

P A R T 2

# Awakening the Soul



*This is the true joy of life,  
the being used for a purpose  
recognized by yourself as a mighty one;  
and being thoroughly worn out  
before you are thrown on the scrap heap;  
the being a force of nature  
instead of a feverish little clod  
of ailments and grievances complaining  
that the world will not devote itself  
to making you happy.*

-George Bernard Shaw

## *a* Life of Accommodation or Inspiration?



*A musician must make music, an artist  
must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be  
ultimately at peace with himself.*

- Abraham Maslow

*I asked the question* more out of frustration than anything else. The answer I got meant little to me at the time, but it has stayed with me ever since, taking on deeper meaning to me as the years have gone by.

I was in ninth grade, returning on a bus with my teammates, having just played the last basketball game of the season. We had lost the game, as usual. With my coach sitting next to me, I was lost deep in my thoughts.

Like I said, I was more frustrated than anything else when I blurted out, “How the hell can you stand it?”

“Stand what?” my coach asked in a somewhat stunned voice.

“This losing. All the time. All we do is lose. And I don’t see it getting any better in the next couple of years. How do you keep going on? How do you maintain your enthusiasm for your job, for the team, for what we’re doing? Why do you keep on coaching?”

“Well, I guess, I guess I just don’t see things quite the way you do.”

He caught my curiosity with that response. “What do you mean by that?” I wondered out loud.

“Well, when I think about coaching the team I don’t measure everything we do by our wins and losses.”

“You don’t. What the hell else matters?” I shot back, feeling somewhat unnerved by his cavalier attitude.

“There are plenty of reasons I coach you guys, the least of which is whether we win or lose basketball games,” my coach responded in his usual matter-of-fact manner.

My voice became shrill as I asked, “What are you trying to do, mess with my head? Like what? Why else would you put all the time and effort into this if you weren’t interested in winning basketball games?”

“Well, one thing I love is working with young kids. It means a lot to me that I can help shape who all of you are becoming.

“Secondly, I love sports. Always have, always will. This gives me an opportunity to stay active in a part of my life that has meant so much to me throughout the years.”

Things were beginning to get a bit thick for me so I thought I would try and inject a note of reality into the discussion. “Yea coach, that’s all well and good, but the truth of the matter is, we suck!”

“Listen, I understand how you may feel the way you do, but being a coach means more to me than just x’s and o’s. It means that I get to be myself for three hours a day for six days of the week.

“It’s a time when I can get away from all the politics of being a teacher, get away from the demands of being a father and a husband, it’s a time each day when I feel like I am doing what I was placed on this earth to do.”

“Yelling and screaming, making us run laps? That’s your life’s calling?” I was beginning to regret ever starting this conversation.

“No, but giving to others, making a difference in somebody else’s life, teaching you guys that there’s more to life than sports and girls. Having a part of my life that’s *play*, being part of the camaraderie that you have with any sports team, that’s all very important to me. I find it all very rewarding.”

“I don’t know, when you’re yelling at us all the time,

I never get the sense that you're feeling all that *rewarded*."

"That's my point exactly. Coaching sports is rewarding because it lets me live my life in a way that matters to me. Just because I get frustrated, doesn't mean I feel like coaching isn't rewarding. In fact, figuring out how to overcome the things that are frustrating me is a part of why coaching is so rewarding.

"That's why I see winning and losing as a small part of all of this. When I think about us as a team, I think about our squad over the long haul. The outcome of each game is just a marker of where we are and what we have to do next to wind up where we eventually want to be.

"Staying true to that is more important to me than our won-lost record. I guess I'm trying to say a couple of different things to you. Number one, I keep doing this because of the personal satisfaction I get from doing it. I don't know how else to explain that to you. It's just something that I believe I was meant to do with my life. I'm happiest when I'm doing things in my life that I was meant to be doing.

"Number two, I keep coaching because coaching allows me to keep growing.

"You ask me how it is I continue. It's simple. What else would I do? Where else would I go? I don't make my choices based upon what would alleviate my frustration or how best to avoid frustrating situations.

