the “S,” “u” and part of the “b” were visible, and indeed, it did look like “Suc.” After clarifying the intent of my signs, I offered to share my work. The man politely assented, which is surprising since he was availing not only himself to my vibes, but also his infant daughter. I opened randomly to a page with some raps. It was awkward. The man moved on and I was left with my table. I felt the presence of three adults talking some 15 feet to my left.

I spotted a young woman approaching from the right. I took in a deep breath and reached my arms out to open my chest, readying to swan dive into a poem. As my left arm swung back, I smacked the mason jar clean off the table and watched as it shattered on the sidewalk. In the mason jar was a one-dollar bill I had placed to give people an idea of what to do. The dollar bill was now strewn upon the sidewalk with many pieces of broken glass (I keep this dollar near my bedside altar to remind me from whence I’m come).

I said, “Oh dear,” immediately realizing that, “this is a fucking disaster.” The adults to my left each chipped in, “Oh, that’s awful,” “Too bad!” “Oh, I’m sorry.” Yup. My face flushed as I darted to the pieces of broken glass to clean up. Several of the pieces cut my fingers, drawing blood. With bloodied hands and wounded pride, I stood again by the table and contemplated perseverance. The moment I decided that
I would remain and still speak the poems, the band across the street began their first song. The speakers drowned out any possibility of anyone hearing my poems. The next moment it began to rain.

Now, you may smile and shake your head, appreciating cosmic humor. I was however still thinking of my act in the frame of failure and humiliation. With tears thick in my eyes I packed up my things, carried the table past the three witnesses, and shut myself in my car.

I did not leave for this trip thinking I had the cat in the bag. However, the trip was part of a longer struggling mission I had set upon after graduating college, so each moment must be seen in greater context.

I recently found a box of books from when I lived in Albany, New York in 2016. Among the books were *The Motivation Manifesto* by Brenden Bouchard and *What to do When it’s Your Turn (And it’s Always Your Turn)* by Seth Godin. Bouchard, Godin, Tony Robbins, Tim Ferriss, and other lifestyle gurus of our time express the latest version of manifest destiny. The idea is to become completely self-sufficient and determining in your dreams of life. Become the highest version of yourself. Do more. Be excellent in all dimensions. Manifest your destiny.

Godin says the time is ripe for people to share what they got, because the internet and other tech like cameras, phones, and audio equipment are affordable. Each voice matters, everyone can turn their hobby into their life-passion profession. It’s your turn.

Bouchard chimes in with goal sheets, agendas, schedules, and the discipline necessary for results. Morning outlines for the day. Exercise and other healthy habits combined with unstoppable perseverance.

There is something I love about this drive for individuation, full potential and complete freedom. Tim Ferris exemplifies this freedom. He secured enough financial security so that he can do whatever he wants with his time. He can travel where he wants and buy what he needs to learn something new or otherwise improve himself. I think we are born in pursuit of this freedom, and it is exactly what I argue for in hope of a beautiful future. I know that not everyone can travel anywhere they wish or have unlimited experiences, but the most fulfilling soul experiences do not require extravagance; they are born from the mundane: When our normal social structures are aligned with our true nature, then we will have merged the mundane and the sacred.
I set on my path when I graduated college. I knew I would not work a full-time job. That would limit pursuits of my budding passions of poetry, music and this soul-searching thing.

I worked at a summer camp right out of college. Then I went out to the suburbs of Detroit to live with my friend Derek for a couple months. In Detroit I had a couple thousand saved from the summer camp, so I didn’t need to work just yet. Derek worked ten hours a day, seven days a week, so I had his place to myself for hours and hours on end. I worked on my writing with as much tenacity as I could muster. I typed out a plethora of poetic potential and organized different pieces into songs. I had a full project worth of material. I tried to recite them over beats. I freestyled. I beatboxed. But I wasn’t very good at these things yet. And I was woefully isolated, alienated and sad, living in the darkest concrete jungle of suburbs I have ever seen. There was too much struggle. Plus, I didn’t know I had Lyme Disease, so I was also dealing with debilitating conditions on the daily.

The experience was messy and pathetic. My best efforts seldom amounted to more than two hours per day of creative work, which by most standards is substantial for self-motivated “side-gigs” or “hobbies,” but with 12 to 18 hours of free time per day, I wanted to reach a point of full-time vocation with my crafts. Despair and other multitudes of ailments can dampen the spark of inspiration, so I spent a lot of time wallowing in the dark.

After moving back home with my parents and feeling the mounting tension from disturbing their routine, I set out for the next level in Portland, Maine. I got a list of all the coffeeshops and cafes in town. I called 20 numbers and eventually got an interview with Coffee By Design, a company that originated in Portland in the mid-1990s and has since grown into the premier high-quality coffee chain of Maine with four stores in Portland and wholesale accounts that span the globe. I got the job, and with two friends from high school, found a place to live.

I was living out the dream I had set in college. I figured I could find cheap living and work 25 hours a week as a barista while using my free hours for creative growth. If I threw enough hours at my craft, success would be inevitable in the long run. I still believe this, but the kicker is now in the question of success—what kind of “success” do I want?
Either way, the immensity of struggle continued. I tried and tried to get my material to a high quality. I recorded and re-recorded over and over, day after day, showing up to write and work on the stuff. But I was tired. Achy. Sad. Miserable. Alone. Alienated. Anxious and depressed, yes, the whiz kid was a mess. Again and again I would give up. Projects would fall by the wayside. Netflix would happen.

After six months, my friends and I declined on re-signing the lease and we went our separate ways. I then actualized the other part of my vision from college: Live in a cooperative household and pay around $300 a month. I found out about Dreamship Cooperative Community. I was already working on my questionnaire application when my roommate saw their ad in Craigslist and told me to apply, joking that it looked like a half-way house. It is not a half-way house, but it is a most unusual home of sobriety, recovery, and healing.

How do I do justice in describing Dreamship? It was a trip. It’s a huge sprawling building full of artists, healers, spiritualists, recovery folks, mothers, and other pilgrims. I met wonderful life-long friends during my two years stay on this ship of dreams. However, my daily experience aboard the Dreamship was still hellish compared to a healthy and happy state of existence.

The house also served as a cauldron for mixing together fourteen or fifteen personal healing journeys. From the alchemy of the passengers, the universe kindly set up a series of conflicts and crises that allowed our stuff to surface and be resolved. One thing I learned through using plant medicines in Mexico is that healing is a collective process—when one of us has something to address, we all do.

Later in my story I stay with the founder of Dreamship, Tina, and her partner and my dear friend Jeanette, so I’ll give you more details about the ship when we arrive there.

After two years as a stowaway, it was time to part ways, but my ideal of becoming my damn true self had not left me. After my lease ran up, I moved to Albany.

In each of these places I tuned into motivational Youtube videos and read the self-help books. Why? Because I knew with unshakeable certainty that there is greater purpose in living aligned with one’s truth, and I needed every ounce of encouragement Wayne Dyer could offer.

I realize that my path has been about finding my voice. It is a cosmic wink that I aligned the path such that my first twenty years were
designed to squelch my voice, seeing as poetry, storytelling, singing, chanting, and other vocalizations are primary in fulfilling my essence.

I do believe our soul-essence-being-thing continues after death where it enters a conscious plane of realizing the point of life and evaluating lessons learned. In the loading station of the afterlife, the soul then chooses the circumstances of its next material venture, aligning events, people, places, and other conditions such to promote its utmost learning and healing. I don’t have unshakeable proof in my experience that this is the case, but many lines of inquiry and experience are trending to this conclusion.

Back to the topic of voice, we aren’t often encouraged to express our truth, not in our society. As children we are taught to listen, remember, and obey. Follow rules. What you have as a kid is not relevant. How could it be? You don’t have a developed rational mind, you don’t know anything! Sit here and learn what we have for you. No, it doesn’t matter what you like to do! It doesn’t matter what really interests and inspires you. Do you remember when you were lit up as a kid? Really lit up about something! Something was just so great that it was wonderful! And there was nothing else to it. Well, that’s the way. That’s what we follow, and yes, I know the follow your bliss thing is cliché, but let’s remember to bow and pray and see for yourself.

In our society however, you must follow the directions, learn the information and stay in line. If you don’t, you will fail and fall by the wayside, unable to support yourself or family, condemned to a miserable and diminished life.

The systems of our society demand we conform to irrationally rational ways of thinking and expressing ourselves. In a million ways we lose touch with who we are as we attempt to be who we’re supposed to be according to our teachers, parents, celebrities and peers. We are rewarded when we conform and punished when we stray from the norm. In a million ways this happens all the time. I consider this the central tragedy of our culture, that so many learn to think that they can’t be who they truly feel themselves to be, or worse, come to believe that there is nothing within themselves worth pursuing. This is the ultimate disempowerment of the privileged.

These false beliefs overlap in several conceptual programs based on the separate self. The dominant scientific beliefs say the universe is a conglomeration of separate objects floating around on trajectories determined at the Big Bang. Life is a lucky shot in the dark, an
accidental byproduct of all this chaos. It’s all without purpose or meaning. There is no essence of soul or whatever other religious flitter you fancy. The natural self of Taoism is like other religions in postulating a mythology to pacify your existential dread of knowing that you are here absent your choosing in a bewildering and meaningless existence that is fated for an eternity of non-being.

Since there isn’t any innate intelligence or order to nature, it is up to the “rational” human mind to set things straight. The child expresses the wildness of nature, so the coming of age process is predicated on control and discipline to transcend the wildness. Our society goes away from nature and seeks to overlay a model of “higher” “scientific” intelligence based on this “rationality.”

Wisdom traditions of the world however insist on the opposite—they tell us to tune in to who we are by going within. Forget the programs that have been added by human cultural systems: Go get the information direct and align your will with the ever-present state of Nature’s intelligence. Nature doesn’t act with a set of pre-identified cookie-cutter rational schematics. Nay, the very coding of Nature expresses a rationality that supersedes our “rational” systems. For instance, Nature’s intelligence continually creates thriving systems of life the word over, while humankind’s rationality of the present does the opposite. That’s why it is an “irrational rationality.”

The real Nature is sacred geometrical fractal designs that self-organize endlessly and has so many meta-levels of consciousness that are guiding things for us and as us, as is apparent when we in reflection realize that we set up the day or series of events in such a meaningful and purposive way that is understood only after the fact.

Anyway, while in Albany, after years of slogging through disease and becoming incrementally better at my crafts, I recognized that health and wellbeing are boons for creativity. In this process I learned the importance of healthy diet, exercise, mindfulness, rest, and healing modalities. I also became super-intentional and obsessed with visions, goals, and manifesting. From the box packaging for a bookshelf, I found two long pieces of parchment that easily rolled up like scrolls. On one I wrote out in permanent marker a set of three-year goals spanning creative vocation, relationships, health and spirituality. I marked the paper with my blood, committing myself to the realization of my ideal.
After six months in Albany I returned once more to my parent’s house. Typical millennial, right? Always moving back home with Mom and Dad, refusing to get a haircut and a job, never growing up.

During this home stint, my mother helped me figure out the Lyme thing. She heard from a friend about the chiropractor medicine man in Portland and found that she too had been carrying some of the Lyme. I got in for an appointment and yup, I had intense Lyme and one or two co-infections. I got the right meds and began the path to healing. It was nice to finally understand a major source of my limitations. I reflected that what I had accomplished in my 20s was pretty good, considering that my body and mind had been working at about 50%.

After a year of treatment, I felt much better, though I of course had much to work on. For instance, I was still a lost soul limping out of what had been a tough go. I was alone, alienated, and without intimate relationships. I most often chose to be in solitude rather than with friends. Romance? Forget about it.

There is emotional trauma in this way. There is constant anxiety and despair about life. The soul is dissatisfied on its basic level, and the response is sapped energy, emptiness, aching, and sadness. On top of all that then you must go into the world, force a smile, and muster up the energy to get through it. Jesus.

I sometimes thought about the benefits of throwing in the towel and trying for a full-time job like most of my peers. If I worked 40 hours per week, I could still muster two hours a day on my art if I were disciplined. Damn that vision! I cannot think of an uninspiring job I would take regardless of the security and social network it guaranteed me. Regardless of the wardrobe, car, healthcare plan, or extra cash to buy drinks and meals for potential mating partners, I would not trade my stubborn vision of pursuing creative individuation.

And so it has been, this journey leading me here, to a life of transience. Wandering. Traveling. Playing music, writing, recording, meditating, walking in green Maine woods and up red Sedona rocks. Hopefully awakening and helping in some way. Anyway, let’s hurry up and get Florida over with.
Into the Jaws

Mark and I had a hellish first day in Florida. I did however enjoy the climate, so even several hours of traffic and confusion about our destination was placated with warm sunshine. We were wandering down the coast toward some shot in the dark camping spot, but we were met with an amazing backup of traffic that Google estimated would deter us for over two hours. Amid this BS, my car came to a shuddering stop, causing me to say, “Shit.” Luckily, it turned on right away. This is the one and only time this car ever had that trouble, and I take it as a helping gesture from whatever you deem appropriate—“universe,” “higher self,” “angels,” “guardians,” etc.—because I promptly exited the highway, not wanting to risk breaking down there.

By nightfall Mark and I made it to St. Augustine Beach. We discreetly parked in a beach house condo community, and with a dog barking in a house right next to the beach entrance, we not so discreetly trespassed upon the white Florida sand. Mark wanted to get our sleeping bags and lay out on the beach for the night. We got our bags. But with the dog barking on each pass plus the tire marks all over the beach indicating police monitoring, I rescinded on the plan of beach sleeping. We finally found a dirt-cheap motel near Jacksonville.

The hotel lady behind the counter was an “honest Christian” who does not pray to idols, as I learned when I asked about the Buddha and Krishna statues I saw on the desk. “Indians own the hotel,” she told me in a whisper. Oh, I see. Well, I was just wondering, because…Well, never mind. Let’s just stick to smiling, shall we? Southern hospitality sometimes trumps critical thinking.

This night was the first I felt happy in a long time. Mark and I were chillin’ like a couple villains in our room, our gross, sticky-floor, broken-toilet-so-we-peed-in-the-bathtub, room. We laughed as we watched a few funny videos and laughed some more as we reflected on our trip. We made it to Florida. Life was OK.

The next day we vowed to go to the beach in the morning and figure it out from there. Who cares so long as we got the beach sun. We had a snafu on the way with some anger and quick back and forths emerging over some satellite issue. In the tense silence following some sharp words, I paid my apologies and Mark quickly accepted. Qualms usually aren’t worth getting too upset over. They can be complex if you make them, but more simply, they are part of the drama of human life.
The important thing is getting back together in a harmonious flow of connection. Because without the other person, you don’t even have yourself.

At Jacksonville Beach we laid out in the sun with a spread of fruit upon our blanket. It was a rather nice beach with smooth silky sand that pours through your fingers. I sat up and looked out at the water. It occurred to me that this could be my life. Why not travel? Why not travel from beach to beach and go where the wind wills? Wanderlust stirred within.

As the afternoon sun dipped to the horizon, we were still waiting for couchsurfing requests for our night’s quarters. In another thirty minutes we would throw the towels in the car and go back to the 1.5-star motel. But we got lucky: A fellow living in the suburbs of Jacksonville accepted the request. This was an interesting visit. The host was in his mid-thirties, working as an accountant. He acted the part with his glasses, collared shirt, kakis, trim haircut, and mild manners. He was friendly, but very quiet and to himself.

And there was something different about him. He lived alone in a 3-bedroom house out here in the burbs. The downstairs looked like it was in the middle of a carpentry job. There was hardly any furniture, the walls were half painted, and the front door didn’t have a functional doorknob—you had to open the key latch to open the door. He is not your average middle class young professional living in the suburbs of Jacksonville, Florida.

Mark and I each got a room with nicely made beds. Cushi! We got a winning ticket here for Mark’s last evening. Early the next morning I would deliver Mark to the bus station in Jacksonville, and I knew with a heavy heart what that would mean. I had grown to love his company. What a blessing to have a brother like Mark with me on the first leg of this journey. From his humor to his music to his simply being there, I deeply appreciated him. I knew deep down it would hurt going solo again.

And it did hurt. I let it all flow after I dropped Mark. I cried. I cried because I instantly felt alone again. Ahhhhhhhhh. The loneliness that had plagued me for so many months and so many years, abated for some number of days, and then just like that, I was cast back into darkness. But the trip must go on. I sensed that what lay before me I must face alone. And I had many miles to make heading south, many beach towns to visit as I jollied onward.
That night I stayed in Ormond Beach, which is near Daytona Beach and some other beach, about an hour south into wonderful beach-filled Florida. I did an Airbnb. The house was decked out modern chic classic with a big aquarium in the living room, hanging glass pictures that shimmered and shined with false flames, and surround sound that played Pandora radio from the big screen TV. If I would be sad, at least I could continue the comfortable streak and chill out. I watched some Netflix and rested my tired bones.

And so began my sojourn through Florida. Beach town after beach town with entire days at my leisure. How many hours can one spend alone at beaches in the spirit of fulfillment? It didn’t take long for agony to again clasp its bony hands around my throat, for the ever-present ache of the unsated to rise and settle like a dark cloud around my aura.

In Daytona Beach I stopped in a spiritual stones and books store. The shop-keeper told me about a spiritual camp in Casadega. I checked their website later to see what they had going on. A psychic and healer named Joy Sagar had a free monthly healing session on his porch the next day. I planned to go, but first I had to find my next night’s stay.

Back to couchsurfing. This time I found a young lady who looked about my age. Her profile picture was cute. I made mental anticipations, though of course I would play it cool and see what might arise. Sometimes couchsurfers and their hosts hook up. I never did, but I’ve heard stories. It makes sense: We travelers tend to be young and open to sharing beds.

My host was 20 years old and she had a girlfriend who lived with her. They had just moved into this place and the living room of the apartment was completely vacant save for a fake little Christmas tree in the corner. Fine by me. I laid out my yoga mat and made myself at home on the carpet.

