

Reflections on the Inner Quality

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To my parents, Aubrey and Nanolene Lasater, to whom I owe everything

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Introduction

The Purpose of the Soul's Embodiment

One of the main purposes of the soul's embodiment in human form is to learn the proper use of free will in time and space, as well as certain other dimensions of spiritual and material existence. The proper use of free will for mankind is to align his will with the will of God to the best of his understanding and ability. My understanding of God's will for mankind is to take what He has given us as the character of our soul and to do something positive and good with it. I assume that God's intentions for His creation are good and that, therefore, the unique character of each soul is good as well. I call the character of the soul the "inner quality," because it is not only spiritual in essence but also appears in our biological evolution as seeds of empathy and altruism, instincts found commonly in human beings and certain other species.

Humans have the ability to use their free will to express in greater measure the goodwill in their hearts and minds, fulfilling in part the evolutionary potential of empathy and altruism. Thus, the inner quality can be understood as the potential goodness of the soul in embodiment, as the soul seeks to learn the proper use of free will in the world of form. When we use our free will to express our inner quality through personal decisions, thoughts, feelings, and actions, we are in fact doing God's will as we understand it.

When I speak of "God's will," I do not intend to imply that I know the totality of God's will. The universe is far too complex for any person to comprehend God's will in its entirety. Our very understanding of who or what God is varies considerably between religions, cultures, and individuals. What we can know with a degree of certainty, however, is our own best character as a human being. Our human best character is a close approximation to the spiritual character of our soul. Whereas our soul's character is a permanent part of our soul; our human best character is an evolving sense of goodness within our outer consciousness that grows and matures over time and through experience.

As I use the term, the "inner quality" refers to both the character of the soul as well as the best character of the embodied individual. For human beings in embodiment, the process of gradually knowing, understanding, and expressing the inner quality is how we become our true selves. Becoming one's true self is, in essence, a conscious alignment of one's free will with the character of one's soul. In this way, over time, we in embodiment become fully and consciously integrated with our spiritual side, that is, our soul. When this occurs, one of the main purposes of the soul's embodiment in human form is achieved: the material and spiritual sides of man are merged and become as one.

The Purpose of This Book

This book explores some of the implications of the inner quality by reflecting upon various topics. The first reflection describes how I discovered my inner quality and my initial thoughts on what the inner quality might mean for ethics and politics. These initial thoughts demonstrate that the application of one's inner quality opens the mind to new ways of looking at things, in essence providing an additional lens through which to view the world and oneself. The inner quality can be an agent of positive change in one's life.

Discovery and Implications of the Inner Quality

Finding My Inner Quality of Honor and Integrity

For much of my life, I was uncertain of who I really was, not really knowing my true self. I felt my intentions were good, and I also believed that my good intentions justified occasional misbehavior and a tendency to use expedient means to realize personal goals. My personality was pragmatic, realistic, and rational. I felt that if I wanted to do something and the feeling was natural, I should feel free to do it. My sense of morality rested on the belief that I was the center of my moral universe, having the authority to decide for myself what was right and what was wrong. The net result of this belief structure was that I sometimes behaved in ways not appropriate, even inadvertently sometimes harming in an emotional or psychological way those whom I loved or befriended.

At a certain point, the constant dichotomy of having good intentions yet acting amorally began to take a toll on my personal, social, and professional life. For seemingly inexplicable reasons, I found myself being falsely accused, my family and career began to fall apart, my health deteriorated, my self-esteem and confidence weakened, and doors that once easily opened seemed closed and sealed.

As I tried over a period of years to understand what was happening, I came to see that the root cause of my situation was a deep division within myself. My identity as a person was not fully integrated. I was not being my true self. Rather, I was living in a state of consciousness that was essentially gray, a mixture of salt and pepper in my inner and outer consciousness. On the one hand, I knew I was a good person; on the other hand, I sometimes acted in an amoral way with few boundaries in my behavior.

As I analyzed my situation, I began to see a connection between my behavior in the past and my conditions in the present. Somehow, the scales of justice were being balanced, although in causal ways not directly perceived by me. Nonetheless, I could feel the moral balancing within myself taking place. Then, in meditation one evening, I suddenly understood that there really were material and spiritual dimensions to life, and that these needed to be properly aligned in order for a person to be his or her true self. The source of my dichotomy was the lack of integration between my outer sense of self-awareness and who I was at the level of my inner self. I drew the important lesson that one should never allow oneself to become one's own worst enemy by separating the essential unity of one's material and spiritual sides.

Probing this idea further, I discovered deep within my consciousness the origin of my sense of goodness. It was a point of light, appearing to be teal green in color, which radiated the quality of honor and integrity. I instinctively felt that this was the character of my soul and true self. I needed to express this character inwardly and outwardly in order to be integrated as a whole person. To me, this was a profound discovery that tied together the components of my identity. It explained how my psychology could be brought into harmony and thus allow the full expression of my potential both materially and spiritually.

I had discovered the source of goodness inside of myself as an inner quality of honor and integrity, but that raised an interesting question. What is the source of that inner quality? If the inner quality truly was the character of my soul, then there must be a spiritual component of the cosmos. And if such a spiritual component existed along with the material cosmos, then that increased the probability of the existence of God and a truly multidimensional universe.

Ultimately, I reasoned, the source of my soul's goodness was God, the initiator of all things material and spiritual. This concept was strengthened by research showing that goodwill is often reflected in the behavior of many species of animals. There was scientific evidence that most mammals have an innate sense of empathy and altruism linked to certain hormones contributing to group survival.

I now had two plausible explanations for goodness inside of myself: a spiritual explanation based on the character of my soul, and a material explanation based on the evolution of empathy and altruism. Because of the apparent dual and complementary explanations for my soul's character of honor and integrity, I decided to call this fundamental character my inner quality, a term meant to encompass both its spiritual and material origins and expressions.

I further reasoned that, since we are all human beings, it was very likely that an inner quality could be found in most other people. Their inner quality might not be honor and integrity, but it could be one of the multitude of qualities associated with goodness. These qualities include a mother's love, mercy and forgiveness, healing, selfless service to others, a monk's quiet meditations. If it is true that there exists an essential human goodness within us all, then it seemed to me that certain fundamental ethical principles could be drawn of relevancy to individuals, society, and perhaps even to humanity as a whole.

Principles Implied by the Inner Quality

These basic principles include: the essential oneness of all of life, mankind's moral duty to express goodwill and to defend goodness, the utility of using the ethical and moral standards of the inner quality to guide one's life, recognition that the inner quality gives each person virtue and personal value, and the obligation of society and government to respect the value and free will of individuals comprising their communities. These fundamental principles can be summarized as follows:

Oneness of All Life

The inner quality provides a connection in consciousness between the soul of man and the embodied individual. The individual person and his or her soul are the material and spiritual dimensions of a single lifestream, even though that oneness is sometimes not perceived by the outer consciousness of the embodied self. As the character of the soul, the inner quality is a potential of goodness to be mastered by the soul as it learns the proper use of free will in time and space. As the best character of the embodied individual, the inner quality is the refinement of the empathy and altruism residing within the very DNA of human beings. Because the inner quality seems to be an aspect of God's own goodness – which is shared by all mankind – we ought to respect each other as souls regardless of our outer circumstances. Moreover, to the extent that goodness exists in other forms of life, there is a spiritual connection between ourselves and those other forms of life. This connection can be sensed as a deep feeling of oneness as commonly experienced in prayer, meditation, and other high levels of consciousness. Because of this spiritual oneness, we ought to respect other parts of life as well.

Moral Duty to Express and Defend Goodwill

A moral duty is something one ought to do for moral reasons. The motivation to do one's moral duty and the actions taken to fulfill that duty come from within the person by virtue of their personal decision. Such deeply held obligations usually cannot be forced upon the person by others. God and nature have given everyone a seed of goodwill which we call the inner quality; however, that inner quality may or may not be expressed by the individual utilizing free will. Since the inner quality is the best character of the person in both a spiritual and an evolutionary sense, if the person decides to work

towards expressing the inner quality, then the individual can become his or her true self. If the person chooses to ignore or work against the inner quality, it is impossible to become the true self. Spiritually and materially speaking, we ought to accept the moral duty to try to do our best to know and express our inner quality. Moreover, since life's experience usually teaches us that goodwill does not always prevail in this world, we ought to accept the moral duty to defend goodness whenever we can on this planetary home.

Ethical and Moral Standards

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the inner quality is that it contains within itself ethical and moral standards to help us decide the proper course of action, thought, and feeling in virtually all circumstances. The proper course of action using the inner quality's moral and ethical standards can be found through a rational decision-making process or through increased sensitivity to one's conscience. When a person contemplates his or her inner quality, both the rationality of the higher mind and a sharpened sense of moral intuition are activated. The higher mind can be used to develop a personal set of ethical and moral standards based on one's inner quality. These standards can be utilized to guide us rationally through the twists and turns of life on earth, like Kant's categorical imperatives. One's enhanced sense of conscience can provide instinctual guidance on which way to go. Since we have both rational and instinctual capabilities, we can combine the use of the higher mind and intuition to help us become our true self. It is important to keep in mind that the ethical and moral standards of one's inner quality belong to oneself, no one else. And it also must be borne in mind that, sometimes, those standards can differ from those of society and other individuals. The inner quality standards are meant to guide our human behavior so that our soul's purpose in being born on earth can be fulfilled.

Individual Virtue and Value

It is the presence of the inner quality that gives an individual true value and self-worth. One's inner quality is a person's innate virtue, in the Greek sense of the word. Virtue cannot be given or taken away by another person. As true virtue, the inner quality is the foundation of a person's highest sense of self-identity. Because the inner quality appears to be a spiritual gift of God to the human soul and also a fulfillment of eons of evolution, the inner quality gives the individual great personal and social value. The social value of the individual is closely related to the individual's expression of goodwill, whose characteristic and level of expression can vary between people. This variation in the type of goodwill and the level of its expression helps to define us as individuals within society. We can use our inner qualities to discover and develop our special talents and to focus our contributions to society. Thus, knowing and expressing one's inner quality and its distinct virtue can make our personal lives worthwhile and contribute something of value to the human race as a whole.