"I take whoever I am with me wherever I go. If I'm not true to who I am, I will never be able to escape *that frustration*. So I make my life choices based upon what situation is the best arena for me to use my innate talents and interests, not what would be the least frustrating for me.

"All the losses don't discourage me from continuing,

because you see, coaching is *what I do*, but it isn't *who I am*. Coaching is the vehicle that enables me to be who I am."

I wasn't able to understand it at the time, but my coach was sharing with me his formula for a life of well-being that was built upon his life-choices, life-choices that were a reflection of who he was, his abilities, his interests, his passions, his desire to contribute to other people's well-being.

He was teaching me about his value system, a value system different than the one I used to evaluate myself and the events of my life. His message was a simple one, although I didn't understand it at the time. He was encouraging me not to measure myself by such things as whether you win or lose, make a lot of money or don't, have a prestigious job or not.

No, he clearly understood something very important. He understood that there was a much more important benchmark to use when we evaluate ourselves, the decisions we make about our lives, how we live our lives, and the basis for the choices we make.

That benchmark? Well I see it more clearly now than back then. Quite simply, our life-choices are a reflection of our soul.

I never had considered that there would be more to measuring my life. It would be very dramatic to tell you that single conversation made a profound difference in my life, but the truth is, that conversation wasn't an eye opener at that point in my life. As I said earlier, looking back, I could see it was a beginning, a beginning that took years to bear any fruit.

In my coach's day, he would say, "I'm just doing what



**Come Out, Come Out,  
Wherever You Are!**



*Our greatest pretenses are built up not to hide  
the evil and the ugly in us, but our emptiness. The  
hardest thing to hide is something that is not there.*

-Eric Hofer

*Just what is it* that our souls have been buried under? What has so anesthetized our soul? What is it that leaves us disconnected from the very essence of who we are?

Well, there are volumes of books written on the subject, so it would be hard to distill all of that into a mere chapter, but let me see if you recognize this about yourself.

Paula's story is one of the classic ugly duckling who turned into a swan. We shared a couple of classes together in grad school. We would often work on projects together, so we spent a lot of time with each other. One night over coffee, Paula told me about herself and the obstacles that had shaped her into who she was today.

"Knowing me now, you would have never guessed what it was like for me growing up. I was short and chubby until I was fourteen. My mom made me cut my hair really short. I wore a pair of glasses that were from hell."

"Ech!" we laughed together.

"Need I tell you that I was the object of everybody's ridicule? It was really merciless."

"I had only one seemingly saving grace, how well I did at school. Now, that was the only thing that saved me from being totally ostracized by the kids my age.

"Don't get me wrong. I never kidded myself. I knew what few friends I did have liked me only so that I could help them with their homework."

"Well, how did all of that change for you?" I asked, not able to match the person I knew today with the person in the scenario from back then.

"A funny thing happened to me. I don't know what it

was, maybe my hormones finally kicked in. I grew some, shed my baby fat, convinced my mom to let me change my hair style and get contacts.

"Overnight, the very people who had taunted me began to embrace me. The only problem with dating became who was I going to choose. I continued to excel in school. I had gone from being the butt of everyone's joke, having my name painted on the bathroom walls, being shunned by everybody because of my physical appearance to the homecoming queen."

"Wow, that must have been sweet revenge," I said. The odd thing was, she didn't agree with me. In fact, she started sobbing.

"I can't tell you how much hell all of that was for me. And it haunts me to this very day."

"What do you mean?" I asked, feeling somewhat embarrassed for not understanding any of this at all.

"Don't you see? Look, when everyone was making fun of me, it was because of how I looked. The only reason anyone liked me at all was because of what I could do.

"Then all of a sudden my looks became more acceptable and people liked me for what I looked like as well as what I could do.

"The point is I never was liked or disliked for who I was. Me on the inside never impacted anybody. I never learned to know *me* much less value *me*. When I was too ugly, I hated *me* because of my appearance. When I became attractive in everyone's mind, well there you had it, it just reinforced that my value was derived from my physical appearance.