This night I completely lost whatever clean, empowered bearings I had maintained with Mark. I got a pizza. Then chocolate from Walmart. I ate a chocolate bar as I walked around Walmart and then I bought another for my hosts. They didn’t like dark chocolate, so I ate it. We smoked a good amount of ganja.

The only bathroom in the place was through their room, and we never really discussed how that would work if I had to go in the middle of the night. At 4 A.M. I awoke with an urgent need to pee. I had slept maybe two hours. I went outside and peed in a bush, and then returned
to collect my things and make a pre-dawn escape. I hung out in my car until Starbucks opened. And then began my Starbucks dependency. I should have counted how many lattes, breakfast sandwiches, honey-filled chocolates and other garbage I consumed at Starbucks between Daytona Beach and Austin, Texas. It was not impressive.

This was the day of Joy. After caffeinating enough to shake and shudder into the day, I made my way to Casadega for the healing. Casadega has a town square with a nice old-fashioned hotel, and probably more energy workers, psychics, mediums, and other spiritualist professionals than I’ve ever seen per capita. Perhaps this was the diamond in the Florida rough.

The healing thing with Joy was fine. It didn’t last long. I sat on a bench with my back to him. He moved his hands around different parts of my back and head. He asked in a confirming question that I liked music, insinuating that he picked the tid-bit up from my field. I nodded. He told me to think of a song I like and use it to anchor my awareness. As with many energy and spiritual things like this, I didn’t feel an overt difference, but I trusted on some level the energy had been adjusted and would come through in time. I took a business card from Joy, eyeing with interest that he offered visionary readings to help one plot a path forward.

For the next two evenings I had camping reservations in Christmas. Christmas was inland about a half hour. Welcome to rural Florida country, home to the true rednecks (really, farmers get red necks because of the sun). I had no idea what to expect about where I was going. It turned out to be really rural. Cattle farms with huge pastures separated neighbor’s properties.

The online reservation from Florida’s state park system had said I would be the only one there. I understood—why would anyone want to go camping in the middle of nowhere Florida? I found the park and pulled in. At the self-check-in kiosk, I was surprised to see a big ol’ Ford F-250 parked and a middle-aged man filling out his card. I immediately judged him conservative. I got out and we greeted one another. I said I was surprised to see him because the internet told me I would be alone. He said not to worry, he was camping with a whole gang of folks and they would be having quite a time. He invited me to come hang with them.

I told him I would come by, and I meant it. I thought about how plans and visions can change. I had expected a solo-weekend getaway.
and now this. Okay, I’d flow with it, and I expected there would be something interesting to experience.

The drive to my site was an endless gravel road. After a couple miles, I noted in my rearview a black Jeep kicking up a cloud of dust as it zoomed toward me. I had been told to take a right at the electric lines that crossed the road. The wires turned out to be a huge column that straddled each side of the road, so I took the right and continued in the aisle of wires. I hoped the Jeep would go straight because I don’t like being pressured to go faster.

After a minute I saw the Jeep turn onto my road. When he made enough ground, I pulled over and rolled down my window, deciding not only to let him pass, but to also ask if he knew where I was going. As he slowed to a stop, I saw the glint of something metal in his left hand—a shiny silver hand-gun. My stomach dropped. Some may say I’m just not used to gun culture like this, but man, I was out in the middle of nowhere southern country by my dear old lonesome with a set of Yankee plates, and this guy pulls up to me holding a hand-gun. I ask about directions. He tells me where to go, pointing forward and gesturing with his gun. He was friendly, Latino by the look, and we said “hey man,” and “thanks, man,” “peace.” I waited for him to go ahead, having already decided to turn my ass around at first convenience and get the heck out of there.

I decided to check out Orlando and find a place to stay. I sent out some requests to couchsurfing hosts, last minute per my style. As I drove toward the city, I realized I must perform my poetry somewhere. It was a Saturday night. Orlando is a decent sized city; I had to get that third performance.

I got in around five o’ clock and through word of mouth, found a place somewhere out of the downtown. It was clearly not the right spot. I packed up and headed straight to the downtown. I found some parking in a not too sketchy but still sketchy area, got my bags and walked into the madness. There was a road closed to traffic but full of bar crawlers. This was a drunken city: So many ladies shuffling and squirming by in glittery short dresses, so many bro-dudes with product slicked hair. Oh boy.

I set up on a very busy street corner. I laid out the whole thing. Blanket, lion statues, my books, some crystals, the whole show. Then I peddled my mind like a mad man. And I was a mad man. I let it all loose. I spoke to them. I sang to them. I performed for them. Some
watched me. Some were unsure of what was happening. Some cannot compute the distortion I represent, so they block it out. They offer it no opinion of condemnation or otherwise, they just flow past, eyes fixated on further points.

I met some people. A few encouraged me, and I gave them books. I slapped hands, talked about life, gave a few hugs. I got tired after an hour. It’s hard to keep a steady stream of energy pouring out, especially when most of it is improvised and not received.

I met a college couple going to school in Gainesville at the University of Florida. We exchanged contact info and they said to give them a call if I needed a place to stay.

I left drunken downtown Orlando feeling satisfied. That was a gutsy move. I was determined to do it, and I did it. I can step in that space if I wish. And it will be better when I am better. It will be better when I have instruments to play, people to play with, and technology to broadcast the sound. A step into the field is an opportunity to look around and say, “OK, next time I enter, here’s what I will bring…”

I drove out to Amin’s house for my couchsurfing stay and arrived just moments after him. Amin is a PhD student in a computer engineering field. He is from Iran. Next year he will make good money working for Microsoft, a job he feels he must take to maintain his visa. We shared a nice talk on philosophy, values, what’s happening in the world, technology, poetry, and spirit. PhDers can be fun to talk with because they are generally interested in knowledge. People like Amin allow you space to get a complete thought out there, and then they seriously consider it.

Amin knew the deal with couchsurfing. He feels the strains of the system, the creaking and crackling of its collapse and the agony of its alienated people. We talked about how the couchsurfing community is full of people living lives alternative from the standard get-a-job, get-a-house, marry, save money, buy things, get a storage unit for your extra things, retire, and die. For many, being in the flow of hosts and surfers is an alternate reality based on freedom and this search for something more meaningful and fulfilling.

Couchsurfers are unique to the standard American code for at least two reasons:

1) They are travelers. In Mexico, I saw very few Americans. Maybe they were in Cancun and not Tulum, but I suspect most Americans are afraid to travel. Or unable to afford the tickets. Travelers
leave the American matrix and open to new possibilities. I bet you can only travel so much before having a total rearrangement of your sense of self and value system. Many active people in the couchsurfing community travel often.

2) Couchsurfers share their space and are open to strangers. They know the value of connecting with people and sharing resources. For many of my hosts, couchsurfing offers valuable social experiences. Guests bring ideas. They bring reflection and opportunities to expand. They bring unassuming gifts in just being who they are. Couchsurfing folks have permeable boundaries. My home? My space? It’s better when shared. But what about trust?? Won’t they steal my stuff or do something evil like at least some people do?? That’s a fearful pattern of thinking coming from the old system. In separation, many create defensive projections based on the belief that people are inherently untrustworthy and ill-willed, but 99% of people are the opposite. Plus, people’s profiles have reviews on the site. If a couchsurfer were stealing stuff or otherwise being harmful, their hosts would report them.

I left early, before anyone in the house awoke, as is my style. I like to get on the road early and avoid breakfast entanglements. We’ve all got things to do. What I had to do I didn’t know. I didn’t have anywhere to go. Just returning to the coast and continuing south. Going was my doing.

Cocoa Beach was like the other beaches, except maybe a bit more “conscious,” though the woman running a healthy coffee bar suggested otherwise, pointing out how the chatty woman who just left the cafe, though warm in her bubbly personality, voted for Trump and expresses racist sentiments now and again. Oh. Okay.

What does Florida have going for itself? Not much. All the beach towns are the same. Obnoxiously crowded, full of condos, and commodified with the same tacky beach stores that go, “Boing! Itttt’sssss Florida!!” No personality. No creativity. Nothing close to what it could be! What anything could be… a state of ever-present becoming totally engrossed in the cultivation of beauty and love…

The next two nights I stayed in a suburban Airbnb. Awfulness. Anytime I end up embedded miles deep into a suburb, it’s like, what the hell happened? How did I end up here, again?

Thus commenced two nights of overeating by myself in private misery. Alone. In a Jesus type household. Very weird. My hosts were a young couple around my age. Professionals. Religious folk. They had
four small dogs who barked up a storm anytime a door opened anywhere. The woman maybe didn’t work at all. She kept to herself in her room with her dogs the entire time. The living room and kitchen were always empty, quiet, and dark. The guy, and I’m not sure if he even shared a room with the woman, was gone most of the hours of the day working. My room was styled red and pink with lovey-dovey pictures of the host woman with inspirational messages dotting the walls and framed atop bookshelves. Interesting. I ate, watched Netflix, and felt awful.

After that joyous experience, I made my way down to West Palm Beach to stay with Andre, a veteran sniper who served in Iraq. Before Andre, I stopped at Jupiter Beach because I had the whole day and it’s called Jupiter Beach. On this beach were more perfect shells than I have ever seen. I should have filled up a trash bag and sold them online or something. It was a great beach. It was also a wealthy beach. Tiger Woods and Celine Dione have houses in Jupiter. Speaking of wealthy, West Palm Beach.
Oh, How the Stars and Bucks Glitter...

The actual beach part of West Palm is wealthier than Jupiter, and it’s a blight upon Earth. The non-beachside is a fine little city, similar to Portland, Maine perhaps but also with a defined ghetto of black people in addition to the gourmet coffee bars. West Palm beachside, however, is a dismal place. It’s an ultra-wealthy prison of senseless taste, decrepit moral values, and the plastic surgery veneer of beauty.

The mansions and complexes are fenced off with high security systems. The grounds of the larger estates are filled with army ant work brigades of brown-skinned laborers mowing, trimming, painting, weeding, and walking around.

The streets were clogged with luxury cars. Mercedes, Porsches, Corvettes; drivers with wealth glittering on their hands, wrists, ears and necks, all looking rigidly forward with stoic expressions of soul-pain concealed behind designer shades.

“What a mess,” I thought to myself.

I followed my GPS to the Starbucks which happened to be on a little mall street. I parked behind a Rolls Royce. I took a picture of it next to my white ‘99 Toyota Camry. I walked past a Louis Vuitton store and took a picture.

The Starbucks was the ritziest Starbucks I had ever seen. I took a seat in a lounge booth set with red plush cushions. When I ordered, my barista attendant was none too pleased to see me. I did not belong here, clearly. I was wearing sweatpants. No joke, sweatpants and a shirt I had worn the day before. I hadn’t shaved in a while.

So, me and a handful of millionaires and Starbucks employees found each other in a common sphere of space and time, and I was not welcome. Of course not, why would I be? In this Starbucks, the elite hold themselves with contrived grace and dignity. It is the way of rich folk at a ball, dressing to the nines, twinkling with their champagne glasses, carrying on tradition in composure and taste. Yes, a lovely affair, the spirit of the rich and powerful. When they go to their offices and command centers, there as well they carry the air of the higher. To them deference is owed. They maintain the standards of excellence and justice, they set the fate, they bear the torch of cultural progress. Well, they do or appear to do until Rome burns.
They are the master class, but really, most of the folks at the Starbucks were just living their lives. They were mostly women, dressed glittery, overtly alienated from their environments via absorption into their smart phones. They didn’t notice me. And the ones who did, who were nearby or sitting across the room talking, eyed me with surprise and interest. From their faces I deemed them kind. Perhaps they were just playing the game they found themselves born into, living with so much access to wealth, only knowing this weird world of playing the highest roles as signified by the most expensive clothing and adornments, consorting among themselves with ambition to become the highest power master. It’s all very much like Star Wars when you get down to it.

Anyway, I feel sorrier for the Starbucks worker who disparaged me with her attitude. I sympathize with her because she is working a Starbucks job, and yes, those jobs are most often awful for the human spirit because of the menial wages, the routinized assembly line nature of the work, and the lack of self-determination and self-expression granted to workers.

I’ve worked as a barista in a local, good-valued, and conscientious coffee shop. Even there, the nature of being a coffee shop moving product in capitalistic society means that you must develop routines, lines of power and responsibility, and scripted roles that young people who are coming and going can easily learn.

Our high-paced, consumer-crazed market society necessitates working conditions that are alienating and dehumanizing in that they require people to sacrifice their individuality and range of potential to become automatonic efficient inputs to the production process. The behind the scenes of a coffee shop illustrates the computer-game nature of this venture: There are designated places for all the things—cups, lids, drinks, parfaits, coffee filters, and so on—and at certain times the workers must restock the inventory. The job can be reduced to clockwork routines, as seen in certain busy Starbucks wherein employees have timers strapped to their belts that beep when they should make restocking and cleaning rounds. It’s just manual labor that must be done, simple input/output logistics to keep the machine running. We need the cups out here to feed the people. We must batch out enough product to deliver, so the baristas become assembly line servants moving product. Every day the same thing. The same routine. The same times to
restock. The same pattern at the end of the day. Batch out. Clean up. Restock.

Though the social interaction with coworkers and customers, creativity and pleasure of making drinks for people, and Zen flowing around to do the thing were at times rewarding, that life wasn’t for me. Maybe it could be in the future, because I can envision running a coffee shop with some friends being a wonderfully fulfilling experience.

But Starbucks has taken it to the next level. There’s an old farmer’s saying that goes, “An eye for every acre.” The logic of this line is that you must be tuned in to what’s happening right in front of you. If you try to manage too much, none of your things will succeed very well.

The same is true with coffee shops. Starbucks, being the king corporate conglomerate beast of the coffee world, sets up new shops as if they pop out of magic cubes made in secret space stations. The executive-alien leader of Starbucks arrives at the scene. He pulls a cube out from his coat pocket, tosses it on the ground, and turns back to the helicopter as the cube opens in a burst of a green light and materializes into a new Starbucks shop. As the biggest corporate coffee chain, it follows that Starbucks would have the most dehumanizing structures.

Sure, I am emphasizing the assembly line dehumanization of Starbucks, and some baristas may have a ball dishing out lattes, meeting new people, and even having self-discretion about things like new drink ideas and writing on the board. Sure, but I am emphasizing a point that needs emphasis. Besides, I’ve seen enough stressed out baristas to know what I’m talking about.

There is no reason to engage in this work-style. There is no reason in the 21st century that we need to order ourselves like Santa’s elves in a line operation. Not for profit, not for security, not for safety. We have the means to consciously create our working environments, to consciously decide what we need as a society and how we should make it.

To deny the conversation about, “Hey everyone, what do we actually need and want here? What would be best to create given the limited resources of the planet, and not to mention the disastrous epidemics of social and psychological despair that have arisen from this trip into hyper-capitalism?” is to limit the potential of who we are. We must ask, “How can we arrange ourselves to make what is good for society in ways that are good for everyone?” Sure, individualism is
great, but must we completely shun a perspective of collective empowerment?

To deny this conversation is akin to an addict refusing to seriously consider acting on the question, “Now what would be best for me in terms of consumption habits?” And maybe that addict really does try to change. Maybe he sees how his ways are leading to a destructive spiral of self-neglect, but dammit, he cannot change. And how he has tried! He’s read books! Watched Youtube videos. Woke up early to meditate and do yoga. Wrote in his journal, ate superfoods, went to retreats, talked about his problems, and yet, he can’t kick the habits. But how he yearns to.

Maybe the underclasses of society have awoken to the necessity of change. It’s become glaringly obvious, that is, unless you compartmentalize anything you hear about climate and ecological disaster, intensifying economic struggles, and the mass breakdown of mental health. But what is one to do? How can one effect change?

Maybe we’ve become too accustomed to seeing change in terms of exerting force in the material world. Maybe intent and small decisions that lead to disinvolve ment in the dominant value system and economic sphere are paramount to this process’ success. Maybe the more we link up with each other and reach a consensus agreement about the basic values of goodness for all beings, then we will naturally and lovingly create the appropriate structures and systems we need to conduct our lives. Awakening is a long arc, and though it seems slow in the moment, consciousness will prevail in the long run.

I also feel for the Starbucks employee because she had assumed a mindset of subservience to the elites. She smiled and primped and preened for each customer, hungry for a look of acceptance. Her association with the elites marked her as superior to one such as me. Slaves sometimes exhibit this behavior when they believe their masters to be superior. If one slave is elevated to a manager position, she may adopt behavior and beliefs related to the masters, and then grow to look upon the other slaves with disdain. Master is better, that’s the gist of it.

I was curious by this experience. True, I can feel defensive and resentful about other people thinking they’re better than me, but I would rather not feel anger toward anyone in that room because I want us all to be free from the matrix coding. Even if I’m not in a feeling of compassion for others, remembering this helps me to reframe their actions. When this barista was a child, what did she like to do? When
did she go from curious and experimentally creative to overly invested in what others thought of her?

There are several developmental psychologists of the past century who have discussed cognitive and moral stages of psychological growth. As Ken Wilber shows, most developmental models show paths leading to states of higher self-determination and reliance upon one’s own values and conscience, and less investment in organized structures such as churches, political parties, or ideologies. Those who look to authority figures and the prevailing customs of society to find their sense of right and wrong are limiting themselves. We are each capable of critical thought and empowered responsibility. The fact that more aware and responsible states are our natural evolutionary path given sufficient conditions is a note of optimism for the revolution. My hope for the future is rooted in the heart of human nature. It is after all the heart that compels us to serve one another.

After the Starbucks, I drove around and searched in vain to find a free spot of beach to rest upon. Parking was $10 on the streets, and the beaches were fenced off. I parked, ignored the payment meter, climbed over a small wooden fence, and trotted down a bushwhacked path to the beach. I laid my body on that sand and soaked up the sun for an hour. I didn’t pay anyone, and I didn’t get any parking tickets.