Social and Political Respect for the Individual

People have inner qualities of goodwill that give them virtue and value. Society and government ought to respect and acknowledge the worth of the individual, whether man, woman, or child. This is a fundamental principle of governance, although the demonstration of that principle varies to reflect cultural and circumstantial differences between civilizations, cultures, and nations. Wherever possible and to the greatest extent practicable, social and political institutions should encourage and empower individual citizens to discover and express their inner quality through the proper use of free will. At the same time, society and government must serve the interests of the whole of community, which requires some restraint of individual free will when its exercise might harm other individuals or society as a

whole. Maintaining a proper balance between respect for individuals seeking to find and express their inner qualities and preserving social order for the harmony and good of all is one of the greatest challenges for social and political institutions. The means by which this balance is maintained ought to be formally enshrined in constitutional and legal frameworks governing society. These frameworks should acknowledge the value of individuals and specifically define areas of free will expression which cannot be transgressed by government except under specific circumstances.

With this introduction to the inner quality and some of its implied principles, the next section describes how to define one's inner quality, using as example of my own inner quality of honor and integrity.

Defining Honor and Integrity

Classic Definitions

The terms honor and integrity are typically found in association with virtues such as truthfulness, faithfulness, commitment, and moral fortitude. Various dictionaries define honor (noun and verb) as doing what is right with a sense of high mindedness, fulfilling one's duty, and maintaining a positive and upright attitude. Integrity is a noun defined as the quality of being honest, having strong moral principles or convictions, demonstrating moral uprightness, as well as maintaining a state of wholeness within one's consciousness.

The virtues of honor and integrity are often linked, as they relate to a strong sense of morality, adherence to moral principles, doing one's proper duty, and being unified and whole in a proper way. There are slight differences in the terms, however, with honor implying living life and performing one's duty in a respectful and morally upright fashion, and integrity being strict adherence to a moral or ethical code.

Personal Definitions

I have distilled honor and integrity into a simple motto for myself and family: "Take what God has given you and do something good with it." To my way of thinking, if one can do this every day, then he or she is fulfilling their responsibilities as a human being and contributing something good to life and nature in return for the privilege of being alive.

I define honor and integrity as the character of my soul, because these are the feelings I sense from a certain force of moral character emanating from within the core of my being. The words honor and integrity are the English language constructs I use to describe a deeply powerful, emotional and loving force moving within my consciousness.

When I contemplate on the emanations of honor and integrity from within, my conscience and higher mind are activated, inclining me to act or not to act in certain ways. The inner quality thus can be used either rationally or intuitively. Although I have not yet mastered the various ways in which the inner quality can be utilized, I am thinking that the end result may be similar to the Zen archer who hits the target naturally, automatically, and without forethought – presumably because the archer, the bow, the arrow, and the target are all connected in some way.

Accurately describing the inner quality of honor and integrity is challenging, because we are discussing forces and powers that are not readily translatable into words or even rational thought. The inner quality appears to have multidimensional attributes that resonate deep within one's consciousness,

psychology, physical body, and spiritual senses. Explaining the inner quality is like defining the Holy Spirit, which can move an individual to do exceptional things in ways that are incomprehensible to observers or even to the individual himself.

Opportunity and Responsibility

The fundamental thing to know about the inner quality is that it extends wherever your being and consciousness exist: time and space; the physical, emotional, and mental bodies; the spiritual and material dimensions in which your lifestream resides. Wherever I am as an individual spark of life, the various vehicles I inhabit are instruments through which to express my inner quality of honor and integrity. Where I am, there also is my inner quality.

Because the inner quality of honor and integrity exists wherever my lifestream and consciousness exist, I have an almost unlimited opportunity to express my inner quality in myriad ways and in multiple dimensions. Having this limitless opportunity, however, comes with an inherent responsibility of doing something with the opportunity – that is, seeking to know and express the inner quality. Because the inner quality is the character of my soul, given to me by God and nature, I have an inborn moral duty to try to express and demonstrate honor and integrity in every aspect of my life. Within the sphere of my existence, it is my duty to apply the moral standards of my inner quality to the best of my ability. I have free will in this matter: I can express or not express my inner quality, accept my moral duty, or use time and space, materiality and spirituality as I wish. The choice of using my inner quality within the range of opportunities I have is always mine and none other.

Although my moral responsibility is large, my actual ability at any given time and space and other dimensions to express my inner quality is constrained by my current level of understanding, resources, talent, and self-mastery. My potential, in other words, is always greater than my ability to fulfill that potential. I am like a child in the universal home of God, learning how to create, how to move and function, how to interact with others, and how to live in the environment in which my soul is embodied. As I gain experience in these various dimensions, I gradually learn how to use my inner quality as a blueprint of creative goodwill that I can apply to all circumstances in which I find myself.

A large part of the evolution of the soul, therefore, is the discovery of its own inner quality, learning its characteristics, and mastering the tools and resources available through which to express its natural goodness. This gradual expansion of the soul's ability to express its unique goodness is one of the marvels of God's creation, which is accompanied in some ways by the expansion of the physical universe. God seems to have created a multidimensional universe, two aspects of which are material and spiritual. As the soul gradually matures and learns how to use its creative free will, the material vehicle through which it embodies becomes itself progressively more advanced and capable. These parallel processes of spiritual and material evolution take place over an enormous span of time, perhaps billions of years as measured on earth.

Spiritual and Material Sides of the Inner Quality

I have concluded that my inner quality of honor and integrity are aspects of God's goodness, expressed through my consciousness as I occupy a human body in time and space. My body's DNA has programmed within it millions of years of evolution, including the traits of empathy and altruism, feelings of concern and compassion for others essential for the survival of the species through cooperative groups. Thus, not only my spiritual soul but also my physical body contain seeds of goodwill

towards other parts of life. The goodwill within me is expressed through honor and integrity; in others, good will is expressed differently. However, all goodwill flows from the same sources of spiritual and material goodness permeating most if not all forms of life.

In one sense, the purpose of my entire lifestream's experience is learning how to express goodwill by living a life of honor and integrity. I have free will and creative capacity, so my expressions of goodwill can contribute to the overall expansion of goodness everywhere, within the limits of my authority and influence. The extent of that influence is a product of many factors such as my circumstances in life, my natural and learned capabilities, my karma and dharma, and myriad other personal and exterior conditions. Creating and expanding goodness through my inner quality is part of my higher nature as a human being. Thus, when I express honor and integrity, I am acting as my true self which aligns with both the will of God and the higher course of nature's evolution.

As a human being, I am in essence both spiritual and material. The two sides of myself appear to have different perspectives, purposes, and laws governing their respective functions. My consciousness is able to bridge these two sides of myself, and my inner quality is a common characteristic shared by the two dimensions of my selfhood. When I act with honor and integrity through my free will here on earth, I am integrating my spiritual and material sides, thereby becoming more of my true self. When I am so integrated in consciousness, I can be very creative in expressing goodwill. It is within this state of self-awareness that I am most in harmony with God, the souls of other beings, and the higher potential of life's evolution. It is within this state of consciousness that I can realize greater and greater portions of my potential as a soul and human being.

The Inner Quality and Decision Making

Honor and integrity are not merely linguistic formulations. They act as an instinctual trending toward making correct free will decisions in life. On a moral level, honor and integrity are somewhat like the laws of physics that define the parameters of what I can or should do. I can deviate from these moral guidelines, but they always exist. My whole being functions more harmoniously when I act within the parameters of honor and integrity, and the net result is that I feel better about life and myself. Honor and integrity do not control or limit my free will; rather, the inner quality provides my free will with the tools necessary to be maximally creative and constructive in life, while at the same time to be morally correct within the framework of my changing environmental conditions.

Before I discovered my inner quality, I was strongly inclined towards an amoral approach to life, believing that expediency was often the best way to achieve some goal I had in mind. Almost instinctively, I internalized the rationale that good ends can justify the means to bring them about. It took a long time and numerous painful experiences for me to learn that one's good intentions are not enough. One's moral character and quality of actions are highly important as well.

Still, as a political scientist, I was troubled by the idea that a single moral rule could always be applied. I felt there surely must be exceptions, such as when one's duties were to protect the security and survival of a group. In this case, failure to protect the group by any means necessary could have severe costs to those for whom one is responsible. It appeared to me that, in the case of high levels of leadership responsibilities, the need for strategy and political acumen might take precedent over any form of conventional morality. For example, the moral rules for a general leading war efforts would seem to be quite different from the moral rules of a civilian living comfortably in times of peace. I asked myself:

under the moral paradigm of the inner quality, how does one reconcile the apparent different kinds of ethical behavior required from the same person in vastly different circumstances?

Moral Relativity

As I thought about possible refinement of the rule that moral ends must be pursued through moral means, it seemed to me that specific moral guidance from the inner quality could vary somewhat, depending upon one's situation in life. For example, when I act with honor and integrity, I am required to do what is necessary to protect the interests of those for whom I am responsible. If I am a leader in society under crisis, my decisions would be different from those I might make as a private citizen in my own home in times of peace. I would be able to follow the moral standards of my inner quality consistently, even though my decisions would probably vary under the different circumstances. My ethical principles would remain the same because they were based on honor and integrity as I understood it to mean at the time. The basic moral rule we ought to follow, then, is simply to always do one's best in whatever the situation. Or, to recraft Shakespeare's admonition: To thine own higher self, be true.