"But all along, there was a whole *me* buried deep inside myself. Never coming out, never daring to show

her *face*. This part of *me* stayed hidden from myself and the world.”

I tried putting this together. “So you never really built your life based upon who you were, you just figured that people would like you for what you could do and how you looked?”

“Sorta. I mean I put doing and achieving above all else, above just being. I viewed everything as a competition where if I didn’t win, I was a loser. I never had any satisfaction from what I accomplished. It was like there was a black hole inside of me that never could be filled.”

“What would happen to you if you were to become less achievement oriented?” I asked her.

“I don’t know. What pops into my head is, I would lose myself. I would be totally lost, I would have no sense of myself.”

We sat quietly for awhile trying to absorb all that we had just discussed. Looking at Paula’s face, I could see that she had reopened some painful memories.

For me, I was more confused than anything. I just couldn’t connect the person I knew today with the person Paula was describing. I somehow felt responsible for not being sensitive enough to what Paula was going through.

After a few more moments, Paula wiped her eyes, then gently laid her hand upon mine, as if to say she understood how hard this was for me to see her so upset.

Then she continued, “The moral of the story is I had built my life on a never ending treadmill chasing affirmation, acceptance, and self-worth through other people’s recognition of my appearance as well as my accomplishments. But the point is, I had never found a way to

provide love and affirmation for myself about myself. I was completely estranged from myself, unable to ever do enough or be enough to fill that void.”

We all recognize the pact that Paula made with herself. It sounds something like this, “In order for me to be accepted, in order for me to fit in, I will forfeit all of who I am.”

Do you understand what I mean by *forfeiting who we are*? We shut off, tune out, disconnect from who we really are. The sense of importance we place upon other people accepting us becomes so out of proportion that we lose ourselves.

Just what is it that we lose when we make this kind of pact? Inevitably, we sacrifice our whole emotional being. In order to conform, in order to please, in order to pursue what others deem important for us to be, we have only one choice: we disconnect from our emotions.

Why is this divorce, the divorcing of our emotions from our soul, such an inevitable outcome? Quite simply, our emotions, our feelings are little more than the manifestation of our passions, our passions being the manifestation of what is important to us.

Our emotions are a sign post. They are an affirmation of the path we are on, the people we are with, the destiny we are chasing. When things are clicking, when things are in sync, we know it by what our feelings are telling us. When things are present in our life in a way that does not honor who we are, our emotions tell us that as well.

To sustain a life in which our soul is not connected to what we’re doing, who we’re becoming, we must learn to ignore our whole emotional-self.

Our emotions will let us know whether something is



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We not only lose ourselves by forfeiting who we are or disconnecting from the little voice inside, we oftentimes become overwhelmed to the point of being paralyzed by the wounds that we carry around inside of us. What is it that paralyzes us, paralyzes us to the point that we hide? We hide who we are, we hide what we feel. We hide what matters to us.

Johnny is a close friend of mine. I've watched Johnny wrestle with himself over the years. His life was out of control because he wasn't connected to his soul. He had abandoned his soul at a very early age. Abandoned it so he wouldn't have to feel the pain of betrayal. Abandoned it so that he wouldn't feel so consumed by the confusion he felt. Abandoned it in order that he might simply survive.

Johnny survived by building a shell. A shell around his wounds. A shell that separated the world from himself. Sadly, a shell that separated Johnny from Johnny.

Johnny has fought long and hard to awaken the parts of himself that he had buried out of sight. As a result of his courageous work, he has found a way to be present in his life. Present to the people he knows and the circumstances he faces. Today he enjoys a life free from panic and fear. Especially panicked that he would be found out for who he feared that he was.

You see, Johnny lived in fear of anybody finding out, finding *him* out. And he coped with that fear by totally

disconnecting, thereby deadening his soul.

He learned at a very early age how to finesse the people in his life. For him, it was a matter of survival. He didn't see it any other way.

Survival to him meant never letting anybody find out. Never letting them find out his secret.