Across the bridge was the real West Palm Beach, which is a pretty “woke” place. Lots of natural food, quality coffee bars with friendly and talkative baristas and customers, art galleries, kava bars, and a general friendly vibe.

Andre was a little wired and clearly had PTSD stuff to work through, but the guy was also “woke.” He talked fast and often, and I received most of what he said, offering reflective or critical response when given space to do so.

Andre is no stranger to the evil machinations of the military industrial complex. He told me how he and his unit were basically told to go through supplies as quickly as possible, to use new vehicles to the max and really beat them into the ground. He said soldiers are just consumers eating up stock in the machine, serving the profit flow of the complex.

The military is just another industry sustaining itself through exploitation and destruction in the name of profit. Sure, there are other warped narratives of “freedom” and “democracy” wrapped in the military’s mission in the Middle East and rest of the world, and those
narratives are also just as problematic as the profit incentive mission, but Andre was pointing out the economics of how corporate fingers get into the pie and then exert their influence in Washington to maintain the death industry. To the corporate go the spoils, and death and destruction to the non-capitalized brown-skinned people of the world. Yes, we may look at how companies like Lockheed Martin and Boeing use their money on pro-war lobbying, campaign contributions, and think tanks. The war industry is right out in the open, folks, all you have to do is follow the money trail to understand the great American tradition of endless war.

Andre was a gracious host, and he offered an extended stay if I wished, but I was feeling antsy because of the trajectory I had been on. I felt I needed to get away, to deepen into nature. The opposite awaited me: The reckoning of Miami.
The Belly of the Beast

All those tasteless beach-towns on Florida’s east coast are mere photocopies of the Miami matrix. Miami is the ultimate cancerous archetype of Florida. Maybe it has redeeming qualities. Somewhere. Culture? Sure, maybe it has rich Latino culture and art and such. I witnessed some of it in fact, and I’m sure somewhere in the thick of it is something of redemption.

But let me lay it out for you by the numbers. From West Palm Beach to the outer edge of Miami is 108 miles of highway. This entire expanse is one big skid mark of strip mall Florida beach culture with more suburbs than you can imagine. They are packed in there like sardines, right between the swamp and the ocean. The swamp encroaches more every year, and so too are ocean levels rising. Soon nature will mercifully force an evacuation of Miami. I can’t imagine anything worse than driving those 108 miles again. If again I ever journey into the belly of this beast, I will be sure to bring a lamp, and better yet, one with a genie.

That first day started well thanks to an unlikely encounter with friends. I planned to meet the father and stepmother of a good friend from back in Maine. Bob and Robin had recently sold their house, cars, and sailboat to buy a bigger sailboat that they could sail wherever they wanted for a couple years. They had been living on the same road I grew up on. They moved there the summer before I went to college, and I met their son, Andrew, in my dorm bathroom that fall. We became fast friends, journeying together through doors of perception as we navigated the corridors of our emergent adulthood. I called Bob to see if our paths may cross south somewhere. Miami was the spot.

Bob motored his skiff in to retrieve me from the coast. They were moored in a quiet harbor, bobbing about gentle in the glittering water. An island among fellow traveling islands. Not much to do but watch the new boats come into the harbor and watch the other boats bob in the waves of the new. An older guy on a nearby boat emerged from his cabin butt naked. Why not?

It is cool what Bob and Robin are doing, and I was pleased to connect with them amid their adventure. I support older folks when they uproot and do something totally different. Good for you! Be liberated! Leave the nest! Go beyond! But what about healthcare or retirement
savings? Nay, no concerns. Life is not for concerns. Plus, worry of concerns manifests the very concerns you worry over, and this creates and re-creates a comfortable mode of reality in that at least you are in control of being concerned. Trust the process. The universe rewards courage, so I’ve heard.

The first night I stayed with a friendly couple of older guys somewhere in the burbs. I think it was in the portion of paradise they call “Hollywood.” These folks were no new-bees to couchsurfing and they knew it. They had at least two guest bedrooms along with protocols, procedures, schedules, work-exchanges, a fire pit out back, a hot tub, dogs, and the whole 9 yards, I’ll tell ya. I graciously accepted their acceptance of my request and spent a comfortable evening. Well, as comfortable as one could be as one prepares to journey into the heart of darkness.

The next day I drove into the deep. I had no plan. I’m not sure what happened. I didn’t have a plan. Mike Tyson once said every boxer has a plan before he gets hit. But I didn’t even have a plan. I spent many hours that day in my car. I ventured over to the actual beach part of town, but this was a shit-show on a whole other level. Plus, did I really want to just hang out on a beach? What the hell? What was I even doing? Why was I there? I didn’t need to be in Miami, but it was part of the non-plan. So, there I was.

At a Starbucks, a man told me he knew I would be rich someday. He said I have the look. “Doesn’t he have that look? You’ve got the look.” It was a funny time to hear this because I was dangerously close to zero dollars in my bank account, and I had minutes before found out that my job supervisor (a remote online person I have never talked to) responded to a customer complaint by reimbursing the customer with my earnings along with withdrawing a fine from my account. I didn’t feel like I had “the look.”

That night I planned to go to a stand-up comedy thing. I should have. I don’t know why I didn’t. I ate ice cream instead. It was the kind of “I’m eating ice cream right now and I hate that it has come to this, but I don’t know what else to do, I just don’t know what else to do, someone help me please.” Yeah, I ate the ice cream. Then I went to a Walmart parking lot and I parked on the edge near some swamp land. I parked near a couch. There was a couch out there between the lot and the swampland. And laying on the couch were three cats. They would be my friends for the evening. I loved those cats.
I went into Walmart and bought more things I shouldn’t eat plus a few cans of tuna for the cats. I peeled back the cans and let ‘em have the fish. Two more cats ran out from the swamp. Five cats hanging out, as homeless as me, making it work in the Miami swamp.

Later that night, a Walmart employee came to be with the cats. He didn’t know I was there because I was laying back trying to sleep, and so I heard him talking to the cats and sharing some of his dinner. I understood.

I don’t know why I stayed in Miami that next day. I was debating checking out the Keys. I should have. But with not a lot of money, no takers on Couchsurfing, and the thought of another day’s worth of driving in despair, I didn’t want to dip another hour or three further beyond where I was.

At this point, I was past defeated. Just stressed, tired, jacked up on caffeine and chocolate, jittery, confused, alienated, and disdainful. I decided to get the best pizza I could find. I searched Google for “Best Pizza near me.” I ended up in a neighborhood where Spanish is the common language. It was a nice area, with good restaurants just down the road. I parked near a guy spray-painting a sweet mural. It was of an indigenous American man dressed up like Captain America. A great bald eagle was behind him amid an American flag backdrop.

I voiced my appreciation as I walked by. I met someone standing by the mural taking pictures. He walked with me away from the mural and confided that he was looking for mushrooms. He asked if I wanted some too, because he would call me, and he knew where to get them. I refused, though maybe I should have gone with that flow.

I ate in the restaurant, which promised the best Napoli pizza in town, which is interesting because it was a nice Italian restaurant with plenty of well-dressed white folks eating, but the chefs were all Latino. The pizza was in fact delicious.

By late afternoon, I decided to scram from Miami by taking one of those roads heading west through the swamp. I would be done with my journey southward and gone from the east coast.

My timing was such that I drove into the sunset. Peace, Miami. Go f...be so very well to yourself. When I made it to the other side, I of course had no where to stay, but I was gone from that madness. The mess of Florida’s east coast was no more. ‘Twas but a memory, an unprocessed emotionally disturbed two weeks that would sit stirring in some part of my mind until a later now.
I tried sleeping in another Walmart lot, but it was brighter than the last one and sans a kitty couch near swampland. Back to boring old suburbia. At least the Miami Walmart had some flare to it.

Here are some entries from my journal:

*I should have stayed another night in Miami at the Walmart with the cats so I could have some friends for the night. The cats. Yup. I miss the cats. Now I’ll go to another Walmart and I’ll be by myself. Of course. And that’s the chart I course. Eating shit. That’s me. Eating shit.*

And this entry:

*Living in this world creates anger and dis-ease in the soul. If you put an animal in a cage, it becomes agitated because of the basic affront to its freedom. The soul needs freedom to be at ease and happy. The anonymous machine culture of commodities and distraction and shallow attention lends toward anger. Frustration. Like a monkey howling in a cage. If we really tuned in to the tensions of our normal every moment living in cities and on traffic jammed roads, or alone, walking past people with eyes averted and lacking recognition, then we may notice the need to howl as well.*

Yes, this is true, and in our culture, that tension and frustration rarely airs itself properly, maybe because we don’t even know how to process it, let alone open up space for it to be expressed. But America will make you feel like that. The normal feelings of our culture are indicators of “something is wrong.”

The Eastern mystic J.D. Krishnamurti once said, “It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society.” When the body is in pain, it is sign that it needs to heal. Collectively, the “body-politic” is in pain, and so we must clean up and heal. Our matrix appeared functional for some time, but even the appearance has waned. It has become overtly maddening, obsolete, and painful. And unnecessary. The next day I called Steve.
An Oasis in the Wasteland

Steve is a long-time friend of my mother’s. They knew each other some time ago in Boston. Between the 1980s and present, Steve bought up a bunch of cheap property in Dunedin, Florida, a coastal town between Tampa and St. Petersburg, and now he’s the landlord for many people.

Steve gets it. He sees what’s going on. He has a wonderfully witty sense of humor, and though he may be a little jaded, who wouldn’t be these days? Steve lives a nice pace of life, connecting with friends here and there, enjoying some herbal altered states in the evening, and talking philosophy or about the system. He’s a good dude. He hooked me up with a sweet place to rest, recuperate, and revisit my healing friend Mother Marijuana.

At night, we talked about the zooiness of the system: About how I had gotten lost driving around the downtown mall that’s the size of a small village and about the other buffoonery of this clown show society. I poked here and there about how we may accept a noble mission of raising consciousness and rallying the masses. Steve joked, “By all means, get on a donkey and charge forth.” Monty Python seemed to reflect his views on reality: A humorous, good hearted yet slightly cynical take on what may in fact be a meaningless existence. But really, Steve supports raising consciousness, and he even generously paid me to research and create a little website revealing the dangers of sugar and the conniving deceitfulness of the corporate sugar cartels. Steve’s offering was an oasis in the desert of loneliness, and many miles had I before the better deserts of the southwest.

To reflect on what had happened the prior two weeks, my experience shows the range of potential available to each of us. Alone out there, lost, sad, and without a family or places to stay, I reverted to an animal. We all have a part of ourselves that gnaws out in hunger and defense. If someone had been recording me through video, they would have seen many instances of a teary-eyed Dan walking into Starbucks and various grocery stores. I didn’t try to hide it too much. I knew what I was feeling and doing. It’s funny, even if you know exactly what’s going on, you sometimes can’t change it. Sometimes it must play through the process.
But yes, our conditions determine which parts of us are expressed. With my basic needs met, I can be an affable, creative, good-natured, humorous fellow. Having consciously lived through the range of potentials from hungry animal to humane, I am 100% confident that the same is true for 100% of humanity—it all depends on context.

There was a recent experiment that shows how addictions are related to context. The first part of the experiment had rats in small separate cages, each fitted only with two water hoses, one of which was laced with cocaine. In these cages the rats naturally became heavily addicted to the drug water and over time they grew sick and died.

The second part of the experiment allowed the rats to roam around in a large “rat park” where they had plenty of opportunities to socialize, ride rat wheels and otherwise have a good ol’ rat time. In the park there were also drug water hoses in addition to clean water hoses. The rats tasted the park’s drug water, but they didn’t become addicted as they did in their cages. Rather, they chose to spend their time socializing, exercising, exploring, and just being rats.

This experiment demonstrates what happens when our needs for companionship, freedom, nature, exercise, and other basic fulfillments are unmet. Many of us become “addicted” to various forms of compensations. Alcohol, weed, or food can serve to compensate for what we really need—connection, meaning, security, love, freedom, nature, or whatever else is missing. But how much weed must you smoke to compensate for heartful connection with others? There is no amount. You can never have enough of what you don’t really want.

For many years I have battled myself about getting my act together rather than seeking to satisfy those basic conditions of fulfillment. I still idealize a state of power, strength, discipline and dignity in which I can transcend my hungry behaviors when I am fallen into achy loneliness. Some would say this is a form of “spiritual bypassing” in that a spiritual ideal replaces one’s actual needs.

Here and there I’ve entered oases where those hungers fall away thanks to truly satisfactory conditions. A few romances. Sharing my creativity. Staying with friends. I always loved sleeping over at friends’ houses when I was a kid. Sleeping on the floor never bothered me one bit: I was satisfied being close to others all through the night.

The amount of aloneness we experience as normal in our society is unusual. I’m not saying it’s “wrong,” I’m saying it is most unusual when compared to the entirety of human history. Actually, it is also
wrong. The result of our individualized culture may be that we’ve toughened our skin and reached existential and cognitive dimensions that were maybe inaccessible to those of the past. But all our aloneness has left us in a subtle state of trauma wherein we are seldom truly fulfilled and secure in our identities and relationships.

From the “enlightened” rational perspective of Modernity, the need for companionship is sometimes seen as an animal need, or a “lower” need. We Americans are so civilized, cultured, clean, and proper, unlike nature which is dirty, wild, chaotic and instinctual. It could be we have placed ourselves in a battle between various aspects of our nature, striving to be composed, neat, and orderly self-sufficient characters of our dramas rather than the instinctually ruled mammals who came from flesh itself. This could also be why women have been so denounced, marginalized and dominated by men through the past 5,000 years of empire: By virtue of menstruation and childbearing, women are much more unavoidably linked to nature than men.

When I say that we have a natural wild dimension, I do not mean the “red in tooth and claw” wildness that people like Thomas Hobbes falsely project onto the history of humankind. Rather, I mean a wildness that blooms in ecstatic activities such as drumming, chanting, dancing, sexing, and the like. When primordial rhythm and song emerges unhindered, we bypass the conscious, rationally linear mind and enter the immediacy of present moment experience. The result is not a recklessness, but rather a heightened state of joy and awareness. In fact, sometimes the ecstasy becomes so much that the rational control-based self cannot cope with the overwhelm of emotion. As far as I can tell, God is the highest vibrational source of what we are, and the closer we get, the higher we vibe into a state of self-dissolution.

After a few days with Steve, I packed up and went to Gainesville to stay with the couple I met a week before in Orlando. I texted on my way saying I was going to the grocery store to see if they wanted anything. They requested I pick up a twelve pack of Coronas because it was taco night. Back to college life, I guess.
Gainesville is Corporate AF, I Mean, UF

I had many hours before meeting my friends at their apartment, so I checked out the University of Florida. The campus was very nice. It was old. Lots of brick with green ivy growing. A tall clock tower and several libraries. I love campuses in the way I love monasteries: The spirit of betterment through knowledge is palpable.

But a new spirit has also crept onto the college campus—the unholy spirit of capitalism, personified by the green Goddess logo of Starbucks. There were Starbucks everywhere. I learned that the University of Florida outsources their dining to corporations such as Panda Express, Subway, and did I mention Starbucks? There was a Starbucks in every library and dining hall I visited.

And there, my friends, is the commercialization of our country. Every possible good and service is turned into an opportunity for corporate to come in and suck up some change. Further and further the corporate sector encroaches, further the shadows of capitalism creep over us of, eclipsing all that is holy and good, including the pursuit of truth. The university, once a hallmark of enlightenment and character development, becomes a corporate training ground and another extension of supermarket logic. A large group of young adults with capital (student loans) on hand? Build the mall food court. If you build it, they will spend. And when the Midas touch of capitalism has turned the entire world into financial wealth, we may wonder what we will eat and how we will love.

The night with my new friends was strange. We went out, of course. They invited a friend to come along, a very pretty and flirtatious young lady. She was creative, talented, and gushing with enthusiasm, or, if I may say, “naïve joy.” Eventually the friend and I split off from the other two and we spent some time together. I thought there may have been a chance for something with her, but that was romantic of me. In the thrall of the chase I did however consent to buying a $20 ticket to see the band “Of Montreal.” They aren’t bad, but I don’t really care for them, and besides, my new friend wanted to leave after two songs.

There was one redeeming quality of this expensive side street: The lead singer of Of Montreal was dressed as a woman with a wig, make up, and skirt, and he was rocking it. Seeing this example was
inspiring. Entertainers who blur and bend the gender polarities seem to be having the most fun, if David Bowie and Prince are of any indication.

The next day I had arranged a night with someone way up near the border of Georgia. This guy was a true southerner. I could hardly understand him because he spoke so quickly with his accent. His town had one main street with a gas station, small grocery store, and McDonalds. He lived off the beaten path a bit, and his house was full of things. Packed full. You had to carefully pick up and place your feet as you walked around. As soon as I entered the house I decided I was not going to stay the night.

I told him right away about my change of plans, saying that I had more daylight than expected and wanted to make more ground. He was expecting me for dinner and asked if I would still stay for the food. I consented. It was whacky. He seldom stopped talking, sharing with me intimate stories of his life such as the death of one of his children and a bike trip he had taken with his other sons. He wanted to show the importance of being a father who was there for his kids, so they all biked across the country. We ate gumbo and drank lemonade in the living room while looking at pictures he had recently taken.

This guy expressed the best of southern do-it-yourself and hospitality. He had the attitude of “suit yourself.” I don’t know if you are going to eat, but I am. You can stay here if you want, doesn’t matter to me none. He was proud, honest, and direct, and he owned what he owned. He bought his property and house for $10,000, and he was fixing it up himself. What your deal is, he didn’t really care for, so long as you paid decent respect.

After eating, just as day turned to dusk, I hit the road again to Panama City Beach. I found a cheap hotel by the water, one of many in this winter season. From my balcony I could hear waves splashing on the beach, but the wind was cold and I was too restless to stand around gazing out the ocean.