One's moral duty, therefore, is to make decisions consistent with one's personal inner quality. If we act from that level of consciousness, we act morally because we are being true to our best interpretation of the character of our soul. Over time and through experience, we will evolve in our understanding and interpretation of our inner quality. The consequences of our actions do have moral repercussions, as conveyed through the concept of karma. Yet karma is measured not simply by the fruit of our action, but also by the motivation behind the action. Since we never know beforehand the full cycle of consequences set into motion by our decisions, we ought to focus on doing our moral duty as we understand it to be.

In some ways, the impulse and need to do one's moral duty is akin to the nature of animals, who act instinctively in ways that define their species. One of the distinguishing characteristics of mankind is our ability to make free will decisions. And one of the most persistent of all questions raised by mankind over the millennia is: On what should our decisions be based? Many philosophies, religions, cultures, and civilizations have been built on the various answers to that fundamental question. However, most of these answers can be grouped into two basic categories: (1) decisions ought to be based on a specific set of rules and (2) decisions ought to be based on individual determination.

The paradigm of the inner quality is based on the assumption that man has a twofold nature: spiritual and material. For most of us on earth, we are not perfected either spiritually or materially. In fact, we are maturing spiritually at the level of our soul at the same time that we are maturing materially while in embodiment. In both cases, our maturation centers on how to make proper decisions with our free will. And since the inner quality is both the character of our soul as well as our best human character, then the standard we are trying to master in learning the proper use of free will is the appropriate expression of our inner quality in all circumstances and planes of existence. It is this mutual goal that integrates the soul and the body, and it is essentially the moral duty given to us by our Creator: Take what God has given you and do something good with it.

Personal, Social, and Spiritual Morality

Even though one's inner quality ought to be the moral standard in one's life, there can be at times differences between the dominant moral beliefs of one's society and one's personal morality based on

the inner quality. Usually, this is not an insurmountable problem, because most social moral traditions have their origin within the minds and hearts of outstanding cultural leaders in the past – many of whom were attempting to express in their writings and lectures the very best character of mankind as they believed it to be. For example, most of the Ten Commandments contain moral precepts that are similar to or identical with the moral character of the human soul.

But there can be cases in which social morals fall completely outside the goodness of one's inner quality. One calls to mind the extermination of large groups of people in ancient and modern times based on racial or cultural differences between the majority and minority within a society or between those with power and those without. Such genocide is not an expression of goodwill, and an individual holding moral beliefs based on his or her inner quality would find mass murder to be morally abhorrent.

These cases present a very difficult dilemma for those adhering to inner quality ethics. The individuals could inwardly oppose such oppression without too much fear for their lives or harm coming to their loved ones. But to express publicly their opposition to those carrying out the genocide could very well bring pain and hardship to themselves with little chance of changing the evil that is being done. From the perspective of the inner quality: What should one do in cases such as this?

Here we see an example of the moral relativity of the inner quality, because there is no universally correct answer – only a circumstantially correct one. For few among us would be willing to sacrifice the lives of our family in exchange for voicing opposition to the evil actions of others. Yes, there are some among mankind who have made such a decision, putting not only themselves but also their loved ones at risk in the course of doing what they felt morally obligated to do. Many of these selfless people have been recognized as saints. But their path is not for everyone. Only those embodied souls ready to forgo all human ties and relinquish entirely the physical body are ready to make this ultimate sacrifice. Whether and when to choose this renunciation of earthly life for the sake of goodness and goodwill is a matter of individual choice.

As I contemplate this issue, I am not sure whether it is possible for the soul to master the use of free will on earth without having its physical embodiment being willing to surrender all earthly ties for the sake of complete integration with one's higher spiritual self. I do know that the morality of human beings does not always align with the morality of God and His Spiritual Hierarchy. This moral misalignment has been reflected in the story of Abraham and Isaac found in Genesis 22 of the *Bible* and whose implications were described by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* and further illustrated by the battlefield conversations between Krishna and Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. I myself have faced the dilemma of suspension of the (human) ethical, as when once I knew precisely what was spiritually correct but chose instead to protect the feelings of a friend. I believed I failed that test, because ultimately the outcome of my choice was far worse than its alternative. The lesson I drew was that, while infinite resignation may well be the spiritually correct moral choice, it often comes at a high cost in terms of one's personal moral belief. So high, in fact, that most human beings have great difficulty letting go of their earthly attachments.

Spiritual morality, in other words, ultimately requires the consciousness of man to be willing to forgo anything other than obedience to God's will. At the highest level, the inner quality, as the character of the soul, contains within itself the seeds of spiritual morality. At that level of consciousness, there is alignment between God's will, the will of the soul, and the will of the embodied person. The moral principles are aligned as well, and the infinite resignation – while difficult (witness Jesus at Gethsemane)

– is possible for the embodied person. That final surrender to God’s will, however, is something that requires a certain level of consciousness: perhaps one of pure innocence or perhaps one of hard lessons finally learned or perhaps one of incredible self-discipline and self-control. Until that level of consciousness is attained by the person in embodiment, the adherence to one’s best known character as the inner quality is a partial solution to how to live on earth as a human being yet also to express goodwill in one’s heart and goodness in one’s decisions. A person’s commitment to know and express his or her inner quality leads to an alignment with the character of the person’s soul and thence to the soul’s more permanent reflection of God’s will on earth and in heaven.

The Multidimensional Characteristics of the Inner Quality

The inner quality is an aspect of God’s goodness, the character of the soul, and the highest virtue of the embodied person. The inner quality thus exists in a multidimensional reality: the level of God and the creative forces of the universe; the level of the individual soul of a human lifestream; and the level of a person’s ethical principles. The inner quality is a pathway in consciousness that links God, the soul, and the human being as an individual and as a species of life. It may also link the human with other species of life on earth and beyond, although this is a subject I have not personally explored. The point is: the inner quality is multidimensional and can only be understood in that context. Identifying, expressing, and contemplating the inner quality is one way to begin exploring the many dimensions of selfhood and the universe in which we live.

All inner qualities have virtually unlimited ways in which they can be expressed and applied. For example, my inner quality of honor and integrity is an expression of goodness that can inspire and guide me no matter where in the universe I may be: whether sitting on my back porch watching the sunset with a cup of coffee in my hands or flying on a space ship to another galaxy. Honor and integrity are always with me. Honor and integrity also are practical moral guides that can assist me in deciding what I should do when faced with difficult challenges in life. As a human being, I am both spiritual and material; I exist in the world of ideals and I exist in the world of practicality. My consciousness can freely move from one dimension of my existence to another. And no matter where my consciousness is, there my inner quality is as well.

Because the inner quality is the character of the soul and the soul has its origins in the spiritual dimensions of God, focusing on the inner quality enables the embodied person to move in consciousness to and from the spiritual world. In other words, the inner quality is a window to the higher spiritual dimensions of which the individual is part. I can know God through the lens of honor and integrity, because honor and integrity are parts of God’s own character of goodness. Once I touch the source of honor and integrity which is within God, then other attributes of God’s character may become known to me. How far this exploration of God’s goodness can go, I have no idea. But one of the most remarkable things about the inner quality is that it is a doorway to one’s own spirituality and a point of connectivity to other parts of God’s creation. This means that every person has the potential to commune with God and His Representatives in the privacy of his or her own heart and mind. To do so, one follows the source of goodness within oneself.

How Can We Know that God and the Inner Quality Are Good?

When we speak of the goodness of God, we are making an inference from our own character of goodness. I consider honor and integrity to be good virtues. There are an infinite number of other characteristics of goodness or virtues, such as love, the proper use of power and leadership, wisdom, health and healing, ministering to the poor and needy, mercy and forgiveness, creating uplifting architecture, and beautiful art and music. Because I have an attribute of goodness and most other people also seem to have attributes of goodness, then the source of good as pure virtue probably exists within God.

To my way of thinking, the uncertainties we have over the existence of God is mostly attributable to the limitations of human understanding. It may be impossible for man to truly know God without knowledge of the entire universe, whose vastness is almost incomprehensible. In the Milky Way galaxy, there are about 250 billion stars and more than 100 billion planets. And there are over 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe. Each year, astounding scientific discoveries are being made about space, the solar system, Earth, and the nature of life itself. Yet with all of these discoveries, our conceptions of God have not really advanced too much. Our concepts of God seem not to have kept pace with our evolving understanding of the physical universe.

One way to grasp the goodness of God is to reflect upon the origin of our own goodness. This goodness has both an evolutionary origin in the inherited traits of empathy and altruism and a spiritual origin in the character of our soul. When we pursue the origin of our goodness back to our soul, we move our consciousness and perceptions into spiritual dimensions. Within the realm of spirit, such things as divine inspiration and the Holy Spirit are normal, just as the five senses and rational thought are normal parts of our physical existence. The spiritual side of our existence ought not to be denied or ignored by modern man, because human spirituality has been experienced and recorded for as long as humanity has been on the planet.

If we reflect upon our inner quality through the lens of our spirituality, we can sense the inner quality's infinite potential of goodness. It is that infinite goodness which gives us a glimpse of God's own character. Thus, knowing that God is good can be confirmed by knowing one's own character of goodness. There is a direct linkage between God, the character of our soul, and our true self as an embodied person here on earth.

The next section of this book describes some of the interesting characteristics of the inner quality, which further explain its nature and relevance to everyday life.

The Nature of the Inner Quality

Levels of Selfhood

We frequently hear the terms higher self, lower self, normal self, and so on. What do these terms mean and what is their relationship to the inner quality?

Levels of selfhood are really levels of self-identity – in other words, levels of consciousness that are operational in one's outer awareness. Our consciousness spans a wide range of states of being: subconscious, awakened consciousness, super consciousness, and so on. Psychologists and yogis have different definitions and levels, but these three illustrate the point I am trying to make.

When I refer to the lower self, I mean functioning at the level of the subconscious. That level mostly consists of survival instincts and the baser motivations of mankind. The higher self, in contrast, refers to functioning at the level of the higher mind, the soul, or the inner quality. This is the level of the ideal person living by his or her highest virtue. The normal self refers to the level of consciousness most of us are accustomed to when going about our daily lives.