So how could he possibly let the world get close? How could he run the risk of anybody getting close enough to see? See his doubts. See his confusion. See the guilt that paralyzed him. How could he possibly share the doubts he carried around about himself?

No, the only way for him to cope was to create pseudo-intimacy with the people in his life. He knew all the right things to say. He knew when to say them. He knew as long as he kept feeding them what they wanted to hear, they would never go looking for who he truly was.

The only problem was the longer he hid who he was, the more shame he felt about who he was. The cycle became more and more vicious. The more shame he felt about who he was, the more he drank. The more he drank, the more he slid into his private world: a world racked with shame, fear, confusion, and secrecy.

Now, not only was he running from his past, he had to hide his present as well. But, he convinced himself that was the only way to survive.

Afterall, that's how he survived throughout his whole childhood. Unable to trust anybody. Unable to feel cared about by anybody. Unable to feel safe with another person. He just invented a new life. A life that was separate from what was going on inside of him.

And at the age of thirty, he was still doing the same thing. Living a double life. A life where he played at being

whole. He played at being involved. He played at being connected with the people in his life.

But the longer this double life went on, the worse his drinking and drugging became. The worse his acting out became. The more shame he felt about his secret life, the more out of control his public life became.

Women. They would leave just as quickly as they came. Jobs. He had been fired from three in the last two years. He would go through periods of being estranged from his family. There were times when he was one step ahead of the bill collector, but that didn't keep him from getting more credit cards and maxing them out. His friendships seemed to end abruptly in fits of anger and disappointment, never to be repaired.

But he could fool you. From the outside looking in, you would never have guessed. You would never have guessed at the emotional swirl that was going on within him. You would have never guessed how fear consumed his every waking moment.

You would have never guessed how much pure panic permeated his emotional world. And it all got acted out so that he could hide, hide from himself and the world around him.

In fact, it seemed that initiating a new relationship was the precipitant of the cycle repeating itself, always ending in tears and accusations. The more women he brought into his life, the more he acted out. Everything became out of control as he had to maintain this double life until finally he went to get help for himself, finally reconnecting to his soul by shedding the shell he had created to hide his wounds.

For many of us, disconnecting from our soul has

been a means of coping. Coping with the well of pain, coping with the well of fear that has consumed us our whole lives. The cause of the fear and pain may differ from person to person, but the means of coping looks the same. We all have secrets. We all have our ways of hiding what we don't want the world to know about us. We all inevitably hide parts of our soul so that we aren't found out.

We believe we have to hide ourselves from ourselves and the world. The solution: invent a new person. So we go about the business of divorcing ourselves from who we are by creating somebody we believe the world wants us to be. The more we crawl into this shell, the more convinced we become about how unacceptable the core of who we are actually is.

This just keeps the cycle going. The paradox that allowed us to initially survive becomes the means by which our soul becomes emotionally and spiritually deadened. After awhile, we're no longer hiding the pain and shame that we feel about ourselves, we're only hiding the fact of how empty we feel inside, how empty our lives have become.

The solution to ending this cycle is using the courage we all possess, the courage to discard the shell we have created. The act of discarding our outer shell will make room for the emergence of our awakening soul. As we make room for those parts of ourselves that have lived in slumber our whole lives, we will experience our lives taking a new direction, a direction that enables us to step out of the shadows.

Let's stop for a moment and think about the parts of yourself that you leave buried deep inside of you. For



## *Awakening: Questioning or Examining?*



*The truth is that all of us attain the greatest success  
and happiness possible in this life whenever we use our  
native capacities to their greatest extent.*

-Dr. Smiley Blanton

*So what is it* that we have become disconnected from within ourselves? What is it that we are seeking to awaken, seeking to become [re]connected to again?

As part of my own searching, I have befriended many people throughout the years. Friends who have walked their own path. Friends who know the pain of being disconnected from their life's journey. Friends who have found their way back.

I have tried to tap into the wisdom that lives within them. Wisdom born out of their own trials and tribulations. Wisdom born out of the lessons taught when we surrender our willful, ego-based solutions for the solutions that are born from our soul.