I tried to go out that night with the expectation that maybe I could meet some people (or a woman) and have a good night. I drove around for a while but to no avail. It was another romantic delusion. I returned “home” and fell asleep.

The next day was a short drive to Pensacola. I stayed with a couchsurfing host named Anthony. Anthony is from Africa, and he works a marketing job. He is very humble and gentle. His house was in a gated condo community, but it was sparse with things. In fact, it was
almost barren inside the main living area save for a couch and pictures of his friends and family. We had a nice conversation during which I shared about my path. We discussed values of materialism and the importance of community. I left him my poetry book.

From Pensacola, it was a long and sometimes troubled shot to Austin, Texas where things would begin to turn around a bit, in case you were wondering how long this sad song of wandering can persist.

I made it to New Orleans by late afternoon. By the time I finished my work it was night. I parked downtown and walked around near Bourbon Street to see what all the excitement was about. It’s true there’s a lot going on in the city, and there’s a unique spirit I appreciate. I was however quite detached, wandering past people like a ghoul, seeing them but seeing through and past them, my expression stoic as if I had seen some things. Not much in downtown New Orleans could phase me at that point. It was all just program code in operation, capitalized alienation coping with itself by buying things and getting drunker by the hour. I wasn’t disgusted by the scene, but with the wider context.

I walked three blocks, turned around, walked back to my car and hightailed it out of there. I got a few hours sleep in a Walmart parking lot in Baton Rouge and then left for Houston before sunrise. Houston surprised me. I was expecting smoke stacks, smog, and a thick wet smell of chemicals like in Jacksonville. But the good parts of Houston are actually very clean, neat, and conscious in a way that big parks, health food stores, and personable cafes are conscious. The people were friendly too. Houston, not a bad town, at least the parts I saw. The not so fortunate mostly-African American poor people who were crushed by the 2107 hurricane season may have a different view on Houston, but from my privileged experience, it was OK.

I did an Airbnb that night in a heavily Christian home. There was a Laura Bush book in my room and Jesus quotes and Bible sayings framed around the house. A big white board downstairs posted house rules and chore schedules for the kids, plus a reminder that they will be grounded if their chores are not finished either on time or satisfactorily. I was lucky that everyone was out until past my bedtime. I of course left early—I’m all for connection and communion, but the right crowd also matters.
Finding the Others: Enter the Authentic Austinites

I was headed for Jacque’s house in Austin. I became friends with Jacque some years ago in college when we intermingled in common groups of ecologists, peace activists, poets, other creative expressionists, and the other odd-balls who had their hearts in the right place. According to my journal, Jacque was living in a “co-op kind of house, predicated on connection—or something.”

I arrived at Jacque’s and found a young woman cleaning out and rearranging her car. A fellow traveler, it looked. I took her to be one of Jacque’s roommates, knowing that her house was in the style of communal living and passersby stopping in. Indeed, Sydney, hailing from the northwest, had been traveling. Her and I, from far corners of the great American expanse, meeting right in the center of the Lone Star state.

I was immediately attracted to Sydney as I sensed she was to me. We turned out to be very similar in talents, interests, and knowledge sets. Through her cuddles she pulled me out of my lonely escapade and back into feelings of comfort and belonging. What bliss. Simply to make physical contact with another person with care and affection, not even anything more, is amazing. Multiply that amazing by an unquantifiable degree and we begin to tread upon the surface of my interior after coming from those sad swamps and suburban deserts.

Austin began the reformatting of my hard disk, though living communally with “alternative” people was nothing new to me. I was wise to their ways of veganism, non-binary gender, relaxed boundaries of touch, and something akin to nonviolent communication that they call “authentic relation.” It was great to be with a new crew because I didn’t have to bring my trip with me. They didn’t have to know of the draconian despair I had dwelt in.

I’ve learned as a wanderer that life does not necessitate hashing out one’s story upon each encounter. Each person met is on a unique path. At Jacque’s there were as many trajectories as people in the house. Each person could unload an entire set of baggage to adorn a stage if they wanted to act out the drama of their story. But the meeting of new souls opportunies a fresh start, an immediacy of being that unfolds in the present encounter. Who I was in the past is almost irrelevant because you will know me by who I am now.
After a few nights in Austin, Mark entered the scene. He arrived back from California where he had been doing some authentic relation trainings. He roomed in the pantry-turned bedroom loft right by the kitchen.

Mark and I began to connect through swapping freestyle rhymes in the mornings. I’ve seldom met anyone as skilled in interpersonal dynamics of listening, empathizing, and really caring. When I met Mark, he was a life coach and facilitator in authentic relation, so I took interpersonal healing to be his calling. But he also freestyled! What fun.

I enjoyed Austin. Intentional communities, authentic relating (we’ll get to this later), ecstatic dance events, and several high-quality coffee shops open 24 hours a day. Austin is big and sprawling, but there’s a current of friendliness. It is easy to enter another’s communicative space in the Whole Foods, and people on the street will meet your eye and smile back. Maybe they know they have that Austin reputation to live up to.

For Christmas, I scored a housesitting job 15 minutes from Jacque’s house. I spent three or four nights hanging with a dog and cat. I wished I had enjoyed the solitude more than I did. There’s always something exciting about housesitting, at least in the beginning. A new house, an entire space just for you. And the hosts say help yourself to food! But as the hours tic by, you realize that yeah, there’s a big TV and comfortable living room couch, and a fridge with a smattering of things you normally wouldn’t eat, but now you’re just alone again. If my trip had ended after this Christmas housesit I would have called it “Alone Again.”

In my aloneness, I crept back onto Tinder. For those who don’t know, Tinder is a mobile phone app that allows you to connect with people of your desired sex, most often with intentions for sex or dating. It’s a crass app that mimics our toss-away, pick your own reality way of being that we enjoy as super-individualized consumers starving for connection, authenticity, and meaning. It works by showing you a picture of another person in the Tinder system from your local area. If you think they are attractive or worth connecting with, you “swipe right”—literally, you drag the picture to the right side of the screen. If that person sees your picture and also swipes right, you two are connected on the app and can exchange text messages. Swipe left and you will never hear from that person.
Well, I hooked up with someone for the first time in my Tinder history. I would rather not talk about it.

On Christmas day I was able to procure some marijuana, which was nice and helped with not feeling the lowness of my loneliness. I had asked the universe for some ganja, as I had been so long without it and it was what I wanted, dammit. I went for a walk around the downtown about midday. I wasn’t expressly looking, but I thought, “Maybe I’ll get some out here.” As I was walking back to my car, a rag-tag homeless looking traveler guy sitting with his girl called out to me for a favor. He asked how to get to Pease Park. I pulled up the map on my phone and showed him how to get there. Then I asked if by chance he had any green. He said, yes, as a matter of fact, and sold me a $20 bag. Merry Christmas!

New Year’s Eve was the next happening. I accompanied Jacque and Micah to a house about a half-hour drive from East Austin, somewhere out in the suburbs. This was a reputed house in the authentic relation society of Austin. I entered, looked around and thought, “Oh shit, I should have stayed home.” It was a nice house, the type for professionals, you know, people who make decent incomes by dressing clean and driving their 2017 Toyota Camrys to their respectable jobs. These folks looked around ten years older than me and appeared to be having sophisticated adult conversations. Luckily, I was wrong.

As I talked with people, I realized that the authenticity and good-personness of Jacque’s house was here as well. I met several lovely souls who liked to banter, joke, and explore deeper stuff. Jesse turned out to be a real swell guy, and I became fast friends with Dan Funk, who is indeed funky. One circle of conversation turned to Daniel Pinchbeck’s work on the connection between hallucinogenic plant medicines, shamanism, and the breakdown of consumer capitalism in the 21st century.

Later, after some ganja with Funk and some other new friends, I met a wonderful pair in Danny and Stellar. I recognized Danny from a few days earlier at Jacque’s house. Danny brought a hang-drum into the scene, and Stellar accompanied with a stringed instrument. I gushed enthusiasm at the hang-drum. The hang is a UFO looking instrument, metal with concave circles dotted around the surface, each hitting a different note in a melodic twanggggg that hums and hangs through the air. It’s a wonderfully meditative, otherworldly instrument.
Danny, Stellar, some others and I eventually went into an adjacent room and played music. They were quite good, and I, with surprisingly little reservation, launched into freestyle poetry and song. I don’t know how I sounded to others, but it felt damn good.

We were called out of the room at the 5-minute warning to the ball drop. We returned to the kitchen space which was now packed full of people. After the new year rang in, the room became hushed and attentive, expectant for someone to say something to link us together. Someone stepped into the energy and said something that rang cliché. During a collective calling out of “Feel the love,” I said, “Feel the war.” I’m not sure why exactly, but I did. It felt right. Stellar took note. I had struck a social justice chord, though I did not know at the time and nor was I seeking out social justice partners.

After some free dance and expression, Stellar suggested Danny and I all three go upstairs to talk privately. We found an empty bedroom save for a cat and sat on the bed. We talked about justice and all the stuff, and yet my heart longed to be back downstairs, because I thought maybe I could hook up with someone. Sometimes soul takes over and overrides such yearnings, because Stellar and Danny were worth initiating into deeper relationship. I was discovering more about these two, their polyamory, their interesting histories from wealthy backgrounds, Danny’s years of Buddhist monastic training, and Stellar’s amazing music.

We were later joined by a fourth, a young man who was quite distraught over the happenings of his partner. She was heading for a hook-up with someone else that night, and though he knew he should be cool, he was anything but. He was a warm, sensitive and fun soul.

The bed was huge so we all got in. However, after an hour or two of laying awake, I made a somewhat brash decision—I was to walk home. It was a cold night, by any state’s standards: 20ish degrees with a blustery wind. But I did it. It took me over five hours, but I did it. I stopped in East Austin at one of those all-night coffee places and got a butter coffee. Damn right I did. And that, my friends, is how we start the year off.

The next week was full of communalism. Every night we gathered seven or nine of us on and in front of the couch and watched movies on the projector. Also, “the retreat” loomed near, so Micah, Kai, and Danny, all lead organizers, regularly gathered to prepare. The retreat
was for authentic relation, and it was the big thing in this woke Austin community.

The other cool happening was Mark and Kendall. When I had met Mark a week earlier, I learned that he had just done some authentic relation work in Boston and had been deepening a relationship with someone from Portland, Maine—a woman named Kendall. I realized I had met Kendall a few years prior while working a coffee table for a yoga and wellness event.

Mark had fallen head over heels for Kendall and apparently her for him too. Kendall came out to visit during this week, partly as a test to see if she and Mark would be compatible and for what type of future they may pursue. So here, her and I, two Mainers, found themselves in this Austin house.

Once you get into it and figure out who are doing the things that you like to do, you find that the world is smaller than you thought.

Though Mark is a legendary authentic relation facilitator, he chose to pass up the retreat and instead take some time to focus on his own things.

I went to the retreat, but I only stayed for Friday night and most of Saturday, which was plenty. Up until this point I had not engaged in authentic relating, but I had heard much of it. Many people spoke of it with reverence, describing it in almost hushed tones as if it could hear us. Transformative. Revolutionary. Deeply, deeply, deeply meaningful, this I understood authentic relation to be.

I was a bit unsure of how well I would do, given that I was not learned in the nomenclature I sometimes heard thrown around. But with many years of meditation and engagement with related practices of listening and heartfully communicating, I came determined to flow with ‘em and show that I too have the rhythm of authentic relation!

I found this practice to be both beautifully connective and potentially healing, as well as narcissistically self-obsessed in the way that an overly analytical deconstructive breakdown of the present moment can be. How are you feeling? Pause. Longer pause. Deep breath with eyes closed. Then I jump up, knocking my chair over, and yell: “NO, I ASKED YOU HOW YOU WERE FEELING. I DIDN’T ASK YOU TO GO ASK THE 11TH DIMENSIONAL ARCH-ANGEL GUARDIANS HOW YOU WERE FEELING.”

There’s a point where it becomes so self-referentially absorbed that I don’t want to play anymore. Now THIS is happening. Now THIS
is transforming into THAT, and I feel a bit more like THIS or THAT and I have other things to do, so thank you for sharing, but I’ll see you later. If you are communicating with me, and we are doing something together, sure, let’s talk about what’s going down. But obsessing over changing patterns of feelings that you are not really feeling as you ideate feeling-states that you want to feel to assume a certain self-image, then I haven’t much patience. I know, we’re doing the best we darn-well can, but sometimes less is more.

My friends know I practice a path of heart, but I do believe my gifts are more in the range of communicating knowledge and creative expression than they are in parceling the hearts and minds of others.

I left the retreat a day early and returned to the Austin house with the sole inhabitant of Mark. Kendall had left back to Maine, so it was just Mark and me. This was a Saturday, and the coming Tuesday I had a plane ticket to Mexico. Mark and I had a good hang out time, going to Whole Foods to work together and then the YMCA to work out and hot tub. Later he even brought me out to his older friend Joshua’s house where we had a men’s night of sharing and rolling around on massage rollers.

Mark and Joshua held space for me to speak into vision a soul-mate. Mark asked me to describe her characteristics, and I did so honestly while Mark and Joshua listened attentively. “She has to have a candy-red Porsche, a beach-house in the Bahamas, and a poodle with a diamond-studded collar.” No, I said things like “witchy,” “loving,” and “musical.” It felt real.

Mark and I had spoken before about using freestyle rap to call in visions for life, including soul-mates. It’s not a new idea in the New Age—speak to your soul-mate as if she can hear you. Share your love for her, tell her you are ready to invite her into your life. Even clear a space on your bed for her! All this stuff. I do buy into it, as a matter of fact, because I think fields of intention, by the quantum-dream laws of reality, tend to manifest. There may be multiple paths ahead and the vision we select may narrow it down to a tangible choice among the many. That future may be alive in the way that all information is alive, and when we speak to it and hold space for it, it may solidify and move in to meet us in the present. Thought and vision, when attended to with positive emotion, action and care, will create results.

Manifesting is an actual phenomenon because of the interconnectedness of the individual mind with the greater consciousness

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of everything. We are little gods creating this reality through our perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and visions. The separation model thinks we are outside of reality, and that we only change it by exerting physical force in the world. But this spiritual-psychoid-quantum model insists that we are intertwined within the creative dynamics of the universe, so what we dream and desire sends out creative ripples in the field that manifest in our physical realm. Thus, envisioning and reinforcing the vision with positive feelings of joy, love, gratitude and trust that the experience is on its way, will often pull a future potential reality into the present moment.

Granted, material conditions very much matter: How can you dream and feel the manifestation if you are hungry, thirsty, sick, and insecure? To insist that impoverished African Americans in Washington D.C. or Chicago can simply manifest a new reality for themselves is short-sighted and even cruel.

Given this degree of creative power innate to the human condition, the disempowerment of our age is even more a travesty. The systems of our world compound to make people believe they are powerless. This couldn’t be more untrue. We need to shift our attention from Nike or NBC or the government and put the locus of focus on our own hearts and minds, and on those in our immediate vicinity, and then keep expanding until our action is also in alignment with the wellbeing of those in Burundi, Somalia, the Congo, et al.

Mark is a good guy to work with regarding manifesting soul mates because he has honed his skills as a life coach. Attentiveness, creativity, a caring heart, orderliness and a “schedule it and do it” attitude serve one well in the manifest the future department.

However, I am not content with any old manifest the future. Rather, I am most keen on listening to what wants to be born. Sound cliché? I concur, but it’s still relevant and important. There is a vision manifest in the intelligence of Earth, and every being on this planet can come into contact and service of this vision. Don’t believe me? Fine. But I may hope life is as generous for you as it has been to me and that it offers you a glimpse now and again of being connected to some greater Earth/Nature/Cosmic intelligence. It’s woo-woo until you see that it’s all woo-woo—we are skimming the surface of thought-oceans. Underneath the waves is where the magic happens, folks.

Speaking of going under, Mexico was indeed a crossing of the threshold, and it was well-worth the toll.
Part 3: The Second Crossing

South of the Border

My plane first went north to Denver, Colorado where I hung out in the airport all night. Some people in the extraterrestrial (ET) research and other conspiracy communities (“conspiracy” is not necessarily a discrediting term, mind you: you can be damn sure people at high levels are “conspiring” behind closed doors) insist that under this airport is a base for the super-elite controllers of the system. They allude to strange murals in the airport featuring apocalyptic scenes of fire and brimstone, demonic soldiers, and mass graves, as well as scenes of peace, unity and beauty. Some say these murals express themes of the elite’s belief systems that justify their positions of total dominance, cruel policies, sexual violence and so on. The New World Order, Illuminati, and Freemasons are often discussed in these stories. I tend not to focus on those potential or likely shadow cabals, because there is enough blatant injustice to rally against. Why invest energy opposing hidden entities and organizations when in plain sight the political-military-financial-pharmaceutical-medical-educational-agricultural-entertainment-industrial complex lies, exploits, manipulates, dominates, and destroys?

Before my Cancun-bound plane took off, I spotted a large image of a rabbit on the side of another plane. Follow the rabbit, Neo. Down the rabbit hole, Alice. Typical symbology of the hero’s journey projected out of the unconscious, splat, right here in the external material plane. Zeros and ones, the Matrix runs.

I landed in Cancun a comical disaster. I had yet to try on my fully packed hiking bag, which held not only a sleeping bag but also a tent, along with a short supply of clothes and such. I felt like a goober putting it on, like here’s a gringo-fool fresh off the boat. I had scarcely any Spanish skills to speak of and there was no real help at the airport. There wasn’t even an ATM in the terminal.