Since the inner quality is the highest character of the individual, when one seeks to function from this level of consciousness, then the person is the higher self – the best person we can be at a given time and space because we are living at our maximum capacity at that moment. The ideal for an individual is to reflect his or her highest level of consciousness, and this is done by acting, thinking, and feeling predominantly from the character of one's soul, inner quality, or best virtue.

Our consciousness spans all levels of selfhood. However, the focus of our outer consciousness determines at which level we function in the world of form. The level of selfhood from which we function is mostly a free will decision on our part. We can control our memories, thoughts, feelings, and actions. This kind of self-control is something we learn through self-discipline. The motivation for making the effort to acquire self-control comes mostly from within, by the person desiring to realize his or her highest potential, to do the best one can do in all circumstances, to serve God or seek the betterment of mankind, or to pursue one's highest virtue in order to leave a positive mark on the world.

Infinite Potential of Expression

One of the most amazing characteristics of honor and integrity, as with all inner qualities of goodness within mankind, is the infinite potential of expression of those virtues. It would be impossible to exhaust the expression of honor and integrity in one lifetime or several. Honor and integrity can be reflected in almost all of one's activities, thoughts, feelings, memories, and spirituality. For example, I can reflect honor and integrity as I move about my house or do my job at work; I can express honor and integrity in my feelings as I love my wife and children and feel compassion for those in need around the world; I can feel honor and integrity as I think of my parents and grandparents and all that they did to bring me into the world and pass on to me much of what I know to function in my environment; I can express honor and integrity in my prayers to God, thanking the Divine One for the blessings I have received and the opportunities I have had in life. I can reflect honor and integrity in outer space or my living room; I can express honor and integrity as I work on my car or design bridges or play my guitar. Honor and integrity are characteristics of virtue which are mine to express infinitely over time and space and dimensions of existence.

Honor and integrity are like a towering mountain of virtue; however, honor and integrity are a single mountain in the great range of God's repertoire of goodness. Each inner quality is as infinite in potential as my inner quality. Everyone can use their inner quality to bring light and goodness into their world. At the same time that it has practical applications, every inner quality exists in spiritual dimensions as part of God's character. The inner quality's material and spiritual attributes enable it to be used by us as both a personal standard of behavior on earth as well as a gateway to greater interaction with our individual souls and common Creator.

High Moral Standards

The inner quality acts as a high, personal moral standard within the consciousness of mankind. When I go through life, I can use honor and integrity as a criteria to measure the moral correctness of various

responses I might have to a given situation. There is an inspiration method to do this, as well as a logical method. The best way to describe the inspirational feeling of what to do or not to do when using honor and integrity as a moral standard is that certain choices seem either to harmonize with or to be out of sync with my inner quality. I am not entirely sure where the origin of that feeling is. It seems to reside in my mind and heart as an enhanced sense of conscience. It is different from intuition, instinct, or habit. The more I use the inner quality as an inspirational moral guide, the more I am sensitive to it and the more useful it becomes.

Kant describes how one can logically deduce a categorical imperative to guide one's moral life. Using a similar method of logic, one can start with the character of one's personal inner quality and devise not only a singular categorical imperative but also a series of moral standards by which to live. This seems to work for me as well as the inspirational approach, and they complement and validate each other for the most part. The categorical imperative works as an easy reference for the mind to use whereas the inspirational approach requires a certain receptivity within one's feelings to be most effective. Eventually, as I attain a greater degree of control over these two approaches, I hope that I will automatically do the correct thing like the fabled Zen archer; however, I am not yet at that point.

The Many Gifts of the Inner Quality

As one comes into contact with the inner quality and contemplates its meaning and role in one's life, it becomes apparent that there are many gifts that flow from that source of goodness within a person's character. Here are just a few examples of those gifts:

- The inner quality is the source of one's true value as a human being.
- The inner quality is the unique identifier of one's soul in spiritual realms and in the planes of matter.
- The inner quality is the source of one's inspiration to create good things in life.
- The inner quality is a refuge one can turn to when the world seems to be falling apart.
- The inner quality is the doorway and path to one's integration with God and the Spiritual Hierarchy of goodwill that serve earth's evolutions.
- The inner quality is what enables one's human self to be a conduit for the Holy Spirit.
- The inner quality is a personal moral standard that one can use to guide one's behavior in times of moral challenge.
- The inner quality provides a common link in consciousness between oneself and other people of goodwill on the planet, regardless of their cultural backgrounds.
- The inner quality provides a standard of excellence towards which one can work to improve oneself and plot a course for future development in life.
- The inner quality is a light within that, when allowed to be expressed by one's free will, enhances the beauty and dignity of self in all manner of circumstances.
- The inner quality is a model for personal behavior in action, thought, and feeling that is consistent with one's true self and is in alignment with the will of God and the highest potential of the human species.

In short, the inner quality is a precious resource available to every man, woman, and child on the planet: a wonderful gift from God to our individual souls.

Reconciling Free Will and Determinism

Within the range of human observation, there are events which seem subject to free will, which seem determined regardless of free will, and which seem to be completely random. These events and their causes, when viewed separately, have given rise to different theories of reality. In fact, the universe contains all of these kinds of events and probably more beyond our experience.

Limiting our discussion to the normal human condition, there has been much debate over whether people really do have free will or whether a goodly portion of their life is determined. The inner quality can help reconcile this debate in a practical sense.

For example, I have the free will to express honor and integrity in my life or not. I can further decide how to express that inner quality. At the same time, the inner quality is not something I created or constructed. Rather, it appears to be a spiritual character of my soul and hence originating from God. I cannot change what I am in essence. I cannot make myself into a butterfly. Therefore, even though I have a degree of free will in expressing my inner quality, there are many aspects of my inner quality which cannot be determined by my free will. In other words, as a human being, I have degrees of freedom at the same time that I live within certain parameters. And I cannot ignore the fact that my life can be snuffed out in an instant by an earthquake or typhoon or a car accident.

Free will, determinism, randomness – all are realities in my world. Not having complete control over my life, the best I can do is to try and be my highest character and to fulfill my duties as I understand them to be. This implies a certain kind of operational behavior, in which I seek to contribute to goodwill on earth while at the same time maintain a degree of nonattachment to the outcome of my efforts. From this perspective, it seems that our soul's embodiment on earth is mostly to be measured by a gradual improvement of our character through free will choices in action, thought, and feeling. Perfection and permanency are beyond our powers. We can, however, strive to improve ourselves and that appears to be our best choice.

Knowing What Is Good

In the world of relativity in which we live, knowing with absolute certainty what is good is a challenge. Opinion as to what is good differs between people, cultures, time, place, and circumstances. There are very few things that we can identify as being always good. Things which occur in our lives or choices that we make can be viewed as either good or bad at the time, but often our opinions are reversed when we see in 20-20 hindsight what the long-term results were.

Faced with a reality that is always changing, people tend to look for distant horizons on which to fix their gaze so that balance can be maintained and direction discerned. Sometimes a talisman is kept in our minds or hearts or person so that we have something on which we can always rely. This psychological need for stability or a point of reference is natural for human beings, and the fact that we appear to have both material and spiritual sides to our existence makes it fairly easy to find something on which we can depend.

One such point of reference is an individual's inner quality. True, the inner quality is organic in that it evolves over time and with our greater understanding, but its essential characteristic of goodness remains permanent as long as our soul exists. It is this essential goodness within our souls that can give us the moral, psychological, mental, and emotional stability we need to survive and go about our daily business with confidence and anchorage. If you know your inner quality and diligently seek to use its

character as your moral standard, then your decisions – while not always 100 percent correct or unchanging – will be based on your best intentions and expected outcomes. This pursuit and expression of personal goodwill provides enough of a definition of good for us to get by in life.

Congruency with Established Religions

There are about 4,300 religions in the world. Some 4.8 billion people (roughly 61.5 percent of the world's population of 7.8 billion) practice one of the five most influential religions: Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. Clearly, religion plays an important part in the lives of most people. There are many reasons for this, but two of the most important would seem to be the spiritual comfort these complex religions give to their followers and the clear moral guidelines these religions provide to their members. In most cases, the founders of these religions, or their inspired thinkers on which the religion's teachings are based, were outstanding human beings who spent their lives trying to understand the relationship between God and man, spirit and matter.

Although some within religious schools of thought may believe that their understanding of God and spirituality is the absolute truth, the reality is likely to be closer to the Indian parable of the blind men describing an elephant: as human beings, what we perceive is highly subjective and not at all the complete truth. Nonetheless, there does appear to be some common ground among almost all religions: a belief that good exists in the world, that the origin of this goodness is a Spiritual Being often referred to as God, and that mankind has a spiritual side to his existence.

The contributions to humanity made by established religion, their founders and teachers, cannot be overestimated. One is amazed when reading Confucius, St. Augustine, and al Farabi, and the recorded deeds of Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Gautama Buddha, Akbar, Gandhi, and many, many more great souls. The combined efforts of these individuals have moderated human behavior and inspired much goodwill among men. Overall, religion has been a good thing for both people and society.

I have found, in my endeavors to explore the implications of the inner quality, that the main difference between following a religious teaching and pursuing one's own spirituality is that the first approach is largely based on faith while the second approach is largely based on the need to understand oneself. It is my belief that many if not all of the founders of the various religious schools of thought must have turned within themselves at some point in their lives to discover the source of their spirituality. These thinkers articulated their discoveries in different ways, but they were all touching a portion of the body of God and trying to share that experience with others to help them find a compatible spiritual path.

I have studied many spiritual teachings and almost always have found insights of value. At some point, however, I decided that my spiritual education needed to be anchored in the real world through personal experience rather than derived from the words of others. When I pursued my own spirituality, I discovered the inner quality which – interestingly enough – greatly enhanced my appreciation and understanding of the teachings I had earlier studied. What I have concluded, therefore, is that all people have a spiritual aspect to their being. Some individuals live their spirituality without giving it a second thought; they are naturally integrated body, mind, and soul. Others need the structure and support provided through established religions. And still others want to explore their spirituality in their own way. At first glance, these approaches seem different. However, the end result is largely the same as they eventually lead the soul back to God.