One such friend is a mentor of mine, good ol' Marty. Marty has worked in halfway houses for over twenty-five years. Believe me when I tell you, Marty has seen it all, whether it be the trials and tribulations of his own journey or the wrestling matches others have engaged in trying to discover how to [re]connect to their own journey.

Early on in my own searching, I had a discussion with Marty about this step, *Awakening the Soul*. We were both at a weekend retreat and had taken a walk in the woods. We came upon a small lake, so we sat down and talked about some ideas I had been chewing on.

Marty was chewing on a blade of grass, mindlessly tossing pebbles into the lake when he turned to me and said, "You're absolutely right. There is an awakening that we all must experience. Whatever you call that which awakens is merely a matter of semantics."

"I think of it as my true authentic self. I believe it's the part of me that has lived and will continue to live throughout eternity. It's the part of me that is tapped into the collective unconscious of our universe."

"Huh? What!" I sensed a familiar cloud of frustration and confusion coming over me.

Marty cautioned me, "Try not to listen to me with your head. Listen for a moment with your heart. Listen with your mind's eye, watch where my words take you. Pay attention to the images evoked by what I am telling you. Most importantly, be patient."

"My true authentic self or soul or whatever it is that you want to call it, well I think of it as a quality of myself, ummm, how can I say this, a quality of myself that lives deep beneath the complexity of my personality."

Marty paused for a moment and watched me. He gently placed a hand on my shoulder, trying to reassure me. He told me to close my eyes as I listened, to only pay attention to my breathing. "Just let my words in. Watch how your body begins to embrace an idea long before your mind does. Watch, learn, take notice of how your body reacts to what I'm saying. You see, that's where our awakening begins."

"My soul, well for me, how I understand it, my soul is the part of myself buried beneath my belief system and attitudes. Those two little buddies of mine—my beliefs and attitudes—are simply a lot of noise that goes on in my head, noise that most often drowns out the voice through which my soul speaks to me. Quite simply, my soul is like a reservoir, a reservoir of inner wisdom that guides my life."

I was trying to digest all that he had just said. His words had been reassuring, yet at the same time, I was

even more confused by it all. I began nervously throwing rocks in the lake.

Marty let me wrestle with all of what he had just said for at least a good half-hour. He sat silently on a rock as the mist began to rise off the lake. The smell of late autumn was in the air as we took in the afternoon sun.

Finally, I returned to him and said, “You know, that’s what’s hardest for me. I see how your life is the embodiment of having embraced the spirit of what you just said, yet, I can barely make any sense out of it.”

He must have noticed the hurt etched in my face. He searched for something reassuring to say. He gave me a kind look as he said, “That’s just as it should be. We all wrestle with trying to *understand* when what we only need to be doing is *embracing*.”

“My rule of thumb is if you find yourself struggling to *understand*, it only means you’re not ready to *embrace* some aspect of where you are in your journey. There’s some fear or some part of your will that is holding on for dear life.”

“What do you mean by that?” I asked. I had honestly never considered that I was holding onto something I wasn’t ready to let go of.

“Can’t you see how your intellect, your insistence on understanding all that’s not immediately observable to you is merely a defense against embracing all that’s not immediately observable to you.”

“A defense against embracing it?” I was lost.

“Sure, our fears, our insecurities. All those things that insist that we understand our path before we can embrace it. All those things that insist that we understand in order for us to connect to that path. All those

things that insist that the limit of our understanding must be defined by the limits of what we can perceive with our eyes or our mind.”

Marty chuckled to himself as he continued, “Let me ask you, when you’re a passenger in a car, do you let the driver drive or are you constantly telling the driver what to do? In fact, you don’t have to tell me the answer to that question, I can only imagine what you’re like.”

A self-conscious smile broke out on my face. “Heh, should I just sit there in silence if I know a better way?”

“Well, let’s see if you can get my point. The more you insist on understanding the ins and outs of your life’s journey, the more you’re like a back-seat driver in a car.