With the help of a new friend, I did get my bus to Playa del Carmen. Upon arrival I found that the tourists had trapped this unfortunate city into the capitalized scheme of a consumer concourse center. A Nike outlet to my left, a three-story mega-mall up ahead, venders left and right selling to the most gringo of all gringos. Bah.
I walked a good thirty minutes to my hostel which was located far on the other side of the freeway in the dirtier parts of town. You have to watch out for dogs over there because they will encroach with snarling growls. One would have gotten me if its chain had been three inches longer. You have to puff out your chest and bark back.

Compared to the hostel, I would have rather stayed with the dogs. Loud, drunken European men yelled and hollered and blared music into the early hours of the morning. 4am, 5am, I don’t know how they kept it up.

The guy next to my bunk came back one night, wasted. He climbed up onto his bed and then rolled right off the edge and straight down to the floor. Horizontal body roll and SPLAT right on the concrete floor. Everyone woke up very alarmed because this fool should have been wounded. He was fine. He climbed back into bed, curled up, and began to scoot his drunk butt back to the edge of the bed. A few of us put our hands up and pushed him back to the wall.

In Playa del Carmen, I got a hint for my path. On my dad’s request, I sought out the Blue Parrot Inn, the hotel that my family, with me included, had stayed some 25 years ago. I had the address on my phone and it led me to the busy strip by the water. I walked to where the GPS told me to go, but I didn’t see the Blue Parrot. Then, from a nook in the wall, a Mexican man called to me asking if I needed help. I saw he was a representative for a tour guide company and was not surprised that he came loaded with offers. His breath smelled of alcohol. I told him no thank you, no thank you, I’m just looking for the Blue Parrot Inn. He pointed to the hole in the wall next to his nook where I saw two women sitting behind a table draped with a canvas sign that read, “Zen Massage.” I looked up and saw a small plain sign stuck above the doorway to this building that read “Blue Parrot Inn.”

My tour guide told me that the Blue Parrot was shut down last year because of a deadly shooting during an electronic music festival. Then he inquired about my plans and tried to sell me a trip to Chichen-Itza or anywhere else. I again politely declined and made to move, but he grabbed my arm and asked me, “What are you looking for, then?” With a mischievous smile, I replied with the first answer that came to mind: “Myself.”

His expression changed. He took my hands in his and began an intent discourse of spiritual wisdom. Knowledge can be found within the heart. Meditate for forty minutes a day on a point three fingers below
your navel and your third eye will open. He read my palm, telling me what each line meant, and then told me to go to Chichen-Itza. He said I absolutely must go, because there I will receive energies of ancient wisdom. I declined on his last offers to tour guide my experience, gave him some money as a thank you for his gifts, and went on my way.

The next day I made reservations for Tulum. I had heard about Tulum. Spiritual center for wanderers, yogis, healers, healees, shamans, and plant medicine enthusiasts. Off the bus I got a good vibe from the backpackers abound with their instruments, long hair, tattoos, piercings, flowy dresses, and yoga mats. I passed a group of unshowered, unkempt, dreadlocked folks. My kind of place.

The first night I was in a bar scene hostel decorated hip and fun. There was a young person vibe of travelers accented by some well-dressed and cologne smelling French guys, a couple guys from New Zealand, and I didn’t see many chicas. I was there just the night.

The next night I went to Hostel Charlys. I don’t know why I chose this one, probably because it was good on price and ratings. But I got four nights right off the bat, which the lady at the desk thought was interesting. Maybe a solo traveler hanging out for a while was different.

Charlys is different from other hostels. It feels more like a boarding house. A family owns it and you can see the different generations intermingled; the young man and his wife who run the place and raise their baby, a grandmotherly woman or two, and everyone is friendly. A lot of people stay in this hostel long-term, using it as a place to live. At least five of the ten people in my dorm room were long-time occupants, including a Canadian woman in her sixties, a gorgeous young woman from Argentina, a friendly guy from Italy and a sweet young Mexican woman who worked as a nanny for the hostel family.

Marshall wasn’t in my dorm, he was down the hall, and he had also been there for some months. Marshall is from Toronto, and if they don’t have accents, people from Toronto may as well be from the United States, though they will probably disagree because they like their health care and slightly higher degree of sanity.

Every day Marshall would roll joints or blunts in the hangout area upstairs. This spot was unreal. It was a balcony patio with a thatched roof, tiled floor with a mosaic mandala right in the center upon which sat a long wooden table with polished tree trunk legs and a matching set of six chairs. The corners of the pavilion roof were held up by Greek looking pillars of chiseled rock. Above the center table was a
chandelier—a ten spoked star with lamps upon each point. Doves made
nests in the corner spots of the roof and serenaded the room with throaty
coos. I had landed in a palace. Every day I typed away my work at the
table, cajoled with people from all over the world, and listened to Mario
respond to my questions regarding wisdom, soul travel, creation, healing
and the other of the 9 yards, or dimensions or whatever we’re doing
here.

Ah, yes, Mario. Well, you see, one day I accompanied Marshall
and our two new German friends Sinan and Yhosha out to eat. During
the walk to the restaurant we turned to the subject of plant medicines.
During lunch Marshall told me that Mario knows a guy who does DMT
ceremonies and that if I wanted, I should ask to participate. I thought
about it. Later I asked Marshall to ask Mario because I figured that
wasn’t the type of thing you just went up to someone and asked about.

Thus far I knew Mario as a darker skinned, middle-aged, amiable
German man who worked some nights at the front desk of the hostel. A
few times a day he would come up to the balcony area to have a
cigarette or eat a meal.

Well, Marshall asked Mario about the ceremony and Mario said
“Of course!” Next time I saw Mario we discussed it on the balcony. He
said in his German accent, “Marshall tells me you will be joining us for
the ceremony! How wonderful!”

In subsequent meetings over the next days, I learned from Mario
that Rex, the shaman who has the stuff, specializes in exorcisms, and
that Mario has seen dark energies lifted out of people. He told me that
you can ask the medicine to show you your life purpose. He told me you
must be humble and have an intention for healing. He told me last time
he did it he was able to see his past lives, like, 1,000 past lives stretched
out before him. He was still integrating this experience, seeing how
current patterns and such are related to past life events. It turns out
Mario was no joke.
The DMT-Rex in the Jungle

On the day of the ceremony, Marshall, Mario and I took a taxi about a half-hour’s drive down a high-way cutting through the jungle. The taxi pulled off the road. We hopped out and began down a trail into the jungle. After a few minutes we came upon a Mayan family or two working on the roof of a new house. They were building structures and growing various crops, including plants for Ayahuasca. We walked on through until we came to another hut. Rex’s house.

Rex was sitting on a white plastic lawn chair around some smoking embers in the small fire circle. He was leaned back, moaning and holding his stomach. He vocalized greetings to us, loud and direct, with exuberance. We embraced. He spoke often, saying how he knew his stomach ache was psychic, the result of recent shamanic work. He rattled on with tales of exorcisms, about a man who had done serious evil of rape and murder, how the ceremony withdrew the evil entities he had attracted. About how, “It’s all good, because the devil doesn’t know it but he’s working for God,” and, “it’s OK if you don’t believe in God, ‘cuz we’re going to meet God soon enough, man, that’s what I say, “Don’t worry bro, we don’t need to talk about God ‘cuz we’re gonna meet God in the ceremony, so don’t sweat.””

Rex channels a spiritual warrior archetype. He told us video cameras capture jaguars walking by on this path. Rex also looks like a jaguar. He would look at me with his head tilted down, his eyes peering up through his brow, fiercely intense. He’s also slightly nuts, but that’s to be expected I suppose when you so frequently travel between this and other worlds.

On the way to the ceremony circle, Rex told me how one of his recent ceremony participants had brought him back a spirit helper. The guy said he felt possessed, like there was some entity with him. Turns out it was Rex’s old spirit friend from another time or dimension, and it had planned the whole thing as a means of steering the guy to Rex. Once released, the spirit merged back with Rex.

We gathered at the ceremony circle. It was a space surrounded by a thin circling of tree and brush, with the jungle looming around on three sides and the path on the other. A fire circle full of ash lay in front of the altar space. One by one Rex smudged us clean. We sat in a circle. Mario mentioned it would be good to have more feminine energy,
observing that we were four males. Rex set the prayer intention of healing and humility. We sang a song of love to invite the good spirits. The song is in Spanish, but in English it translates roughly to “Love, Love, all is Love//Love is all and all is Love//Love are the elements of Earth, Fire, Water, Air//All is Love.”

As we were singing, two female voices joined in from afar, becoming louder and sweeter as they approached. Mario’s wish was answered—two young woman shamans who work with Rex happened to come strolling by. They joined us to lend their support.

Rex readied the pipe. One by one he lit it for us three psychonauts, holding it to our lips as we each drew a great sip. We held the medicine in our lungs while Rex continued around the circle and back to the start to light the pipe for a second breath. I exhaled my first hit just in time to take my second. I couldn’t take a full second, because the world had already started to quiver, shake and fall away. I fell forward on my hands, watching the ground wiggle beneath. I closed my eyes and pressed my forehead into the dirt, and off we went.

I knew in that moment of release that I had come to remember. This group, we had agreed to come here to remember that we are ONE. All the plotting, thinking, planning, worrying, hoping, striving, scheming, achieving, failing, rising, falling, wishing and wanting, it all flickered out and the truth rushed in.

There is only One of us. We created this. The secret behind the veil of “me” and “you” is that God is one thing appearing as many, engaged in constant song and dance, merged in timeless lovemaking. A spiral of lovemaking, a cosmos made of sex, one great, eternal cosmic orgasm. Mario moaned next to me, once, twice, three times. He was moaning for me as well. He was me, I was him, we were the universe in ecstatic love. Was it too much? I had no choice. I chose to surrender because I was afraid to exert my will in this space, so I just went along for the ride.

But I went all in on my surrender. I had intended for this to be an all-in experience. And I was ready to face whatever truth would bring. How dissatisfied I had been with my ways. How distraught about the cyclical patterns of addictive behavior, sadness, and the pathetic “I can’t do it;” the loneliness, the fatigue, the pain of being, the gnawing failure of trying so hard. I was ready for whatever may heal this sad state.

And holy, holy, holy, it was too much...too far, too fast, too much...And then Mario processed my suffering. I felt it. I felt the
suffering inside of me, I figured I should work it out, dig deep, spit it up, yell and moan and groan with gory detail, but I was silent and unsure, timid and afraid of the depths.

So, Mario processed it for me. Rex had grabbed the pipe, ready to dive in to save me, but Mario did it. He yelled and moaned and screamed and spat up my stuff. He sounded in agony, and I felt awful because I knew I was giving him this suffering. If I had lived better, cleaner, stronger, and smarter, he wouldn’t have to process my shit.

After, Mario told me it is supremely fulfilling for him to assume that role, that he feels like an instrument played by the universe, full of bliss. I laid prone and still, face in dirt, whimpering a bit as a lovely lady shaman sang soft and sweetly by my side, running her hands up and down my spine, working with my energies to help the cleansing. Mario told me that in that moment I shined a brilliant white golden light, perhaps the light of the divine child, innocent and surrendered, surrounded by love.

Mario and Rex noted that Marshall and I should swap spots for round two. We each hit the pipe twice more and dove back in. I again bowed prostrate and breathed and felt and let Mario work it out. I looked up at one point and saw Mario upright, looking like an African medicine man in full blown shaman mode, a wild look in his eyes with arms outstretched. “AHHHHH! OOOHHHH!” He yelled with palms up, energies rippling. We went through the mill again. The woman healer was sitting by my side, singing songs for us. As I came back and felt my hands touching dirt, still feeling more light than material, I embraced her, feeling reborn as part of this family. I remembered my place in the family.

Really, it’s no big deal. We’re just part of the family.

Processing the experience with Mario, he told me how he had helped remove a whole bunch of ancestral burdens I had been carrying on my poor shoulders. All this accumulated karma I had held, but it wasn’t mine, it wasn’t necessary, and so Mario, with the approval and aid of archangels, Elohim, guardians, or whoever else watches over, released it and flushed it down into the ever-receptive heart of Mother Earth.

After the ceremony we sat in the circle processing our return to Earth. Rex recited a prayer he had written. It was about serving love and the awakening of our planet. Rex’s eyes spilled tears by the end. The conviction of service to spirit runs into the marrow of this man’s bones.
I can’t say for sure what happened in the ceremony, though I do note that my posture was quite reserved and apprehensive. I felt I could have done more yelling and screaming and vomiting up energy, but instead I had laid low and let Mario do it for me. Another part of me responds that I had a lot of stuff in there, and it is OK to not yet be ready to fully process it on your own. Also, it was Mario’s first time doing shamanic healing on another with the medicine, so perhaps I brought forth exactly what was needed. When I voiced some doubts to Rex about my ceremony performance, he said, “What are you talking about, dude? We had an awesome ceremony, totally crushed it.” Even so, in the future I intend on showing up more fully in that space and testing my balance on the waves. As I am ready, so I shall.

As is evident in the remaining story, the ceremony changed my energetic expressions such that good things lined up and I just felt better. It was not a cure-all experience, because such experiences do not exist. Rather, the work remains to be completed outside of those blessed altered states. On that note, now would be a good time for a song or two on plant medicines.

If you remember way back in 1999, the incredible film *The Matrix* featured a scene where Morpheus, the teacher, offers Neo, the awakening student, the choice to either go back to sleep in the matrix life through the blue pill, or to wake up through the red pill. Neo takes the red pill, goes through the looking glass and is reborn into reality.

Mushrooms are the first red pill I ever ate. I was a freshman in college. Though I got high marks in my econ classes, I was also high a lot of the time, and, you know, you hang with stoners long enough and eventually mushrooms come up in conversation.

“David has shrooms.”
“Oh, I’ve never done them. Have you?”
“Yeah, they’re pretty crazy man! Really fun!”
“What’s it like?”
“It’s…Different. You can’t really describe it. Kind of like getting high on weed but really nothing like that actually.”

Sooner or later my precocious adolescent explorations led me to the mushroom medicine. We ate them in a dorm room. Spring was budding forth from snow. A nice, sunny, muddy, winter melting day. In the first hour of take-off, I got the sense that there was some other place
the mind was going. It was vast. And Other. It descended upon me, and then Whoosh! I’m there. I’m in the trip. And others say, “Woah, I’m tripping. Are you tripping?” Yup. Oh, there’s another wave. It comes in waves. In those days a standard dose wasn’t very much. Not enough to plunge you into hyperspace, but enough to test the waters and jostle or revolutionize a young man’s operating system.

Outside, I had amazing inner experiences. My global finance teacher, a lovely and kind lady who carted her books around in a suitcase, appeared in my mind as the bastion of compassion. She really was a nice lady, though I’m sure the psyche or mushroom takes whatever imagery available to project through archetypal energies such as the Goddess. Such love and warmth. Colors swirling in my mind. Amazing. In the dorm room I sat looking up at the ceiling in awe. I was home. Unbelievable. This is what I had been looking for my entire life. All those dissatisfied glances in mirrors, all that fear and shame and uncertainty about how to be: This was the answer. This was who I was supposed to be, and I was already me! I felt the affirmation of EXISTENCE and IT IS GOOD.

I was faced with an undeniable possibility that the religions of the world maybe aren’t all full of nonsense, for it appears that hidden in the layers of the mundane is a spiritual adventure. I had grown up acculturated into stories of nature as deaf and dumb, and religion as no more than superstition. But this experience uncovered something. I would return. I would be damned if I didn’t figure out what was going on.

My next accounting class entered me to a state of wide-eyed disbelief as I looked around at the sleepy faces of the other students, most clearly not paying attention, some on their phones, some doodling, a few asleep. “What are we doing here? What’s the point of this?” Not only accounting, but this. I began to slide out of the matrix life I had been living, down the birth tube to a new world.

The late great philosopher and psychonaut Terrence Mckenna talks about plant medicines as keys to reconnecting with the Gaian super-consciousness—the web of Nature that is our greater psyche in a state of wholeness. McKenna believes our ancestors lived within the psychic field of Nature, but through climatological and technological changes, patriarchal civilizations formed which put an end to the regular consumption of plant medicines. These plants dissolve the boundary between the ego and the super-consciousness—the group consciousness
of the field in which we exist—says McKenna, and for tens of thousands of years he believes the plants were key in keeping everyone integrated in a harmonious inter-communicative flow with nature.

Regardless of the history, for many people McKenna’s claims are true: The medicines connect us with this huge forgotten realm of our existence. It becomes unavoidably apparent that we are tiny bubbles of awareness within this vast sea of consciousness. All around us and in us is this ebbing and flowing vibe of eternal love-consciousness. Somehow, we are numb and untuned of it, resistant of it, not allowing the greater reality to flood in.

As shamans well know, some plants offer themselves as medicine guides for us if we are willing to humbly step forth into a relationship of learning and co-creation. Thus, the premier two rules Mario and Rex insisted upon: 1) Be humble, and 2) Have the intention to heal. We are here to heal, and we offer ourselves to Mother Earth and the medicine. The medicine and Earth are much greater than us in terms of consciousness and power, so we would be fools to step out there and say, “I have come to rule your domain! Reveal your secrets! Give of me your powers!” That’s the archetype for an egomaniacal hero or villain on the way to a hard fall. That’s the modern scientific relationship to nature.

Mama Gaia and her spirit medicine plants also want us to heal because they want to see Earth’s potential realized. Humankind is Earth’s potential at channeling Gaia into ever more complex and dynamic forms of creation. Our next-level destiny is to 1) Contribute our gifts in creating a spectacularly beautiful and peaceful Earth, and 2) Spread Earth beyond the planet. We are the children who may one day leave the nest and lovingly assist and advance Earth life throughout the cosmos. We aren’t the only ones in the universe who seek to do this, but we are indeed the current species most primed on our planet to go next level, and we are close.