The next four sections briefly consider how becoming the true self influences one's perception of duty, the relationship between language and knowledge, the nature of good and evil, and the multidimensional characteristic of consciousness.

Becoming the True Self and Knowing One's Duty

When you look at other people and reflect upon yourself, one of the impressions is that individuals have a vastly different understanding of who and what they are. Even though we are all human beings, some of us see ourselves as servants, some as masters, some as simple folk, some as sophisticated intellectuals, some as farmers, some as CEOs or presidents of nations, some as saints, some as hardened criminals, some as healers, some as soldiers and fighters against evil in this world. And it is also true that perceptions we hold of ourselves vary over time, and that our personality and character change over the span of our lives.

To a certain extent, we can be creators of our own selves. We can get more training or education, or acquire more experience in certain areas, that will give us new capabilities and widen our knowledge. And with these enhanced capabilities and knowledge come gradual changes in how we view ourselves. And how we view ourselves has impact on the person we become both to the world and to our sense of self.

The ability to mold oneself is one of the distinguishing characteristics of mankind. If a person wants to improve their character in order to become his or her best self, then that individual can do so. One way of doing this is to seek out the inner quality and to make daily efforts to reflect that best character in daily life. The desire to be one's true self can be a powerful psychological drive for positive change within people. If we have that desire, we can deliberately harness that motivation for the purpose of realizing more of our potential. Doing this, we can become more fulfilled as individuals and contribute to the improvement of society.

On a spiritual level, our souls want our embodied selves to maximize our goodness and improve society. Here in the planes of matter, we can fulfill our soul's desire by embracing a sense of duty to do what is morally right. On earth, doing what is right is very often accomplished by expressing one's inner quality wherever possible.

Because of the moral ambiguities which accompany much of life's experience for human beings, it is difficult to foresee the cause and effect sequences that flow from our activities. The inability to know what is right and what is not correct can result in a kind of paralysis from analysis, such that we limit our activities and hence our contributions to life. Rather than being self-limited, it is usually better to approach life from the perspective of doing one's duty as one perceives it to be. One key is to try to align our sense of duty with our current understanding of our soul's character, or the inner quality. When we do this, our decisions and actions are usually not morally deficient, even though they may not be perfect in an absolute sense.

Life on earth is not perfect nor permanent. Life on earth is perhaps best seen as a schoolroom for the soul in which it gradually learns through experience in physical form how properly to use free will. The roles played by the soul, the inner quality, free will, and one's sense of duty on earth are essential to the successful outcome of this process.

Experience, Vocabulary, Knowledge, and Understanding

There is a complex relationship between experience, vocabulary, knowledge, and understanding that relate to the inner quality of mankind. It is important to keep in mind that we do not have to understand everything in life before we express our individual inner qualities. Honor and integrity are characteristics of my inner quality, and when I express this quality I am being my true self, albeit not in a perfected way. In general, however, living a life that is aligned with the purposes of my soul, as I understand that purpose to be, is the correct path for me to follow.

The degree to which we are able to express our inner quality will change over time, as we go through various experiences and gain in theoretical and practical knowledge. Wherever we are on the path of becoming our true self, we ought to try to set the course of our life on a line of progressive self-improvement. This can be done by seeking to become more of our inner quality. Inherent with walking this path are self-defined duties and obligations we have due to our individual karma and dharma. Karma and dharma are the specific things that must be done to balance our debts to life and to fulfill our responsibilities as a soul in embodiment. Our karma and dharma create the path we walk on towards the goal of becoming our true selves, and it is our inner quality which keeps us on the right path.

The vocabulary we use to explain our understanding of these concepts is problematic, because our understanding changes and because language itself is often inadequate to convey to others what we are experiencing and what we actually mean. Further, disagreements over the meaning of words such as God, soul, truth, good, evil, and inner quality abound among mankind. Not everyone even believes that such words describe anything that is real.

Adding to this difficulty in using language to convey abstract ideas is subjectivity. Very few, if any, spiritual experiences or insights are the same across all individuals, civilizations, time, and space. Repeatedly throughout history and cultures, experiences with God and the Spiritual Hierarchy are described differently. Much of this is cultural. If I am a Han Chinese, I look at the world through different lens that if I am an American Anglo-Saxon. It is natural that our senses and perceptions and interpretations of those stimuli are different. The Bible, or one of its interpretations, may seem to be the absolute truth to many Christians; however, the wisdom of the ancient Upanishads may seem a far more accurate description of reality to a Hindu. Does that mean that either the Bible or the Upanishads is wrong? I do not think so. I think they are just different descriptions of reality; or, as is perhaps more likely, description of different parts of reality.

This points to a systemic problem with spiritual teachings of any sort: many people tend to believe that their own subjective interpretation of reality is true and that, therefore, the reality described by someone else is wrong. Examples of this abound, and not just in religion or spiritual matters, but also in politics, philosophy, economics, climate change, art, proper food, raising children, and most other spheres of human expression and activity. The tools of reason and the scientific approach are attempts to narrow such differences, but the schisms that exist between cultures, nations, and people suggest that this systemic problem of subjectivity is a permanent characteristic of the human species.

What does the relativity of reality due to subjectivity mean theoretically and pragmatically?

Theoretically, it implies that knowledge of absolute reality is beyond the capacity of mankind. Pragmatically, it means that mankind, to survive as individuals and society, must learn to function in ways suitable to their own nature. This dual perspective – theoretical uncertainty, operational

functionality – has worked through the ages and likely will continue to do so. At the same time, however, there is an internal compulsion within many people to try and reconcile this duality, at least within themselves.

This duality can be bridged somewhat by following the internal compass of the inner quality. The inner quality, being the character of the soul, is spiritual in nature. The inner quality is also reflected in the material world through the sense of conscience and the evolutionary characteristics of empathy and altruism found within almost all human beings. If we are able to identify our inner quality by reflecting on the source of goodness within ourselves, then we can devise an operational set of ethical principles by which to guide many of our difficult and often moral decisions. Following this guidance helps to align our spiritual and material sides. As greater alignment occurs, then our perceptions of reality (theoretically and pragmatically) come into increased harmony. The net result of this process is that we become more of our true self and are more likely to find greater fulfillment and happiness in life. This process, centered on the outer expression of the character of the soul, contributes to the purposes of the soul being embodied here on earth in the first place. What is occurring is an evolution and refinement of our outer consciousness.

The Healing of the Soul

I assume that a single soul (sometimes referred to as the spirit) inhabits the single body of a person. If the doctrine of karma and reincarnation is true, and I believe it is, then there is a close moral connection between the karma of the individual in previous lifetimes and his or her present body. This would be true, even though many bodily qualities are probably independent of karma. Whatever form the body may take, it is important to keep in mind that the purpose of the soul's embodiment on earth is to learn to make proper choices with free will in time and space. This material world contains the physical, emotional, mental, and etheric bodies that comprise the vehicles the soul utilizes during the embodiment phase of the soul's evolution.

As long as there is close alignment between the soul's purpose in being embodied and the bodily extensions of the soul on earth, then all is well. The soul's evolution continues as its physical embodiments learn to make proper decisions in material dimensions. If, however, a disconnection occurs between the soul and its earthly embodiments, then problems can arise. These problems occur primarily because the outer consciousness of the embodied person loses its spiritual contact with the soul. What then can happen is that the person makes repeated errors in free will decisions, which results in negative karma and a further separation of the person from his or her purpose at the soul level of consciousness. And when this disconnection between the spiritual and material aspects of human consciousness is prolonged, then duality rather than oneness appears as reality.

This is a dangerous situation, because the material self has little or no internal spiritual compass to guide its behavior and the soul may become fractured with few remaining ties to its embodied self. It is this situation, in which the soul can appear to be scattered and the aura of the individual is like mixed salt and pepper, which requires the healing of the soul.

The healing process involves the reconnection between man's material and spiritual sides. Since the problem began with the misuse of human free will, the healing must begin with some initiation on the part of the human self. But how to begin, when the morality of the human has become, at best,

amorality and the difference between right and wrong has become diffused by decisions based on expediency and self-interest?

In my case, the process of reconnection began with a spiritual insight into the existence of my inner quality, made possible, I believe, by a combination of God's mercy and my own deeply felt love of God. Earlier in this book, I described the discovery of my inner quality and some of the implications of that discovery. One of those implications was that I needed to establish a closer relationship with my soul.

When you try to engage your outer, waking consciousness with the higher consciousness of your soul, you can use the shared character of your inner quality as a kind of communications and coordination link between your body and soul. As you do this, a healing process is initiated that gradually integrates the material and spiritual aspects of your being. What occurs is that you use your free will to express the goodness of your inner quality, thereby drawing into alignment and purpose your outer self in the world of form with your inner self as soul in its spiritual domain. The healing of one's soul, then, is really the integration of one's outer and inner consciousness and bringing these aspects of oneself into proper alignment with the will of God. By expressing our natural goodness in daily life, we fulfill the purposes of our soul being embodied in time and space and contribute to the fulfillment of God's plan for the earth.

The next section discusses various lessons of life that I have learned since discovering my inner quality.

Lessons of Life

If we are souls embodied on earth, then our existence in time and space is a temporary one. We are here to learn certain things, especially how to use free will to do what we ought to do in various circumstances. In this section, I look back on my life to draw out some personally meaningful lessons on what life means and how we ought to act. My approach to these lessons is to imagine my future self coming across this collection and perhaps finding something of value on how to live. There is no order to these thoughts. I just jotted them down as they came to me over the years.