“You see, our soul is driving our lives. We’re the one’s that keep screwing the ride up. We make the journey longer than it need be, choppy than it need be, more painful than it need be. We may think we know a better direction to take but until we learn to tap into our soul, we’re merely spinning our wheels.”

“Okay, okay, I get your point. I don’t need to figure out what all this means. But let me ask you, what do you mean by tapping into my soul?”

“We all need to learn how to access that little voice within ourselves. That little voice that we can turn to when we need to know whatever choice we’re about to make is for our higher good.”

“Higher good?” I asked him.

“Yes, higher good. Are we making choices that honor who we are or are we making choices to appease our little gods?”

“I know I’m not supposed to try and understand all of this, but what do you mean by little gods?”

“Little gods? Oh that’s just a saying I use. I simply mean the gods we pay so much honor to, the gods for which we forsake the voice of our soul. Fear. Shame. Will. Ego. Control. Prestige. Power. Self-aggrandizement. Ambivalence. Egocentricity. Caution. Taking the easy way out. Insecurity. Those are all our little gods.”

“So like anything else, awakening our soul boils down to the choices we make?”

Marty shook his head in agreement as he said, “Well, yea, I suppose so, in certain respects. Honor ourselves or appease the little gods, yea that’s a choice.

“Look at the choices we have made throughout our lives, choices that have anesthetized our soul through the use of drugs and alcohol, through the hopelessness of depression and the anxiety from our fear, through the self-loathing of shame and self-alienation, and through the pain of loneliness and despair. Anger and resentment may have so twisted our spirit that we have ceased to believe our life can be any different.”

“Just how do people climb out of that hole of despair and discouragement?” I wondered out loud.

“Just as you say, making a choice, a choice to awaken our soul is the antidote to becoming disconnected from the true purpose of our life’s journey. A purpose that leaves us connected to ourselves, our community of fellowship, and our higher power.”

We talked well into the night but finally the chill of the evening chased us inside. That night I stayed up late pondering what we had discussed. There was a rush of excitement that ran through my body. I didn’t feel like I understood anything any better but I felt like finally someone had given me something to sink my teeth into.

I felt like I finally had some direction to focus my attention. I didn’t know where it would take me but I felt a little more grounded than I had been feeling up to that point.

## Embarking on the Search



*Regret for the things that we did can be  
tempered by time; it is regret for the things we did  
not do that is inconsolable.*

-Sydney J. Harris

## Pathfinder's Tip



*Our soul will awaken when we forsake questioning our journey for embracing our journey.*

What's the struggle behind the quest for understanding? What's the hidden drama that's going on behind the curtain of our mind, the drama about *understanding* our journey rather than *embracing* it. What are we so damned afraid of? What are we so unwilling to let go of?

Could it be true that our need to understand everything actually gets in the way of our ability to embrace a new path?

Well, I have thought about this one for a long time. The more I focus on this question, the more aware I become of all the conditions we create before we give ourselves to an experience.

Do you understand what I mean by *giving ourselves to an experience*?

Paul's a friend of mine who's in a twelve-step program. He works a program, you might say, almost fanatically. But it wasn't always that way for him. I remember him describing the slow gradual shift that took place for him.

Paul had a sheepish grin on his face as he said, "I went through sponsors quicker than Sherman went through Atlanta. They fired me time and time again because I wouldn't listen."

"You're stubbornness got in the way?" I asked.

"Stubbornness, yea, I suppose it looks that way from the outside. I know I can be stubborn, but this was more than being muleheaded. It's just that everything that was suggested to me seemed to come out of left field. It was like I was told to throw away everything but the kitchen sink in terms of thinking about who I was and how I should live my life.

"It was more confusing than anything else. Believe me, I wanted my program to work, but man, it was scary, it was downright scary to have to make all of those changes."

"It sounds like you were holding on for dear life for awhile," I offered.

"Holding on, yea—with my fingernails. I was kicking and screaming, resisting going to the places these guys wanted me to go to. Holding on, you bet I was, I was desperately trying to hold onto myself.