We should also be very interested in the following detail: The active psychoactive chemical in the plant medicine I took with Mario, Rex and Marshall is found in each living human being. DMT, or Dimethyltryptamine, is endogenous in the human body, and found in potentially all forms of life on Earth. Some hypothesize that DMT is the universal link of spirit and matter, or, in other words, is the “spirit molecule.”
In 2000, Dr. Rick Strassman published the book *DMT: The Spirit Molecule: A Doctor’s Revolutionary Research into the Biology of Near-Death and Mystical Experiences*. Strassman, a licensed psychologist, received federal permission to conduct studies at the University of New Mexico in which he would intravenously administer DMT to people. Strassman found that there were three main experiences people had from the DMT: 1) Near-death experiences: Some subjects reported accounts identical to real near-death experiences such as being funneled down a tunnel of light, meeting with deceased loved ones or spirit guides, or seeing their lives lived in review; 2) Mystical experiences: Many subjects reported typical mystical experiences such as dissolving into oneness with the cosmos, feeling extreme bliss or overwhelming love and understanding of one’s purpose, receiving deep healing, and so on; and 3) The last common experience was similar to that of the typical alien abduction experience: Some people reported interacting with non-human entities who were occupying a certain space apart from our physical dimension. These DMT abductees say it’s as if they just dropped into another realm where other entities are going about their business, and sometimes those entities interact with the interdimensional traveler in a variety of ways ranging from benevolently healing to neutrally uninterested to traumatically invasive.

Almost all participants in Strassman’s study reported very positive results that persisted for months, including more positive moods and outlooks on life, a greater appreciation of relationships, and greater clarity on purpose.

At the least, it should strike us very curious that our bodies create DMT. Why would this dramatic spiritual or extradimensional experience inducing molecule be so pervasive in our reality? Coincidence? If you haven’t tried DMT, go ahead and then see if it can be reduced to a sense of meaningless coincidence or psychic manifestation from the imagination.

One hypothesis is that DMT facilitates the entry and exit of the soul in and out of the body, and that it is released from the pineal gland, which is in the center of the brain. The pineal gland, so-called because of its resemblance in form to a pinecone, has long been represented in the literature and iconography of various spiritual traditions. The idea is that through spiritual practices like meditation, fasting, yoga, sweat-lodges, and so on, that one can activate the body’s latent spiritual technologies and allow for the pineal gland to release more DMT. This
may be the key to our next level of evolution. A spiritually activated humankind would be as different from our current state of normality as we are to our long-distant ancestors, who, incidentally, were likely more tuned into the DMT realm and thus living in the “dreamtime.”

After the ceremony we packed it up and hitched a ride on a taxi back to “reality,” whatever that is.

That night back in the hostel I was clear and tuned in, allowing myself to move and speak in proper proportions of flow. I had a conversation with Bell, the lovely long-term resident from Argentina. She spoke little English, so we couldn’t talk very much, but our conversation was indeed nice. Her appearance reminds me of Jasmine from Aladdin, a story which is a central archetypal plot of my life. I watched Aladdin every day one summer as a kid. That night I felt as if I were hanging with a princess on the palace balcony. She was laying out on a couch which looked as if it very well could have been from Egypt.

I had an LSD trip once in which I felt a strong impression that I and my two friends Jon and Jim, who are brothers, were Persian princes once upon a time. I also find it kind of funny that these brothers are in the Ananda Marga group, and there is a recently founded center located in Cairo, New York. Jon has also spent a semester abroad in Egypt. Just saying.
Professor Colon, Chichen-Itza and Valladolid

The next day I packed up to go to San Francisco, a small Mayan village about thirty minutes from Chichen Itza. I had no other clues on my quest aside from what that guy in Playa del Carmen had told me, so to Chichen I went.

I had a roundabout venture to Professor Don Jose Colon’s abode. Don Jose lives deep in a small traditional Mayan village, all the way in the far corner. I saw Don Jose’s post on Airbnb offering a room near Chichen Itza, but what got my attention is that he’s a retired professor of anthropology who spent his life studying the importance of blood and feminine blood cycles in Mayan rituals.

The professor’s abode turned out to be a living space, kitchen, two bedrooms and a bathroom situated in a hut with cement floor, adobe walls, and thatched roof. I was to sleep on the hammock in the living room since a Brazilian woman had the guest bedroom. Mario, the 14-year-old son of the village shaman, also stayed with us to assist Jose with health and age-related ailments.

Jose met me out front his house, walking with the aid of an artisan walking stick carved in the style of a snake. Inside we sat down at a table crowded with various books, and Jose promptly instructed me to open one to a certain section before commencing with a lecture about the history of his work. I was a good student, listening attentively to hold the narrative, fitting together the pieces of his conceptual puzzle and asking questions when relevant. I learned that Jose does not have a spiritualist view of Maya culture or reality at large, because the idea of sexual energy as something important in a shamanic context seemed to him a form of superstition. I had recently read that women on their periods should not take ayahuasca, so I relayed that information, which he appreciated.

Don Jose also shared with me that he was a blood relative of Christopher Columbus. He told me his ancestors are from the island of Hispaniola, and how it was common practice for natives to offer sexual intimacy to guests. Howard Zinn’s The People’s History of America may have a different story of how Columbus came to impregnate so many people. But Jose’s last name “Colon” is short for “Columbus,” and his birth name has alienated him from certain other Mayan anthropologists in his field.
The next day was Chichen. I got a ride out there early to avoid the crowd. It was a misty day, which later allowed for some epic shots of sun breaking through and streaming light over the ruins. I was impressed and disappointed and sad. The main pyramid and other ruins were amazing, no doubt. But the park doesn’t let you climb the pyramid, so I was bummed, as I wanted an hour of early meditation on the temple. And I otherwise felt very sad and heavy. I realized as I was walking around with teary eyes that I wanted to return home. I wanted to be with my family and friends. This may have been the calling to return home. I had done the ceremony and now the return trip was in order.

After shaking Jose’s hand goodbye, I went on to Valladolid, a small city nearby. I had a few nights booked at the hostel Mama Cha. I flourished at Mama Cha. First, it was the comfiest hostel I had been to. The beds were amazing. Soft. Cushy. The dorm rooms were spacious and clean. The dining room was clean and spacious, the outdoors patio area was set up like a café, the owners and workers were warm, and it was just great. Every day I spent most my time in the patio, clicking away at my work, being a social butterfly, and just hanging and watching the clouds go by.

I entered my connective super-self. When I’m at my best and up for the role, I can become the weaver of the social web, the guy introducing everyone to each other, dipping in and out of conversations, slapping backs and swapping jokes. The connector I am, just like in college when I was a peace activist. And I was loving it here at Mama Cha. During my three or four days, I met and got to know 15 or 20 people. I greeted the new ones and sent others on their way with blessings. We had a great group of folks come through, such that every night the patio was full of global travelers talking, laughing, drinking, smoking and just being merry together. My new friend Spencer said I was in a happy go-lucky energy, apparently still buzzing from the ceremony.

My soul-brother Spencer and I exchanged our first words while showering in adjacent stalls. We talked about DMT. I shared my experience and he told me about the Buffo Toad. From there we deepened in conversations and I found him to be unbelievably funny with a big, wonderful heart. He was traveling with his Italian girlfriend Eleanora, and the two were a trip.

Spencer and Eleanora were heading to Tulum, so I caught a ride and merged paths. We went to cenotes and the beach and eventually
made it to Casa del Sol, a fun hostel with good vibes and woke folk. Spencer and I stayed up late with two young lady skater/surfers from Montreal, Canada, and a new friend from England who had just split up with his girlfriend of ten years. They were great, and we had ourselves a night.

I connected Spencer with the right folks and before he knew it he was signed up for a ceremony with Mario and Rex the very next day. Our new Montreal friends were also in on it. I however was in no state for another ceremony thank you very much, and I also felt a need to detach from my new crew. I thought I must have more to do on this trip. I had originally planned to go through Belize into Guatemala. Now, after having spent three weeks in Mexico, Guatemala looked like one hell of a trek. But I had told everyone I was going to Belize, so I caught a bus going south.

I headed to Bacalar, another of the nice areas on the coastal Yucatan. Bacalar borders a huge lagoon which shines so many different shades of blue. But my hostel was kind of lame—hardly anyone spoke decent English! Can you believe that!?? What’s an American to do in such a place. Keep to myself, I suppose. I spent a few days bidding time before feeling certain I must head back to the States. I got a bus to Tulum to finish out my stay at Hostel Charlys. Spencer, Eleanora, Sinan, Jhosha, Marshall and of course Mario were all there. Those last few days were good ones. Spencer is a Philadelphia Eagles fan, so he and the New England Patriots went toe to toe for the Superbowl, giving privy to our friends from around the world to witness the American spectacle.

The last day in Tulum we all went to the beach. I hung out with my German, Canadian and Dutch friends while Spencer and Eleanora went elsewhere. It was one of my only Tulum beach days, as I was notoriously content to just hang around the hostel, writing and talking to people. The beach was phenomenal. The white and blue, the beautiful people, and the hot sun in mid-February. It was a good day.

I connected back with Spencer and Eleanora, we got ice cream, picked up our bags from the hostel, and packed the car to make for Cancun. Mario was working the front desk upon our departure. “The Gatekeeper,” I called him. He replied, “The Stargate is within you!”

In Cancun we stayed at the Blue Monkey hostel. It was new and trendy with all the amenities and drinks you could want at the rooftop bar and swimming pool. I engaged in a rare bout of slight inebriation. In
the earliest hours of the next day Spencer and Eleanora left, leaving me to my own thoughts.

Someone stole my phone during my stay at the Blue Monkey. I was up before 4am so I could say goodbye to Spencer and Eleanora, and I left my phone and laptop at a lounge area while I went to the bathroom. I came back and my phone was gone. We know it was a young lady because security cameras captured it. It’s funny that the only unsafe part of Mexico I experienced was in heavily westernized Cancun. At the hostel in Tulum everyone left laptops and personal possessions laying around. To place trust in others is not always foolproof; there is a chance that someone will steal your stuff. But for me, the cost of living with distrust toward others is greater than the slight risk of losing a piece of property. I’ll just have to remember to be more watchful of wealthy westerners.

The transition from Mexico back to the States gave me space to reflect more upon that hero journey theme.

The idea of an archetypal program written into our psychic dimensions can be seen in our best popular media such as *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *The Matrix*. The “hero,” and that’s simply “you,” because each of us is the center point awareness in the simulation we call reality, will eventually be called to step beyond the borders of the familiar. There will be something more calling you because there is something more calling you—the greater intelligence of which you are part, of *which you are*. What you are looking for is looking for you. It’s a pilgrimage. We left home, we forgot about home, and now home calls to us in whatever way it can enter our reality. Through that calling we follow the signs and clues, face challenges, confront the dragon and save the princess or collect the treasure of remembering who we are. Then you bring the gift home with greater knowledge of self and bestow what you got to the Kingdom.

Speaking of saving the princess, the Super Mario Brothers mythology is a hero’s journey. Mario is the hero called to journey. Princess Peach, whose imprisonment by Bowser is almost always the cause of Mario’s quest, represents the feminine energy. Mario must battle the inner demons of his psyche, i.e. Bowser, before he can recover the lost feminine aspect and thus make the kingdom psychically whole. Bowser is the masculine shadow king, deformed and depraved through his alienation as he compensates for his lack of wholeness through dominating and claiming possession of the divine feminine. On the way,
Mario dips into pipes to travel to the underworld or to transport to other parts of reality. These pipe trips represent the crossing of the threshold, the plunge to the underworld, the liminal space where spirit entities abound.

Speaking of plant medicines, Mario eats mushrooms to regain his health and strength. These shrooms are obviously akin to magic mushrooms which, when used appropriately, will facilitate one’s healing. One of Mario’s allies is Toadstool, a small dude with a white and red spotted mushroom cap on his head. Toadstool is an advisor, giving mushroom wisdom to the leaders of the realm. One last point is Luigi, Mario’s bro, dresses in green which represents the energy of the heart. And Yoshi is a spirit animal.

Stories like Mario Bros. and the books and media mentioned above reveal how our culture is attempting to channel forth the calling to go beyond. The urge for greater expansion is inevitable, though our rational and over-controlled lives rarely offer opportunities to go beyond. However, if you acquiesce to the adventure and start taking steps, reality will respond and start dropping golden crumbs to follow. And when we refuse the call, we are also guaranteed to eventually be forced down the tube of birth.

The journey is part of our coming of age, of transitioning from one psychic stage to the next, as in adolescence to adulthood, adulthood to elderhood, and elderhood to next-life-hood. The journey is thus an initiation—beyond the normal we are initiated into more expansive states. In the process the initiate may believe she is dying. The phoenix is burnt to ashes before rebirth. The caterpillar dissolves to mush before the Monarch rebirth. Christ dies before he is resurrected.

Absent the initiation rituals that have helped people progress through these processes for thousands of years, our culture is unconsciously orchestrating an initiation on a mass scale. Most grown people are still kid-dults, acting like young narcissists who want to be better than others, always affirmed as right, and to finish with the most toys. We are unconsciously setting up crises that are forcing us to confront the nature of our being. If we do not heed the call, the psychic transformation will erupt into our plane of normality, and we will be dragged into the fires. I am not speaking about a fire and brimstone apocalypse, but yes, the process must have its way.

I have found traveling with a loose, open-ended plan an excellent way to invite the journey to unfold. I can’t vouch for the spiritual
redemption of my life or society through my trip, but I can see how easily intentions and plans manifest in the open space of no-plan. Can you imagine me arriving at a Tulum hostel and there, unsuspectedly working at the front desk, happens to be Mario? No, reality shifts and bends and pushes you into the right slot with all the other characters moving in alignment. Traveling allows for synchronicities to happen with ceaseless regularity. You meet the right person at the right time and get the right message. There is not one aspect of this dream not infused with consciousness.
Part 4: The Return

You Look Tired, Go Get Some West

“As we begin our descent into Houston, there will be some turbulence due to thunderstorms.”

“Hmm…” I thought, considering the foreboding news. The skies were dark, and I saw flashes of lightning as we jumbled and rumbled through the layer of storm down toward the airport. An hour later I found myself outside in a cold drizzle, standing silent and shivering at the bus stop. “What have I done? Why did I leave Mexico?”

Near my Megabus stop I found a McDonalds to take refuge from the cold rain and access Wi-Fi. I had found the margins of Houston. The McDonalds was packed full of impoverished black people, several of whom were doped up. Some of them shuffled around asking for money. Trash littered the floors. Most people were slouched and dazed out, others were muttering to themselves. I sat down and was soon accosted by a guy who was kind of out there, but very kind. He insisted on giving me some small bags of peanuts. I reached in my hiking pack and pulled out some dried salmon strips to exchange.

When I arrived in Austin later that night the warning signs kept coming. When I left for Mexico, it was a party. We had a full house with Mark, Sydney, and the regulars. When I arrived the second time, business as usual commenced. The house residents paid me little attention. No one inquired about my trip. Nope, it was 10 P.M.: Jobs had been worked, groceries bought, bellies filled, movies and TV shows watched, and now they were readying for bed. How different from hostel life in Mexico. Enter a room and boom! Someone will connect, a new traveler will enter, something will bloom forth out of the Tao of Travel.

The following days did not get better. After 24 hours, I started looking at flights back to Mexico. I schemed how to quickly finish my trip westward to see T-Love and Jeanette in Sedona, Arizona and then Spencer in San Diego. I would skip along, sell my car and whatever belongings I had, and fly back to Mexico. After three more weeks in Mexico, I could fly back to the northeast in time for the Passover celebration with my family.
After Mexico, the United States felt colder and more concrete and impersonal than ever. My journal notes discuss the sterile rationality of the States:

*The cold indifference of America. It’s not like the people are bad. They aren’t malicious egomaniacs. It’s that the world is cold. The hard concrete. Cars. Buildings. All designed with cool left-brained indifference for the heart. The warmth of Mexico replaced by the industrial rationality of the computer chip. Design optimized. Efficient flow of information. Transfer people, transfer dollars, boom economy, boom, beep-beep-beep-boop, processing, processing. Sigh. What a terrible place.*

I realized with certainty that I was not meant for this place. It became abundantly clear that I should move onward to Arizona. I touched base with my Sedona friends and got the OK to come whenever. A few days later I left Austin to finish my westward expansion.

Couchsurfing, I stayed a night with Nick, a cool guy training in a military computer flight program. Nick is a kindred spirit who chases waterfalls and encourages the world to find their bliss. Then I went to Roswell, New Mexico to stay with a Mainer for a night.

From my journal:

*I’m in Roswell, New Mexico. I stayed the night in a ranch house about 10 miles from Roswell’s city proper. Gary was the host of the house, a fellow Mainer (a real Mainer complete with accent, long rambling stories, talking to himself, talking to the cats; a meat and potatoes kind of guy). Gary is caring for the house while Karen, the owner, is off in India. Karen had said, “If Trump gets elected, I’m leaving the country.” Karen went to India and now Gary hosts the house on couchsurfing.com and workaway.com. I encourage people to go stay a night or a week in Roswell and hang with Gary.*

Before I left town, I visited Stellar Coffee Co. to do some work. The baristas were cheerful fellows who told me about the upcoming UFO Festival. I took a seat with my coffee, right next to a drum and some other instruments.
As I sipped my coffee and clicked away on my keyboard, it wasn’t long before an older man, perhaps 70, walked in and sat on the couch across from me. He was short and well dressed in black slacks, a neatly tucked long sleeve button up, a slick cowboy vest, and a pair of shades that hid his eyes. I caught notice because of his case fit for a small stringed instrument. Judging him a talented musician, I voiced a greeting as he settled into his seat.

“Hello, Sir, good Morning.”

He took off his sunglasses, looked me in the eye and said,

“Usually young people don’t talk to old guys like me, but you did, so I’m going to talk to you.”

He proceeded to tell me about being old, but mostly about his recent joys and challenges of earning the attentions of younger ladies.