Trust God and Trust Yourself

If you believe in God, then you need to trust God. And if you trust God and His creation of your soul, then you need to trust your true self. Life for humans is a constant state of evolution, in which we are gradually gaining self-mastery here in the planes of time and space. God is the Master Architect of the Universe, and we have a certain role – individually as a soul and collectively as a species – to play in the great drama that is unfolding all around us. Our souls are in various stages of maturity. Some of us are younger or older than others; some of us are more or less spiritual than others. It really does not matter where we are on the scale of humanity's evolution. What matters is that we recognize the potential of ourselves from the perspective of our being a soul. The part of ourselves which is the character of our soul (the inner quality) is the best character we can be. Since our inner quality is infinite in potential, we can constantly improve ourselves as we grow in understanding of who and what we truly are as individual lifestreams. Therefore, we should trust and have confidence in God and in ourselves as we explore our potential to become a better person.

Trust Your Instinct and Conscience

One important lesson to learn in life is to trust your instinct and conscience. Your instincts and conscience are feelings to move in this or that direction, and they seem to be based on a much wider perception of reality than your rational mind or its interpretation of what is being perceived by the five

basic senses. Instinct and conscience may not always be right, because their promptings can sometimes be influenced by bias. Nonetheless, the subtle impressions of instinct and conscience ought always to be considered before making an important decision. Especially important is to listen to your promptings when they clearly suggest something you are doing or about to do is wrong. And then there are instances in which a clear prompting is felt that you should do something. The source of these internal suggestions is not always clear to the outer mind; however, because a human being is multidimensional, it is best to pay attention to instinct and conscience since they appear to reflect these non-material aspects of ourselves.

Learn to Trust Others

Trusting other people is sometimes difficult, especially when one has been “burned” several times in the past by trusting the wrong people. No one is perfect in this world, but some people are more trustworthy than others. It is important to be able to distinguish between individuals who wish you no harm and those who wish to take advantage of you in some way. Unfortunately, the most exploitative of individuals sometimes have learned to disguise their mal-intent very well. The old biblical adage of being wise as serpents and harmless as doves is good advice for the ages. The main lesson here is that those who wish you no harm but only good ought to be trusted, especially if they are in a position of teacher or protector. If you do not trust these individuals, then you only limit what you can learn from them.

Take Delight in Nature

When you take the time to observe nature and its parts, you will be amazed by how much can be learned from the smallest to the largest of creatures and objects. We are part of nature and connected to other parts of nature in a fundamental way that can be felt through our subtle senses. From the smallest ant to the largest galaxy, there are patterns and cycles that are in many ways reflected in our own existence. To truly know yourself requires that you know yourself as being connected to nature. That knowledge gives you confidence in the future of your lifestream and provides insights and sources of power you can use to navigate the life we have as humans on this planet.

Enjoy the Simple Things in Life

If you do take the time to observe nature, you will find that the simplest lifeform and smallest object are remarkable in their complexity and astounding in their beauty. When you look at a newborn child or peer deep into the delicate folds of a tiny flower, there is true amazement to be found there. And from that amazement comes a deep appreciation of the privilege of being alive and the opportunities we have to enjoy life in so many ways, great and small. Taking time to enjoy the simple things in life gives you tremendous resilience to go forward in your duties, whatever they may be. The reason this is so is because the simple things are the foundation of everything greater than itself. Being aware of and appreciating that foundation conveys a sense of being grounded in life and able to go forward in whatever direction you might go. Also, taking time to observe and enjoy the simple things in life builds within you a certain sensitivity as to when you are acting in harmony with nature and when you are straying too far from the Tao.

Honor Your Father and Your Mother

Our parents brought us into this world, and we would not have been born without them. Not all parents are good, and none are perfect. However, wherever possible, we ought to honor our parents for the good they have given us and the opportunity for life which they have provided. We honor our parents in

the same way that we honor God. God has created our soul; our parents have created our body. All the opportunities we have in life are the result of God and our parents. So, it is proper for us to honor them and seek in our lives to become the fullness of opportunity they provided. For without God and without our parents, we would be nothing.

Be Kind and Gentle When Possible

Mankind has strong survival instincts, and the tendency to feel and express violence and lust are deeply ingrained in our subconscious. But we are more than survivalist; we are transcendentalists. We have the ability to control our baser instincts and to amplify the goodness in our hearts. One expression of that goodness is to be kind and gentle to others whenever possible. It is not always appropriate to be kind and gentle, but where it is appropriate we should do so. These expressions of our higher nature strengthen our character of goodness and assist others in realizing their own good character. Because life in many ways is so fragile, we ought not to harm other parts of life except when it is necessary, such as in instances of survival.

Be Courageous and Wise

Life is filled with surprises, challenges, and opportunities. In facing these circumstances, it is often better to be adventurous than to avoid the discomfort that comes from the unexpected and unknown. Wisdom plays an important role in being courageous, however, because wisdom tempers the adventuring enthusiast and encourages the timid responder. There are many occasions when we do not know what is around the corner, yet we cannot stand still forever. While we ought to be willing to take a chance when it seems a good thing, we also should avoid being too risky. All in all, the best guide is to walk through life with eyes open and senses keenly alert. Keep the body fit, the spirit strong, and the will to survive and prosper foremost in one's mind.

Learn to Let Go

Nothing in this universe is permanent as long as it occupies time and space. Humans have their circle of life, galaxies have their cycles, and dinosaurs have had their time of earthly domination. Reality is constantly changing and evolving in the material planes of existence. There is no person, place, or thing that you can hold onto forever. If that is true, then it cannot be wise for us to build our lives around something that is impermanent and subject to change at any moment. A certain degree of nonattachment is a good trait to develop, because there is a time to hang on and a time to let go in almost all circumstances in life. Keep these dual human traits in proper perspective and balance is a challenge, but necessary in order to lead a happy life.

Living with Duality and Singularity

You cannot avoid duality in life. Male and female, young and old, black and white, pain and joy, rich and poor, good and bad, spirit and matter, and positive and negative poles and charges. No matter where you turn, there seems to be duality. Sometimes the duality exists together, such as the left and right sides of the brain and the hands and feet. Sometimes the duality exists as different point on the circle of life, such as birth and death. How you deal with duality is an important factor in the quality of your life. We must learn how to accept the dualities of existence, and at the same time master the ability to make the most of each point on the cycle of life. Interestingly, however, there is an almost gravitational pull of the tendency towards merger, oneness, and singularity. Duality and singularity are themselves part of the duality of existence, even while we are all one within the wholeness of the universe. In some ways,

we are like magnets, whose poles seek their opposites: a duality that cannot be avoided when the object is viewed separately, yet a merger that is almost irresistible when the opposites of two objects are aligned. Another analogy is with the force of gravity and the force of the expanding universe. These forces are incredibly powerful, and – like atoms – can release amazing amounts of energy when they are either separated or forced together. The implications of this to human life appear to be significant, although I have not yet thought too much about it.

Share the Good Things

In many ways, life is fleeting. There are lots of challenges and sadness, worry and anxiety, fears and pain as we move through the years. But there are also moments of pure joy and happiness, when smiles come to our faces and we feel grateful to be alive. We ought to share these moments of happiness, particularly with loved ones, because they are buoyant memories that carry all who know them through the hard times. These are campfire stories that will be passed from generation to generation, filling the surrounding darkness with heartfelt laughter and a bonding that lasts forever.

Take Care of Your Family

Of all the blessings one can enjoy in this lifetime, one of the best is family: spouse and children, and all the relatives. The family is the cradle of the Christ child, and as parents we have a responsibility to do everything we can to protect and nourish the positive potential of each child. And as children, we have the responsibility to honor our parents and family elders, to learn from them, and to pass to our own children the lessons of life all generations have learned before us. Families are like giant oak trees, with deep roots and expansive branches that occupy a large space in time than can span for thousands of years. We carry the genes of our forefathers and we pass them on to countless generations who continue to reflect the family's strengths and weaknesses. Family is really a unique branch of humanity, and we owe it to ourselves past and future to do all we can to increase the family's fortune both materially and spiritually. But a special part of our hearts will always be with our immediate family, for these are the ones we know intimately and who stand beside us through troubled times and good times. Family: it is the basis of civilization and culture, and it is the foundation of ourselves.

Enjoy Your Success and Learn from Your Mistakes

You will always have success and failure in life. On those occasions when you are successful: Celebrate and be joyful! On those occasions when you fail, take the time to reflect on what caused the failure. Was it some external factor, or was it some internal issue inside yourself that led to the failure? These are important questions to ask, because we must learn from our mistakes if we are to grow in wisdom and competence. And when we consider what may have contributed to the failure, we should take into account the karmic repercussions of our past misdeeds. Karma has a way of returning to us what we have sown, but not always in a direct way that we can easily perceive. Other than due diligence, there is little we can do to prevent the harm that others do to us. However, the ignorance, mistakes, and misdeeds that we have demonstrated can usually be corrected through our own efforts. Knowing what these errors were and deliberately setting out to correct our mistakes can greatly improve our character and increase our chances for increased success in the future.

Become a Friend of Jesus and the Spiritual Hierarchy

It is important to remember that God, Jesus, and the angels do not need us to worship them. We worship because that act increased our love and obedience and thereby helps us along our own spiritual

path. I personally believe that God and the heavenly hierarchy want us to be their friends, committed to fellowship and determined to play our role in the great drama of life. As we mature on our journey in life, we ought to draw closer to the brotherhood and sisterhood of light that together work to fulfill God's plan throughout cosmos. It is a great honor to be part of this fellowship of light, because it brings goodwill to all of mankind and life everywhere. It is the sense of common goodness and purpose that forms the bonds of our friendship with Jesus and the spiritual hierarchy. That common spirit of love and service is a sustaining force that can give us strength to carry on in whatever situation we may find ourselves. That common spirit enables us to receive guidance and support from our spiritual friends, and that same common spirit enables our elder brothers and sisters on the path to inspire us as we seek to go about doing the good works that our Father has given us to do.