"This may seem weird to you but I felt like if I just blindly followed what I was told to do, that I would melt away, kinda like the wicked witch in the *Wizard of Oz*. It honestly seemed that I would evaporate into nothingness. I wasn't so much fighting my sponsors, it was just the only way I knew to keep *me*.

"Do you have any idea how scary it is to grow out of your very skin? Man, what they were telling me to do, well, it was like, like they were trying to make me start to live my life left-handed after thirty years of living right-handed. Where is me in all of that?"

"So you're saying you weren't really being stubborn as much as you were trying to preserve yourself, your sense of who you were, your way of life?" I asked Paul.

"Bingo. That's exactly it. It wasn't so much what my sponsors were suggesting, it wasn't what the books were

suggesting, it was where this runaway train was headed, everything felt out of control, so I did the only thing I knew how to do, I decided to dig in. Dig in to slow things down, dig in to feel in control, dig in for self-preservation.

“And I did it the only way I knew how, I fought them tooth and nail on everything. I questioned everything. I needed an explanation for everything that they suggested I do. Why do I have to call you so much? Why do I have to read this book? What the hell is a higher power and how do you turn *it* over to *him*?”

“Listen, if I was going to turn myself inside out, I wanted some damn good reasons for doing it.”

“Looking back I see it a little more clearly. But I approached things like I had to be an expert on something new before I would ever try it. The result was I never had to try anything because I was too busy learning about it.”

“Well, you must have gotten the answers you were looking for, because look at how things are now!” I remarked somewhat admiringly.

“Not at all. You’re not getting my point. All that I got originally for all of my questioning and stubbornness was bounced around. In fact, I took myself further and further away from where I am today rather than closer.

“No, the harder I tried holding on, the more I questioned things and tried to understand them, the more bogged down I became. In fact, I began to question whether the program was right for me, after all it hadn’t done a damn thing for me.”

“That changed for you?” I asked somewhat perplexed by his winding and twisting path.

“At some point I realized that the program wasn’t suppose to do anything for me, that I was suppose to *give myself to it*.”

“You mean kinda of like being a Steppford wife, you just kinda mindlessly go through life like a puppet without a mind of your own?”

“No, just the opposite, I had to develop my mind more than ever. Questioning wasn’t using my mind. It was just having a knee-jerk reaction to everything I encountered. No, I decided to use my mind alright—I stopped questioning and began searching.”

“What the hell is the difference?” I asked, not getting any of this at all.

“The difference between questioning and searching—you mean that isn’t as obvious as the nose on your face?” Paul chuckled.

I just shrugged my shoulders.

“Questioning and searching, let’s see, the difference between the two, well, how about it depends upon what part of your soul the act is coming from.”

I frowned at Paul, not feeling the least bit comforted by this explanation.

“What I learned was when I was questioning, I was merely digging my feet in. I was coming from a place in my depths called fear. Fear of letting go, fear of losing all that was familiar to me and about me. Fear of not measuring up. And most profoundly, frightened of becoming so vulnerable, frightened of living life without all the ways I kept myself safe, no matter how much harm that brought me.

“The way I picture it in my mind is my questioning was a means of grasping. Kinda like being in a hurricane

with the wind blowing 150 mph. My questioning was my way of clinging to the last standing tree, believing that if I were to stop my questioning, I would be blown away with everything else.”

“Okay, Paul, so we’re basically talking survival here.”

“Yea, it was in my mind, no question about it, it was about survival for me.”

“All right, I get that, but what about this other thing, ‘searching,’ I think you said? What about searching and the part of the soul that searching comes from?”

“Um, I was afraid you were going to ask me that. Let’s see, searching, does searching and trust go together? Searching and, well, I guess faith is in there somewhere as well. Trusting yourself, your path, the people who you have invited on your journey, I dunno, there’s probably something about surrender in there to.

“Searching for me is like, like a willingness. A willingness to discover what is *so* about myself, that is what is the truth about my path, my life’s journey. It’s kinda like being *open to*.

“At least that’s what searching is for me. Questioning allowed me to dig in, searching empowered me to reclaim from within myself that which is sacred and liberating about who I am.