“Young women are attracted to me because I dress nice. They like me because I represent to them a stable father figure. That’s right, son, Freud nailed it—women want to marry their fathers, and I remind them of their fathers, so they like me for it. They want a secure man in their lives, one who will take care of them. And I have a house and this one woman was staying with me and she became too much, just too many problems, so I had to tell her, “Look Dolly, I love you, I really do, but you can’t stay here anymore.” And I’ve had younger women who won’t leave me alone, calling me and showing up at my house again and again.”

He spoke in an unbroken chain of thoughts, one reflection and life lesson cuing seamlessly into the next.

“Now when it comes to sex, I know how to please a woman. It’s about her, you see, it’s all about her, and they need foreplay, so I give them at minimum thirty minutes. That includes cunninglingus, do you know what that means? Of course you do, yup, thirty minutes usually gets them what they need and some men struggle with premature ejaculation so here’s what you can do: Before evening, you can
masturbate and that relieves some of the pressure and may help you last longer.”

At last, this man smiles at me and says, “I’m telling you important things, but I can tell you already know a lot of it.”

Then he paused for a moment, as if thoughtful. When he again caught my gaze his eyes had shifted, and his expression hardened.

“When I was in Vietnam, I was a sniper, and there were missions when I was in enemy territory and the enemy was a matter of feet from me. I saw friends die left and right. You’ve never seen anything like this. One time I led my squad through a thick of ‘em. I told my men, “Not a sound.” We didn’t make a sound. If anyone made a sound, it was clear that I would kill him. One man was wounded. One of us held his mouth, and I could see in his eyes he wanted to live. He knew he was going to die and he was afraid. I thought we were all going to die. We made it.”

By now he wasn’t talking to me. His eyes had glazed over and who knows what he saw. After a long pause, his eyes snapped back to mine, he snatched his instrument, and in one swift motion, stood and made for the door. He walked by the window muttering to himself.

This man had given me an interesting mix of those basic Freudian drives, Eros and Thanatos.

Well, that was Roswell. In Albuquerque, Lord of the Rings archetypal stories emerged.
The Hills Have Eyes

I love the desert. The open space and stillness is so rockin’. But what really gets me, what makes me drop my jaw and grip the wheel with two hands is after hours of driving in the open desert when I come upon a patch of hills. I feel their eyes as I weave through the highway. I say hello and thank you.

In Albuquerque I stayed with a lovely and intelligent young lady named Kelli. We got on fine, and so she accepted my invite for Santa Fe the next day to meet up with a few friends from Austin.

In Santa Fe we did the Fellowship of the Ring. Nine of us went for a hike up a small mountain path covered with snow growing deeper the further we ascended. From the beginning of our excursion I had the idea of the Fellowship in mind. Up on the mountain pass it became too slippery with snow and ice, so we had to turn back a make a roundabout way down, just like Gandalf and the LOTR fellowship when Solomon launches his magic weather spells.

Later that afternoon we went to Meow Wolf. Meow Wolf is an all immersive art exhibit experience. This jump down the rabbit hole was the Mines of Moria, the submersion into the subconscious. There was all manner of weird things in there and much of it other/inner-worldly. I’m not sure I faced my Balrog. Maybe that was my internal machinations of desire for Kelli; the wishing, wanting, planning, scheming, attempting, and so on.

Like the Mines of Moria, Meow Wolf was much a labyrinth. The labyrinth is significant in the Western psyche, as seen in the Greek myth of Theseus and the minotaur. The short story is that Theseus, the founder-hero of Athens, is forced to go through the infamous labyrinth on the island of Crete. Inside the labyrinth dwells the minotaur, a savage beast half man and half bull. Theseus enters the labyrinth with a length of red thread given to him by the princess Ariadne, and also a sword he has hidden from the guards. Ariadne holds the spool of thread as Theseus proceeds, ensuring his return from the maze, that is, if he succeeds in slaying the minotaur. Theseus does indeed slay Mr. Minotaur, and then follows his heart’s thread out of the maze.

The labyrinth is the mind, and the egoic, rational consciousness is the minotaur. If we journey in without the feminine lifeline, we will be devoured or lost. Without the heart-energy, even if we raise the sword and triumph our foes, we will forever be lost in the maze.
Helms Deep happened over the next two days. The night of the Fellowship I spent the night again at Kelli’s, but the following day I had to vacate because of another Dan coming in for a couch surfing stay. I decided to camp out in the hills—if you drive down any number of roads in Albuquerque, eventually you get to the hills.

There is more than meets the eye to these slopes. You climb a peak and then you see a greater expanse beyond with more peaks. Climb up, see higher heights. In a middle path between large clusters of mountain, there was a large rock wall upon which rock climbers dangle. This wall was the gate of Helm’s Deep. I didn’t recognize it at first, but it is certainly the case.

However, my first trip up the hills was off-path per my style. I ended up with cacti needles all in my hands, arms, and legs. It was worth the prickles in my palms to visit all the rock structures on various peaks. Most every peak has a unique formation of giant rocks. Some have faces clearly visible in their surface.

The night of my camping, I took my gear up off the beaten path. I had scouted out a spot during my first foray into the hills. I found the spot again after much climbing and stumbling around cacti.

But it didn’t feel right. I felt like the hill and desert air, which is thick with stillness and sentience, didn’t want me there. I was afraid and cold. I got in my tent after nightfall and figured to just try and sleep. Animals started growling nearby. I freaked out and shined my flashlight all around. It sounded like an animal had rabbis. I made some noises to scare it away.

For the next few hours I laid in my tent, coiled up in my sleeping bag shivering. Finally, after dozing off for maybe thirty minutes, I awoke with a shudder, feeling like the spirits of the desert hills were again among me. I said that’s it, got my light, hastily packed up my bag with some essentials and left my tent, sleeping bag, and other amenities. I descended the hill in the dark, slipping, sliding, and grabbing cacti as I stumbled onward. I was cold, afraid, and none too pleased with myself. When I finally got to my car I saw that my hazards were on. Sometimes the GPS falls off the windshield and lands smack dab on the hazards button. Perfect. Hey Albuquerque suburbs, here I am, illegally parked, trespassing in the hills after dark, coming back at 11 P.M. with my hiking bag half full.

I got the hell out of there. Distraught, I left town. I had nowhere else to stay. Kelli was occupied with the other Dan. I had lived out my
Albuquerque trip. Helms Deep had proven too formidable a battle. I was overrun by orcs. The day prior, in Santa Fe, I had seen a drawing of a man who appeared to be tripping out in the desert with three demon figures looming over his shoulders. I drove onward as the moon peaked past midnight. I left my tent and rest of the stuff on that hillside and I drove.

After an hour, I thought of Kelli. I thought of my stuff. I thought of what I was doing. I turned around and drove back to Albuquerque. I went straight back to the hills, and at quarter after 2 A.M., I started my second ascent of the night. In the dark it took me longer to find my spot. At last, out the darkness of my doubt, I found my tent, disassembled, packed the rest of my things and descended once more.

By now dawn approached. I found a McDonalds and parked within range of the Wi-Fi. As I was checking email, a homeless man named Ray walked by and asked through my cracked window if I wouldn’t mind taking his money and buying him breakfast from the drive through. I said what the hell, why not. Since it was cold outside, I also invited him into my car to be warm. In exchange for my offering, Ray gave me some weed, which was opportune because I was hoping to find some. I declined on his offer for crystal meth, and I nervously scanned for cameras on the McDonalds building when he showed me the stuff. I told him to keep it in his pocket. He told me he knew layers of corruption entwined in the criminal justice system, as he had been imprisoned. He wants to write a book. His family will help him with the money because he has a hell of a story to tell that will blow the lid on something worth blowing. I gave him my business card and said if you have money and want me to write your book, we could talk.

I also gave Ray a blanket, a back pack, blue berries, and other things I was ready to part from. He needed them more than me, and it was time to lighten the load. Ray was a gentle, good-hearted soul. Homeless folks like him may enter survival modes like what I’ve experienced in my struggles with loneliness and consumption, but they sometimes reflect a depth of insight and kindness that is rarer found in the mainstream.

A few hours later, after I finished some writing work and sent Kelli a message about connecting again, I smoked my new marijuana and made for the hills. This time I parked where others park. The sun was shining and the mountains were misting. I could feel the warmth of the day rising. I emerged from my car and ran the path to Helm’s Deep.
This was the dawn of the third morning and I galloped in like the Riders of Rohan. I charged my ass up those hills. I gave it all I got. I dug in, bit down on my tenacity and ran up the hill. On the upper peaks I scrambled on all fours, clawing for roots and rocks as my footholds eroded the dirt.

I made it high. I was alone. I could see the small forms of other bodies climbing below. I climbed the highest pile of rocks on my peak and crab walked over to a seat that looked like a throne. I sat upon this rock for two seconds, overlooking Albuquerque. Then the thinness of the air hit me, and I lost my breath to a dizzying bout of queasiness, so I scooted off the throne rock to more secure grounding. Woah, still formidable, this mountain.

On this hike, I reflected on my lover self. I was ready for love. Clearly. Completely. Kelli had become the object of my affection. We connected well, we both knew. We got each other on the intellect and we could play and dissolve into laughter. She was however in no place for a night or two of romance with a passerby, though I know she enjoyed being the apple of my eye.

After connecting one last time with her and exchanging several gifts, I left for Sedona. Oh, dear Sedona, Oh, the Siren calls of Sedona...
Sedona is a high-vibing place. Word is that the indigenous considered the space too sacred to settle on, so it remained a neutral place for pilgrimages. There are said to be five energy vortexes located in certain areas of rock formations. The town of Sedona acknowledges these vortexes, marking their locations in travel guides. Everyone talks about vortexes. It must be the vortexes. Yeah, the vortexes.

Vortexes or no, the red rocks marking Sedona’s perimeters are a blast. They’re beautiful and fun to climb. They surround the humble downtown of Sedona so that all sides are secured by warm Earthy rocks glowing red by day and darkening to purple by twilight. Nestled in these mystical rocks are countless crystal, magick, tarot, and psychic stores along with two of the premier chocolate shops on planet Earth.

In the town over from Sedona awaited my friends Tina Smith, also known as T-Love, and her partner Jeanette. As I mentioned earlier, I had lived with T and Jeanette for two years in Portland Maine at the Dreamship Cooperative Community. T is the one who brought forth the vision of Dreamship and she has done her damnest to push it along to its present thriving state.

Dreamship was a good idea for the universe and here’s why: It was a haven for the meek, the creative, the dreamers, the lovers, the feelers, the different, the mutants. It allowed me to live outside of the system and pursue a life aligned with my true self. It provides a community of people with alternative values to be in the same boat, so to say.

And the crew of this dream boat may often be lost, wandering, some-what traumatized and dazed souls. Let’s face it, we’re working it out well, but we still got work to do. In such a space clearly intended for safety and recovery from either addictions or the generalized trauma of our world, the right people can be lined up to experience psychic cleansing events that manifest as crises in the external world.

First, some context: The container of Dreamship is a large sprawling building with nooks, crannies, attics within attics, a partially raised living room floor that may have once been a car showroom, and yellow, blue, orange, green, and purple painted walls. In Dreamship’s prosperity they have since acquired the house next door. The original
Dreamship has at least 10 bedrooms, and a max occupancy of 14 (or 16…) residents.  

The first time I stepped into Dreamship I sensed the intention. It’s not hard to find with the colorful walls, art pieces by residents and friends, and countless uplifting messages tacked onto walls. T-Love’s intention streams through the ship in both structure and community. This is the short-story of how Dreamship became itself.

Before Dreamship, there was chaos, undifferentiated in its sleep. Raucous parties raged in the common space. Residents padlocked their doors for fear of theft. Drugs were bought and sold, cigarettes smoked, and butts tossed to the floor.

T was addicted to alcohol, and through a rock bottom landing, was able to bear forth a spark of clarity that would become the Dreamship. T got straight, and in dictatorial fashion, took control of the house and set new policies of sobriety. Bearing the landlord’s trust, she offered the front door as an alternative for those set against the new ways.

From the beginning of Dreamship, the intention has always been towards greater cooperative involvement in planning, deciding, and implementing policies. There are regular house meetings in which all can contribute to the agenda, and democratic principles guide the process. Most importantly, the desire to connect well, heal and grow together is present.

In the seven years of Dreamship, over 80 residents have passed through the house, some staying for a few weeks and a few staying for years. In my two years I met healers, magicians, old souls, fishermen, carpenters, mothers, fathers, children, musicians, painters, poets, priestesses, and all sorts of other wonderful folk.

What tends to happen in communities like Dreamship is the intention for healing brings together people who have their personal issues ripely present in their field of awareness. I consider it a blessing that the universe is generous to bring us in a space where we can together mix in our mess, stir it around, and through the spiral of whatever crises arise, work through it and leave it in the rear view from a more conscious and lovingly connected place of being. This is the ideal, anyhow, or at least the way I see it. Many people who have lived at Dreamship would look at me with a polite expression, unsure of how to rescind on my Aquarian Age perspective.
However, I know what I saw, darrnit—the healing mechanisms of the universe at work! Tina and Jeanette were leaders in bringing the will for beauty and community cohesion, and though we all went through some difficulties, I’ve always stayed on fine frequencies with the two of them.

My friendships with T and J and the many others who I know from the Ship are examples of value not quantified in society. Dreamship was the perfect pod to pursue my vision of creative independence and community interbeing. I got a cheap room at $350 per month, which is what I had envisioned as feasible to live simply and make art.

One may look at my vision as foolish. After all, I wasn’t saving money and nor was I pursuing a career path offering advancement to more lucrative and self-determining positions. My lack of wealth was exemplified by my lack of car and my wardrobe of second-hand clothes. By the dollars and sense of it, I wasn’t doing anything but floundering and wasting potential.

But my time in Dreamship yielded a different wealth. I made investments in relationships and that has made all the difference. I have indeed walked the modern road less traveled, and I’m damn glad to tread this path. I don’t have an ounce of doubt or regret about my choices because I know what matters: Relationships and giving gifts.

Apart from the existential satisfaction of knowing and loving more people, my investments have also paid off in terms of security and opportunity. T and J moved to Cottonwood, Arizona in the fall of 2017. They intentionally got a house with a spare bedroom. They left the spare room empty, but they have called upon me to come fill it. When I arrived, there was a room for me. A bed. My dear friends. T’s dog, Kloe. Arizona! Mountains to the back, an open expanse to the front reaching out to the looming red rocks of Sedona. I am so blessed for the many gifts of friendship.

The security of relationships very well could be the most valuable security of the 21st century. When our systems decline to the point of complete dysfunction, we may be left facing true scarcity. If our supply lines are cut, our cities have enough food for one or two weeks. Joining in community to grow and gather food, build renewable energy systems, help raise the children, and in other ways cooperate and renew ourselves are the most critical survival steps to prepare for an immanent systemic collapse. Who knows, perhaps extraterrestrials and the
government will unveil Star Trek level technology they’ve been sitting on and we’ll enter an age of paradise. But if trends continue, it’s hard to see how we’ll be OK.

In the era of the separate self, if you didn’t secure your own store of wealth then you wouldn’t be able to purchase what you need to survive. In this becoming age of connection, it is not what you own, but what you offer others, including your knowledge and skillsets, whether that’s philosophy, engineering, gardening or kindness. Value is not determined by what one owns, but rather through what one contributes. Relationships are based on the flow of energy between self and other. The more relationships one enjoys, the more secure one will be in accessing a wider pool of resources. By the same token, the relationally rich individual will draw upon a greater pool of resources in assisting those with their needs. With such reciprocal flow granting safety and security, true beauty can flourish.

Today our relationships are obscured by the anonymity and mass uniformity of money and commodities. We give and receive energy through money and goods and services, but the connections are often unfelt, because who do we feel in connection with when we buy coffee beans grown 3,000 miles away? In the age of Reunion, thanks to localization, we will feel the flow of our energy. Those who give and receive the most will be the most embedded in the web, the most secure in all dimensions.

It was great to see and spend some transformative time with T-Love and Jeanette. We had cacao ceremonies in their living room, reflected upon whence we’ve come and where we’ll go, and we had some great times with some of Jeanette’s lovely co-workers from the awesome establishment ChocolaTree. ChocolaTree, a vegetarian restaurant that also makes gourmet chocolates, is the saintly sister in the land of chocolate. Uplifting, courteous, healthy, ultra-conscious and spiritually devotional, ChocolaTree is a good trip. The owner of the restaurant follows the Shivananda yogic path, so the place is organized around principles of service and love, and they do it well.

And then there’s Lulu’s. Naughty, naughty Lulu’s.

Tina and Jeanette know I love chocolate. At the Dreamship I had earned a reputation because of my choice taste of 100% Guatemalan ceremonial grade cacao. I ordered this stuff online by the pound and soon started selling bricks to my roommates. You see, a few years ago I learned that people were doing cacao ceremonies in places like
Guatemala and Ecuador, and that this high-quality cacao could serve as a plant teacher to the willing student. I love ceremonies, chocolate, altered states, and all things healing, so I hopped aboard.

Lulu’s Lounge is a gourmet chocolate shop with a sultry overtone. The lounge is small, big enough for no more than ten people. It’s decorated risqué, with red lacy wall paper, a red plush couch, and drinks with names like “Sexual Healing.” The spirit of the lounge is decadence and indulgence, sex and candy.

And then there’s Sierra. The manager running the shop also happens to be a gorgeous, fiery, musically mystical woman. On the return trip the hero sometimes gets diverted from the path to entertain pleasures. Odysseus got called by the Sirens and spent years under their spell before continuing.

I met Sierra during my first trip into the lounge with Tina and Jeanette. We stopped by on our way to a poetry event. We got the drinking chocolates which were just so sweet and chocolatey. I was feeling the high in Sedona. I was with my people, drinking chocolate and sharing poetry in a paradisiacal land of sunshine and red rock vortex healing. In the flow of abundance, I made a good impression with the chocolate bar-maid.