Always Honor God

Foremost in our thoughts and feelings ought to be a sense of love, appreciation, respect, and honor for God – the Supreme Creator of cosmos and our spiritual Father. Our very existence is due to His creative force in the universe. We have our own consciousness and free will, and thus it is proper that we put much of our attention and energy into the maintenance of ourselves and the fulfilment of our earthly responsibilities. But always in the back of our mind and in the depths of our heart, we should be grateful to God and ask for His continued blessings and assistance. We should be in a state of constant prayer at a certain level of our consciousness, and we ought always to be guided by the principle of returning to life all of the good that God has given us. The analogy I like is that God is the sower of all the seeds of cosmos; the spiritual hierarchy are the gardeners who watch over and assist in the maturation of the seeds; and we ourselves (body, soul, mind, and spirit) are the seeds God hopes will bring forth a bountiful harvest of goodwill.

Never Tire of Doing Good

At times, we may find ourselves tired of always trying to be good, almost as if we were pushing a large rock up a mountain. I think this sense of tiredness in doing what is right stems from an issue of self-identification. If we think of ourselves as a soul, expressing our true character and thus being our true self in human form, then we are likely to feel natural in constantly doing good things. If we think of ourselves primarily as being human with a dual character of good and bad, then we are likely to feel comfortable expressing that duality. Our personal goal, then, ought not to only do good things but rather to become our true self, which is naturally good. For some of us, this is more easily said than done, because changing one's self-identification is often difficult. Like Saul's experience being transformed into Paul on the road to Damascus, something extraordinary may have to happen in one's life to move one's outer consciousness away from the purely human to the Christ within. How that transformation is to occur is usually not known to us beforehand. It is not something one plans for, or even knows exist. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that happens unexpectedly and without explanation. It is a real but unique experience that has the effect of reordering the priorities in one's life and opening one's eyes to a new, more expansive view of reality. When this occurs, then the sense of working hard to be good disappears, and there is a natural desire to reflect goodwill in all of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions. I believe this transformative experience is helped if you strongly believe in God or in the spiritual world; however, the experience may be possible under almost any circumstance because it is not controlled by you.

Always Try to Work on Things Greater than Yourself

One of the keys to self-improvement is to become involved in issues of greater importance than yourself. This can be in any field, as long as it is highly valued by yourself. By working for something worthwhile, your engagement will improve your own character over time. This occurs because you initiate a process of expanding your field of self-interest. Rather than focusing on self-gratification, you begin to identify yourself with larger issues and to feel the pleasure and pain of these issues as they wax and wane and impact lives far beyond your immediate self.

Leave the Earth a Little Better than You Found It

It is a simple idea, but we need to remind ourselves that we are visitors on this planet and that our time here is only for a short period. We are, however, creators and free will agents of change, so we can and do have a tremendous impact on the earth. While we are here, we ought to be constructive agents of change rather than destroyers of what is good. Whatever our contributions, our goal ought to be to leave the earth a better place than when we found it. This is the minimum we can do in appreciation for the gift and opportunity of life.

Be Mindful of Cycles and Be Patient

If there is one lesson that everyone should know, it is that cycles govern nearly everything in human and material existence. Cycles have their stages, and most cycles cannot be rushed or skipped. It is wise for people to be aware of cycles and wherever possible to harmonize their expectations, activities, thoughts, and feelings with those cycles. This often requires patience, because the human mind and emotions can run much faster than some of the cycles we are subject to. How to live with the natural flow of cycles is the message of the *Tao Te Ching*, a key to successful farming, and critical in the raising of children. Attempting to abrogate the cycles of human life often results in unfavorable conditions. Therefore, working with cycles and being patiently mindful of their stages are quite important to a person's wellbeing and happiness in life.

Learn from Others

There is an old saying that if an ant has something to teach you, heed it. The implications of this are that nature is filled with commonalities that are applicable to human lives. Any walk in nature will teach you something useful. All parts of life have something to teach us, if we are willing to learn, because of our common existence on earth. Human beings are gifted with reason and the ability to integrate knowledge, so it is relatively easy for us to learn from our environment. The major limitation we have in learning from others is a certain blindness brought about by bias and arrogance. But these are limitations we can overcome, especially if we want sincerely to improve ourselves.

Don't Be Blinded by Your Ego

The ego is our sense of identity, our sense of self and individuality. Even though the reality of our self is quite expansive and multidimensional, all too often we identify with only a limited sense of self. What we see in the mirror each day might be called our lesser ego. But if you look deeply into your eyes in the mirror, you can see something behind the eyes that uses the body as its instrument in the world of form. We can call that the super ego or the spiritual ego. That higher spiritual ego interacts with our material body; we often refer to the spiritual ego as our soul. And, then, when we meditate on our soul, we can see that there is a certain character within the soul. This distinguishing character of the soul is what I call the inner quality. The character of the soul, our inner quality, is the spiritual essence of our individuality.

When we function from and express this inner quality, we are our true self. It is important to reflect periodically on the various layers of our selfhood, because we are all these things at the same time – our consciousness is the variable, moving from one layer of selfhood to another. Before we make important decisions in life, it is useful to consider the completeness of ourselves. This broader perspective of selfhood can help us avoid being blinded by the more limited point of view of our lesser ego.

Seek to Align Your Will with God's Will

I assume that we are souls inhabiting human bodies for the purpose of learning the proper use of free will here on earth. If this is true, then how do we learn to properly use free will? One way is to align our free will with the will of God. That can be done in several ways, including: (1) being absolutely natural, just as animals live naturally in their environment – a modern day version of the Garden of Eden; (2) trying to do God's will as best as we understand it, knowing that mistakes will be made along the way but that the laws of moral cause and effect will gradually educate the soul as to how it should act as a free-will agent; and (3) expanding our understanding of reality so that the reasons are clear why we ought to align our will with the will of God. These three paths, or yogas, reflect the tripartite nature of God: love, power, and wisdom. Each of these paths is made easier if you can find and identify with your inner quality, which is the character of your soul.

Be Open to Other Cultures and Views of God

God has myriad faces and characteristics that are reflected in the many symbols of God seen in different religions, spiritual beliefs, and traditions found around the world and through the ages. There have also been millions of good people walking on earth, each one reflecting a different character of the soul. This suggests that, if one wants to better understand God and the full potential of goodness within the human species, then one must be open to other cultures and their views of God. Such deep exposure to the wisdom of the ages will quicken the consciousness and increase understanding, because no single person, nation, culture, or civilization possesses all knowledge.

Explore Your Potential for the Expression of Goodwill

We are all human beings. Each of us has tremendous potential, and some very serious limitations. We are imperfect creatures; yet, taken as a whole, we have talent and opportunity to maximize the value of our life. It is important that we know ourselves, because with that knowledge we can concentrate on those personal attributes which hold the most promise of success and contribution to society. Since we are both spiritual and material with soul and body, we can also learn to move and act multi-dimensionally. Opportunity for the expansion of our goodwill is thus almost limitless. We ought to take full advantage of that opportunity.

Spend Time in Nature to Learn the Tao

Nature can teach us many things about life and how we can be better aligned with its flow, which the Chinese have long called the Tao. It is natural that all living things strive to survive, live a better life, procreate to perpetuate the species, and live a cyclic life with stages of creation, birth, growth to maturity, and finally passing on from physical embodiment. It is natural that there will be within a given species some members that are more or less advanced than others, that some will be happy and some sad, that some will be successful and some failures, that some will have more wisdom than others. It is always the case that some seeds will grow strong and some will never take root. If we observe nature closely we can learn many insights. Generals can learn strategies of offense and defense by watching

various creatures, philosophers and scientists can learn knowledge from ancient forests and distant galaxies, and we all can find balance in our minds and emotions, spiritual and physical bodies. Nature can teach us so many things because we are part of nature and because both humans and nature are part of God's singularity. It is this essential oneness and its common nurturing spirit that gives us insight into the Tao.

Nourish and Strengthen the Four Lower Bodies

One way to consider the human condition is to view an individual in terms of the four lower bodies an individual has while in embodiment. These four lower bodies are often called the physical body, the emotional body, the mental body, and the etheric body. The physical body is the vehicle of the soul we most closely associate with when we pinch our skins. It is the densest of the four lower bodies because it is composed of physical matter. The emotional body is the vehicle for the soul's feelings and emotions while in physical form. The mental body is the vehicle for the mental activity of the soul while in physical form. And the etheric body, the least dense of the four lower bodies, is the vehicle for the spirituality of the soul while in physical form. Each of these bodies need to be nourished and strengthened in order for the entire person to be healthy. The need for food, drink, and exercise for the physical body is self-evident. The emotions need to be calmed, kept positive, and reinforced with goodwill in order to be balanced and to function well. The mind needs to be active in learning new things and absorbing the lessons of life in order to be rational and properly intuitive to guide us in our free will decisions. The etheric body needs spiritual nourishment, which can take the form of meditation, allowing the Holy Spirit to flow through the consciousness, and deliberately seeking to align one's will with the will of God. To the extent that each of the four lower bodies are nourished and strengthened, they can more easily be balanced and aligned with each other. This gives the individual soul the best opportunity to evolve on earth and to play its full and productive role as a person in embodiment. A healthy, strong, balanced, and aligned four lower bodies is a goal all of us should reaffirm and seek each day as we go about our individual activities.

Don't Do Things That Cause Permanent Harm

It seems inevitable that we will cause harm to someone in our comings and goings in life. Often, these harms are done inadvertently. At times, some harms are deliberate but – for most people – these are rare and usually minor occurrences. What we should keep in mind, however, is that some harms can be long-lasting and have potentially devastating consequences. These occurrences of great harm ought to be avoided by people whose goal it is to contribute goodwill to life. The cost to those harmed, and ultimately to ourselves due to returning karma, is simply too high to be easily balanced. We always should think before we act and carefully evaluate whether our actions are appropriate for the occasion.