“Searching, that is an act of discrimination. You know kinda like being able to sort out what is useful for my life and what is not. Searching let’s me tap into the wisdom of mankind, sifting, sorting, trying on what I like and discarding what doesn’t feel right for me.

“Ultimately, searching led me to being more honest with myself.

“Again, I can only tell you what it looks like in my

mind. It’s the difference between driving a car with one finger on the steering wheel or both hands clenched furiously to the steering wheel.

“When I began searching rather than questioning, I realized I started to examine myself rather than question the way I searched. I became more open to the fact that this journey was about who I was rather than how well I performed on it.”

“Okay. I can get behind that, but, it seems to me, Paul, that something must have shifted inside of you as well. It seems like when you were questioning, you lived in an energy that was clutching at, holding onto, that everything was fear based.”

“Yea, I suppose you’re right. The shift, well let’s see, I suppose what shifted for me was, um, well, how about I went from fighting to accepting, the difference in energy between those two. I stopped fighting everything and everyone and started accepting.

“Not everything, by any stretch of the imagination, but little by little I am gradually learning to accept things more.

Let me propose a concrete way to think about the path that Paul walked. In a word, surrender. Surrendering your will. Surrender is a part of any system of transformation. There’s no getting around this simple fact. At this stage of the game, there’s a part of us that’s more intent on holding onto rather than surrendering. This conflict between our will clinging to all that is familiar, rather than surrendering to the steps that remove us from all that is familiar, creates an incredible amount of drama in our lives. It’s this very drama that prolongs our slumber, that prevents our awakening from occurring. Yet it’s this very



## *Bringing Honor to the Journey*



*Every creator painfully experiences  
the chasm between his inner vision  
and its ultimate expression.*

-Issac Bashevis Singer





way that I would abandon myself. All the choices I made, all the ways I was sabotaging myself. I have so much shame about how out-of-control my life became.

“But...” I tried to get out a word of understanding.

“But nothing. I did things that just had no integrity to them. Those things cling to me like sludge from a black lagoon.”

“Wow, those things still seem to cut real deep for you.”

“Yea, they do. So much waste, so much lost potential. And for what? Such a long time to go without me. So long to go without: without my dignity, my joy, my passions. I gave it all away, and sadly enough, I gave it all away so cheaply.”

The pain that was etched on her face reminded me of the pain I once saw on a mother who had to bury her two year old son.

I was moved by Laura’s profound sense of loss. But at the same time there was some sort of transformation that came over her. So much pain yet at the same time it seemed she was experiencing some sort of emancipation. It was as if revisiting her pain was enabling her to reclaim a part of who she was. It seemed as if the bitterness was melting into gratitude right before my very eyes.

I was only guessing, but perhaps gratitude for the opportunity to grow, maybe for the opportunity to complete something within her, or gratitude for the opportunity to learn something new about herself, I didn’t really know.

But what I took away from that conversation has made me think long and hard about what it means to honor ourselves. And what the connection between honoring ourselves and awakening our soul is.

Honoring ourselves is a two-step process. The first step is reclaiming. We need to reclaim the parts of ourselves that we have denied, pushed away, or cast aside. In order to honor ourselves, we need to reclaim what is rightfully ours, the good, the bad, and the ugly. Our emotional experiences, we need to reclaim our passions, all the ways we express who we are to the world.

Reclaiming. It’s an act of ownership. It’s an act of courage, an act of living your life in spite of the consequences of what that may bring to you rather than carving out a life where you are what you believe the world wants you to be.

Once we reclaim these pieces, we need next consistently give expression to all the parts of who we are. We need to express them, and more importantly refine them, add to them, consolidate them.

The connection to an awakening soul? Simple. You see, honoring ourselves is active, not passive. It’s not something to be learned about, it’s something we do.

Let’s end this section with an opportunity for you to identify parts of yourself that you long ago abandoned. What are the parts of yourself that you have come to miss? What effect has those parts of yourself not being there had on your life? Finally, what can you do to start reclaiming those abandoned parts?

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