A week later I stopped by to have a chocolate drink while I waited for Jeanette to get out of work. It was me, Sierra and two folks from Idaho talking about aliens and stuff. I asked Sierra if she wanted to come with me to a poetry slam the following evening. The theme of the poetry slam was “the erotic,” and I told her as much. She assented, and we had a plan. I thought she may cancel but she didn’t.

I performed two poems about sex, one of which got me the highest score of the round. Later that night we hooked up and began our dance. Yes, Sedona spun me right round baby, right round.

Sierra was staying in her friend Genie’s million-dollar home. Genie’s house is on the street Calle Diamante, or “Diamond Street,” so I referred to the house as casa del diamonds. Sierra was comfortably roomed in a basement suite. Before I knew it, I found myself sharing nights with a princess in a palace.

Genie was a trip. Her husband had passed, so she was living by herself. She loved to sing and had a gregarious personality suited for belting the songs. She frequently invited talented musician friends for drinks and music. In addition to enjoying Sierra and a lot of chocolate, I had a lot of wine and champagne during my time in Genie’s palace.
In Sedona, all was sweet, and soon sticky sweet, and soon after, sickly sweet. With Sierra, I had virtually unlimited access to extra chocolates, and so I ate the chocolates. It seemed that whatever was compelling me to consume like an animal for the past several months was still active. A beast within yet to be contended with.

In Sedona is also a wonderful Tibetan Buddhist Stupa, which is a kind of domed or spire shaped structure of worship in which are housed relics of spiritual importance, such as scriptures and mantras of the Buddha’s teachings. The Stupa is situated in the center of a “Peace Park” in which there are walking paths decorated with Tibetan flags, Buddha statues, and plenty of shrines and places to stop and contemplate.

There is also a medicine wheel around which one can walk. The medicine wheel is a Native American tool that signifies the importance of the four directions. From what I remember, the description sign next to this wheel states that north is the element of air, which is related to the mind and elderhood; east is fire, represented by beginnings and the horizon; south is water and emotion; and west is the physical body.

I reflected on how these elements may reflect the socio-geographic spread of the United States. In the North, and especially Northeast, are many centers of mind and knowledge that attempt to push us beyond into new frontiers. There’s the financial center of the world, Wall Street, which deals with abstract variables and formulae, and in the Northeast are most of the United States’ renown educational establishments. The South is considerably more emotionally charged than the North, with passionate religious sectors and a general feeling of “southern hospitality” throughout the Southeast. Austin, Texas and Sedona, Arizona also represent this trend. The West has long been related to aspects of material, as seen in the gold rush of the 19th century and in Silicon Valley which also uses the super-conductive metals of Earth to facilitate and next-level our complex super-information highways.

My trip also reflects these directions. Early in the trip, while in the northern part of the country, I work out a lot of the ideas I discuss in this book, as you remember from the long-winded philosophical soliloquies of the early sections. The southern descent of the trip brought me into the emotional swampland of Florida and to the more uplifted relational spaces of Texas. The westward trek was very much of the
flesh, thanks to Sierra. And then the eastward return is very much about new beginnings.

Finally, after a full month of romance and sweetness with friends and red rocks, the end of March arrived and so too my deadline for returning home for Passover with my fam. Not wanting to drive back to Maine, I sold my car in Sedona and bought a plane ticket from Phoenix to New York City.

It just so happened that Sierra’s friend was giving birth in Phoenix the day before my flight, so Sierra and I spent one last night together and then took her car down to Phoenix. My last day in Arizona was spent mostly in the new-baby waiting room at the hospital. Sierra was in and out of the birth room the entire day and night. In fact, the first time she stepped foot in the birth room was the exact moment that the Mom-to-be’s water broke.

It was a charged day in Phoenix with new life rising out of the ashes of an old story. Endings and beginnings. Had I burnt myself to completion, expending the karma of my old self, now ready to rise and return home fresh, renewed, inspired as a nascent form of new potential? It wouldn’t be so easy, but as we remember from *Harry Potter*, the phoenix’s tears are healing.

After Sierra and I parted ways from a love I would ruminate upon in the coming months, I got a ride to the airport. I found out that my flight to New York had been canceled due to a major snow storm, and that the next flight to the City was in three days. I considered approaching this as an ordeal initiation: Three days in the airport. I could even fast. I was heading in this direction, and a piece of me wishes I had done so. But instead, I learned I could transfer my ticket to Boston for free and fly out the next morning. I went safe and chose Boston.
Home: I Like to Be Here When I Can...

In Boston I stayed with my friend Tiffany. As a professional cuddler, Tiffany continued the trend of physical intimacy in my life. I had parted ways with Sierra with it known that I was interested in a kind of open relationship thing, because I was feeling primed for more romance in the here and now. When I shared my experiences of cuddling and kissing with Tiffany and others in Tiffany’s house, Sierra was not impressed, and thus began the quick decline of our romantic relationship. We were still affectionately texting each other, so it was complex.

If my original flight schedule had remained, I would have visited Eric once more in New York City. I still wanted to reconnect with my pal, so I took a bus into his parts to stay for a weekend. We had a good time together. It was refreshing coming back and hanging, talking and laughing with my bud. However, I still felt weary. The trip had happened and essentially concluded itself, and here I felt tired, fatigued, sad, and heavy. I didn’t look good, and I knew it.

Eric and I saw a funny improv show, ate some good food, and so on. The Saturday of our departure sent Eric to the airport to fly out to California to see his brother while I hopped on a bus to Hartford to join my family for the Passover.

Passover was fun. As a younger Dan, I hated family gatherings. I was angry, sullen, and shy. A real sour grape. It may have been because I am the only male in the field of my cousins and sibling, and there may be other complex social, cultural, and spiritual dynamics that we need not discuss. But I’ve come to love these gatherings. I love feeling our dynamic together. It is endlessly interesting to observe and experience. I love standing as an adult with the adults, talking about life matters eye to eye, seeing into the mysteries of adulthood. I love catching up with my cousins and hearing what they are doing with their amazing hearts and minds. They are a busy and ambitious bunch.

To repeat, my divergent path is indeed the road not taken. At my 6th grade graduation ceremony in Georgetown Central School, I read Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken” to a full assembly attended by parents. It seems children intuitively know their path. Speaking of such, I am reminded of my friend Justin who I’ve known since elementary school. On the playground of Georgetown Elementary
School, Justin had an amazing knack for imitating emergency sirens, and now he is a paramedic and fire-fighter.

Later that evening, my cousins, aunt, uncle and I gathered to do a past-life card reading for my cousin. I’m always down for this kind of thing, and my family also took it seriously, trusting that the intelligence would flow through the choosing of the cards.

I like it when I see people who have feet in different dimensions. Maybe someone still believes hard materialistic science is the best we got when it comes to determining the nature of reality, but that person may also believe in miraculous healing events, or in ETs or something like that. With affirmation of these alternative fields of knowledge and practice comes an eventual reconsideration of the basic tenets of science and rationality ungirding civilization for the past hundreds of years. I wonder, if you believe in past lives, then what else may you believe? What do you believe about the fabric of our reality? How might that belief inform one’s views on other matters of life? How about economics, politics, or the point and purpose and properties of a good life?

~

So, the return was mostly uneventful. I did not feel I gave my family any great gifts of my journey. In fact, I’m not sure if I got any treasure at all on the way. If I did, it perhaps was a greater affirmation of my point and purpose in pursuing the creative path and seeking awakening. Or maybe a subtle change in my energy and intention. Perhaps the departure and quest only brought forth lessons that are not unfamiliar. Perhaps the trip was a matter of piercing my doubt and confusion, reminding me that amid this search, I already know my place on this planet, that the past ten years of struggle to pull something beautiful out of myself have not been in vain, and that the road ahead is as it was—to perfect the self and offerings as much as possible: To live in the glory of God, as God, and with God, manifesting more and more of God into this reality.

I fear that some of my friends and family may be concerned over my “God” language, but so be it.

This chapter of the story ends on another note of affirmation, one I heard loud and clear during Charles Eisenstein’s “The Space Between Stories” retreat at the Garrison Institute in New York. In May I saw that
Charles was holding a much larger retreat than he had done before at the end of June. The rate was affordable, so I didn’t think twice.
It took me until late June 2018 to see that my journey was a coming of age story. I’ve mostly framed it as the hero’s journey, which is appropriate. I’ve mostly discussed the hero’s journey of the Jungian school, but there is also a Freudian model that stops short of the mysticism in the Grail Quest. For instance, the process of entering adulthood necessarily includes a confrontation with the psychic representations of our parents. The father most often represents the forces of Thanatos, the destructive impulse and any system of control that coerces us to remain within its boundaries and constrain unlimited expressions of self. Then we have the mother, who embodies Eros—the impulse of love. If we are attached to being taken care of and coddled like a swaddling babe, then we will not emerge into the individuality of adulthood. These forces are inside us, as patterned by our conditioning. If we are neurotically fixated on either parental energy, that aspect remains a controlling part of our psyche, dictating how we relate to the world, and we will unconsciously arrange and rearrange our lives with scenarios that allow us to work out these dynamics. The early 20th century psychoanalyst Otto Rank takes this Freudian tack of interpretation of the hero’s journey. The adolescent becomes an adult when she overcomes those parental voices in her mind and successfully emerges into the world as her own person.

Joseph Campbell goes further saying that given the Jungian integration of mind and matter, the challenges on the journey are psychic manifestations of those blockages or fixations upon parentally learned programs. For instance, in the Grail Quest, the knights face temptations from damsels in distress along the way. Those are the internal energies of Eros manifested in the external sphere. And the enemies who attack the knights represent the internal aspect of Thanatos. One must fully face those energies without being engulfed and lost in the Eros or ruined in conquest by Thanatos.

During my journey, I assumed along the way that my homecoming for Passover would be the significant moment of establishing the success of my transformation. You know, Chris McCandless died alone, but I returned to the loving field of family. However, it was anti-climactic. There was no celebration of my entry to adulthood, of my independent, mature self as Daniel. I think it would take a Bar Mitzva for my family to consider me as such, and I would
consider a Bar Mitzva to be a performance that I had created, not an orthodox run through the mill of my cultural heritage. My performance is forthcoming.

And I was not in a stable space. No, after returning home, the idea was OK, get back to the grindstone. Now you gotta do it. You went and journeyed, you got the message, and now you gotta do it. As promised, there is one final piece of this story that now confirms where I am, who I am, and what I must do.

This story’s last piece comes from Charles Eisenstein’s retreat. I’ve sufficiently explained the gist of Charles’ philosophy about the New and Ancient Story of Reunion and the breakdown of the Old Story of Separation.

The journey began one week before the retreat when I drove Mark back to his home in Toronto. This is the same Mark I met in Austin. He had moved to Portland to live with Kendall, and now he was ready to go back to Canada. Mark had been living in the United States as an “illegal alien,” as people who are not allowed in the U.S. are often called in conservative political discourse. The return trip for him was significant in enabling him the independence he needs to pursue his dreams of a free life, which is also very rite of passage-esque.

After delivering Mark, I went to Albany, New York to spend a day or two with Jon. Then I went to a yoga center just an hour south, and then to the retreat. At Charles’ retreat, I left after only experiencing the Friday evening and Saturday programs. I missed the last two days of one of the people who has most inspired me and influenced my beliefs and values. My hero, Charles Eisenstein, finally there in person, flowing as he does, and I leave. Well let me share the account that I shared to the Facebook group of the 150 retreat participants.

**Dear Friends,**

*Hello. This is Dan from Maine. I wanted to let you all know that I left the retreat early this morning to return to my Home in Maine. I dearly appreciated getting to know some of you, and participating in this field of inspiration and transformation with all of you. I’d like to share a bit more about why I left, if you can bear a bit of story.*
At 4am this morning I felt a calling to return home and do what I must do. I know exactly what that is. I know who I am. I finally feel an unassailable knowing, or perhaps a permission, of what to do next. The certainty of my early departure was in part influenced by the fact that I was sleeping in my car at the Walmart Supercenter in Fishkill, about 20 minutes away from Garrison (“kill” means river in Dutch). I had wanted to save money as well as to experience the challenge of immersing myself in old story territory as part of the retreat.

Saturday night, my third night of sleeping in the Walmart parking lot, I went through a dark night of soul. I felt an insufferable loneliness that I am well-familiar with. Utter pain, restricted tears, and the agony of so badly wanting it to end. After my disciplined warrior self pathetically disintegrated, I succumbed to snacking in Walmart before managing to sleep for two hours. I awoke around 2am wide awake and distraught. I fought myself for the next two hours, going back and forth: to leave or to stay, that was the question, whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune, Or to take arms against Wal Mart, and by opposing, go home...

Around 4:00am, I was driving back to Garrison, ready to exert my warrior energy by sneaking a shower and joining the early birds for meditation. About a mile from the center, my car’s yellow check engine light flashed on along with a blinking green “Cruise” light. My stomach dropped once more into despair. I felt queasy as I thought, “I’m ruined. Everything is falling apart, just according to a higher plan. Now I have no money and I will have to go humble myself in front of 150 people by asking for donations, thereby stepping beyond the separate self and into the connectedness of the gift.” But then some reflections about recent events seized my mind.

The three days prior to this retreat I was hanging with a handful of monks at an Ananda Marga yoga center just an hour north in Cairo. I found upon arriving at the center that groundhogs had burrowed underneath the meditation hall. I saw a scared and saddened critter locked in a cage trap near a hole just by the front steps. I rode with a monk to release it a mile or two down the road. Back at the center we again set the trap, once more using slices of apple as bait. The next day we found another groundhog. It was delivered to the same place as its
family cohort. We set the trap again. On Thursday, my third day, I found a third groundhog in the trap, and drove it myself to the spot of release. By then I had to chuckle over the symbolism.

First, the movie Groundhog Day is about a day that repeats itself until the protagonist learns to love and serve others. Spiritually, we repeat the same cycles until we get the lesson or heal the emotion or experience or whatever. I thought the monks would appreciate that theme. Second, we used apples to bait the groundhogs. The apple, the primal fruit of Eden’s Garden that caused Adam and Eve’s fall from grace. The groundhogs’ freedom thwarted by this cage, the soul’s journey through this physical dimension, bound here until returning once more to the promised land.

I recognized in my car at 4am that I had just spent three nights in the Walmart parking lot with fleece blankets tacked up over the windows of my too small car. I considered this alongside an understanding of my mission, of knowing I’ve received my marching orders and dammit, there’s only one place that I should be; back at headquarters, organizing materials, sending messages, making calls, and getting out on the streets, the internet, and wherever there are opportunities to share my poetry and songs.

So that is what I am doing. I am happy to say that upon reaching my homeland, several “right place, right time” moments have flowed together, confirming the rightfulness of my decision. Also, just after following a hunch and buying some obsidian in Portland, ME, my car’s engine lights turned off. Also, “Port-land” is the land of shipping out. It’s time to ship.

Well, I could very well end on that note, take my bow and thank all the beautiful souls who have helped me get to where I am, wherever that is. But let’s bring this full circle.

This latest experience is a thrumming confirmation that I know what to do now. Do you know how many times in my past I have tried to make things work by creating things and pushing them on the internet or to others with the hopes that I will be relevant and well-received? Well now I feel an unshakeable certainty that it is in fact time to ship. It
is time. Sometimes you just know that you have reached a point of “it’s
time.”

It’s time to “adult up.” I must integrate the energies and
experiences that have made me who I am, open to the healing energies
of the cosmos and not veer away from what I am and what purpose I
consented to by coming to Earth as me. In other words, just do it, like
Nike says.

Beyond me, it is also time. In the latest Avengers movie, Thanos,
the villain with a name perfectly suited for the imbalanced dominance of
Thanatos energy that rules his heart, wishes to kill half the universe’s
population so that life may have better hopes at peace and thriving. This
is like our government’s agendas, and this psychic detachment from the
flow of Eros will mean continued atrocities and destruction of the good.

We are at a point where unless we integrate these psychic
dimensions, and, as a society, take the trip into adulthood, then we will
crash and burn. Martin Luther King Jr.’s last book was titled Where Do
We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? Well, that’s it folks. Refusal
to heed the call, refusal to summon the courage to do what must be done,
likely means our immanent destruction. And that, my friends, is why I
am not worried about my student loan debt.

Thank you for sharing this journey with me. All the best to us as we
continue.
Afterward

Having some months of space to witness this journey and perspectives that I’ve shared in this book, I feel like I’ve shed a skin that needed shedding. Do you ever have that feeling that you’re going through something that may be a rough ride or humiliating, but you know you have to let the process run its course? Or that you have an old re-occurring story that you have to tell? Well, I kind of feel that way now.

I write these words in the fall of 2018, in the beginning days of a venture that will take me in a westward loop around the world over the next seven months. I am spinning this current trip as a “Poetry Peace Pilgrimage,” so you could say I’m continuing onward with my mission and all that. Really though, I can’t help but wonder if all this is too much a self-absorbed manifest-your-purpose condition of our present day. Part of me wants nothing more than to retire from all this actualization business to a quiet town in Maine and root in. However, even if I am Don Quixote jousting at wind mills, I feel the show must go on.

I also feel that this book may have been an unabashed excuse for me to pack in all my views that I’ve wanted to say for a few years. I’ve relished this opportunity to expound on my cosmological views of reality and human nature; the pivotal transformative process of our time; the existential, economic, and social challenges for all of us and particularly for young adults; a spiritual “hero’s journey” perspective of reality; the importance of plant medicines in facilitating healing and spiritual growth, and among other matters, on the general dismay of Florida.

I hoped to use my personal experience as an opportunity to dive into these topics and to create a gestalt that is recognizable for others. Regardless, I trust the intent of this effort and so I will not worry about where this story goes or how it is received. I do however hope that you, my dear reader, are well in this process and that you take good care of yourself and others through the tumultuous times that may await us.
Thank you to all my friends, family and teachers. May we do justice with all that we’ve been given.