Defend Your Country and Honor Its Finest Traditions

The laws of karma heavily influence the country in which we are born. Every country has its good characteristics as well as those that ought to be improved. To the extent possible and within moral boundaries we ought to serve our country. It is especially important for citizens to identify and support the special quality of goodness that each country and its people possess as part of their collective contribution to the evolution of mankind. Some countries excel in wisdom, some in art and music, some in freedom, some in social responsibility, and so on. Individuals born within these countries usually are part of a mandala of souls brought together in embodiment because their dharma and karma are intertwined – often linked together to advance some great and noble cause on behalf of mankind as a

whole. This is the social side of the responsibility of individual souls, who must not only master the expression of their inner qualities but also do their part in fulfilling the purposes of the mandalas of which they are part.

Don't Be Self-Defeated

One of our greatest challenges is to have a balanced and accurate assessment of ourselves. We are not simply human egos; we are souls created by God and blessed with unique inner qualities of goodness and goodwill. It is important that we hold on to the vision of what we are and what we can become. No matter how difficult the circumstances of life, we ought always to look beyond our current condition to a higher and better future. One key to avoid being self-defeated is always to have a vision of oneself as being greater than one's present situation. That vision of a better future will serve as a magnet to pull us through even the most challenging of conditions. Another important key is to be extremely careful in one's personal and professional life. There are always those who will seize upon your mistakes and use them against you, even if your intentions and overall character are good. Do not let your personal behavior undermine your opportunity to do good in life.

Do Not Manufacture God's Will as an Excuse for Human Activity

For those who seek to do God's will and who have goodness in their hearts, it is sometimes easy to manufacture God's will to justify some action, thought, or feeling that is not God's will at all but rather a product of our own desires. On occasion, this reflects an unconscious mixing in our hearts and minds of our own will and what we believe to be God's will. On other occasions, the manufacturing of God's will to suit our own purposes is deliberate and sometimes deceitful. Because God's purposes are often opaque to humans, we tend to accept ideas when they are presented as being authoritatively the will of God. This requires us to always be diligent and careful of the words and actions of others, as well as our own, because the motivation to be convincing in one's arguments is very strong in many people.

Expediency versus Morality

As a general rule, never use good intentions to justify immoral activities. This is expediency as commonly used in statecraft. It is almost never appropriate in personal behavior, where the standards of morality mostly apply. Expediency is sometimes justified when one has a social responsibility as a leader to protect a state, community, or family under threat. In our personal life, we ought to act, think, and feel according to our highest moral standards, and this is true whether we are presidents or citizens. There are countless examples of the fall of the rich and famous, which very often occur because of personal misbehavior justified on the basis of their high social standing.

Seeing Things from the Perspective of God and the Spiritual Hierarchy

One of the most useful exercises to help develop higher consciousness is to practice seeing things from the perspectives of others. For example, the perspective we have as individuals is different from the perspective of God and the saints. As individual human beings, our primary concerns are to survive and to live the best life possible. Presumably, from the perspective of God, the survival of the human species, the wellbeing of the planet, and the evolution of the universe are matters of greater concern. The perspective of the Spiritual Hierarchy seems to be somewhere between man and God, in that the saints appear to be tasked with the responsibility of making the will of God understandable and actionable to humanity. The reason for this exercise is to remind ourselves that we have duties and responsibilities in our sphere of existence, while other forms of life have different duties and

responsibilities. We are an important component of life, but we are not the only component nor the greatest component. Such considerations help us to put our individual and social lives into proper perspective, and this perspective can assist us in sorting our options and choices as we go through life.

We Cried, and Then We Moved On

I remember when my father told me that my mom had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. I was shocked and saddened, and I asked dad how he and mom were dealing with this terrible news. He said, “We cried, and then we moved on.” I have always kept this lesson in my heart, because my own life – as the life of all human beings – has been filled with great joy and deep pain. Many times I have marveled at the capability of human beings to bear such extremes of emotions in their minds and hearts. Tears of joy and tears of sadness are the signature expressions of all mankind through thousands of generations. Usually, at some point in our life, we think about how we can correct the mistakes we have made and heal the harm we may have done to others. It is here, in this state of wanting to make amends, where the discovery and expression of one’s inner quality comes to mind. For it is nearly impossible to heal all of the wounds we have given, to erase the sadness and hurt we inflicted over this lifetime and others. It is also nearly impossible to take upon ourselves the degree of suffering we have brought to the world. Other than to ask God for His forgiveness, the best we have to offer in atonement is our inner quality, the character of goodness residing within our own souls. If we can identify that character and express it in our daily activities, then we can begin to contribute to the overall improvement of mankind.

The next section discusses how a community of goodwill might be established and maintained, based on the assumption that the inner quality is a character of goodness found within most if not all of mankind.

Thoughts on a Community of Goodwill

Ideal Communities and the Character of Man

Over the centuries, there have been many descriptions of an ideal society. A few examples include Plato’s *Republic*, Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, H.G. Wells’ *A Modern Utopia*, James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*, and Thomas Campanella’s *The City of the Sun*. There have also been many attempts to create utopias built around ideals, often spiritual in nature. These include several communities established in the United States during the 18th and 19th centuries by religious groups such as the Shakers, Transcendentalists, Rappites, Perfectionists, and Amana Inspirationists. Almost all utopias have failed, because an ideal society cannot easily be created by people who are less than ideal themselves.

This section examines the components of an ideal community based on the principle of goodwill. As discussed earlier in this book, goodwill is closely related to altruism and empathy, two traits that are genetically inherited by virtually all human beings. Altruism and empathy are natural impulses tied to the survival of the species, in that they encourage, reward, and support the efforts of individuals to live harmoniously in society. Such social harmony reinforces cooperation between people for the purposes of security and the other indispensables necessary for meaningful life such as a dependable food supply, adequate shelter, procreation, care for the young, shared labor, exchange of goods and services, and the opportunity to develop culture and civilization. The very fact that we are all born of fathers and mothers and are totally dependent on others for many years after our births establishes within us a need for society. We have free will and are independent in terms of self-consciousness; however, we would not long survive without being members of various communities.

If goodwill does exist in most people, then theoretically it should be possible to establish a community based on goodwill. There are, however, other aspects of human character which tend to work against such a community, such as selfishness, resentment, revenge, narrow-mindedness, lust, cruelty and violence, lack of discipline, bias, prejudice, ignorance, ego, pride, and reluctance to improve one's character. From the study of history, even though mankind may possess goodwill, these and other negative qualities make the long-term survival of ideal communities very difficult, indeed.

Given these conditions on an individual and social level, how is it possible to build a community of goodwill? What follows are a few personal thoughts about what might be necessary for such a community to be established in the modern age and to have a reasonable chance of surviving for more than a short time.

Commitment to a Principle of Goodwill

For a community of goodwill to exist, there must be a commitment by all of the members of the community to the principle of goodwill. How goodwill is expressed varies from individual to individual. However, the commitment to goodwill – however it may be understood – is vital to the creation and sustainment of a community. If that commitment does not exist, the cohesiveness of the community can easily be lost because the purpose of the community is not clear and people will tend to go their own ways.

The essence of goodwill is not a single action, thought, or feeling, but rather the gradual expansion of each individual of their full potential as a son or daughter of God. This potential exists as the character of the soul, whose qualities are many and varied just as the quality of beauty, balance, health, or wisdom contain within themselves almost an infinite range and potential of expression. There is no such thing as a single standard of beauty, for example. Instead, there is a tremendous range of possible expressions of beauty, each one of which contributes to the overall goodness of life among mankind.

The community of goodwill, then, is not a rigid social organization. It is like an incubator of the soul of each of its members to find and express their inner quality, or character of their soul. To achieve this purpose requires many things, but of special necessity is the freedom of the individual to come to know his or her true self and to have the opportunity to express that true self in a supportive social environment comprised of like-minded citizens.

If this type of commitment to principle could be summarized, it might be as follows: All members of the community of goodwill ought to believe that God and nature have given them life, mind, consciousness, free will, and opportunity to find and express the special character of goodness residing within their soul. Each member of the community ought to commit to improving himself over time to the best of his or her ability and to contribute what he or she can to improving human society as a whole. In the community of goodwill, individuals commit to a process of self-improvement.

Leadership

Having proper and effective leadership is one essential requirement for the establishment and survival of a community of goodwill. The leader must always maintain a community-first perspective. This gives the leadership a broader view on issues that enables them to make decisions or recommendations that advance the wider interests of the community rather than the interests of specific individuals or groups within the community. The leader must remind his fellow citizens that the purpose of the community is to nurture individual self-improvement within a supportive social context.

Just as different kinds of economic and governance institutions are possible for communities of goodwill (see discussion below), so different types and styles of leadership are possible. Some common characteristics of effective leadership within a community of goodwill could include:

- A high degree of charisma and effective communication skills
- Hard-working and focused attention
- Ability to prioritize issues and policies, and to make clear and timely decisions
- Genuine love, compassion, and empathy for citizens and their personal concerns
- High-degree of intelligence, intuition, wisdom, and ability to think and act both strategically and tactically
- Ability to maintain the dignity of office and a commanding presence, yet also accessible when needed

Checks and Balances

It would be rare and indeed fortunate to have a leader or leaders of a community of goodwill who combine in near perfect balance the essential qualities of spirituality and managerial talent. That is why it is often necessary in a community to divide the functions of spiritual leadership and operational leadership. This division of leading roles – reflecting to some extent the spheres of idealism and pragmatism – comes at potential cost such as in conflicting priorities. However, potential costs are equally present under a single leadership, such as misuse of authority and the absence of competing yet valid perspectives on complex issues. In the world in which we live, a community of goodwill is more likely to need a system of checks and balances than it is to find perfect spiritual and material leadership combined in one person. That being said, the challenges of cooperation between two or more leaders representing different spheres of responsibility need to be carefully addressed in the community's governing documents.

Managing Individuality and Free Will

One of the major challenges in sustaining a community of goodwill is to allow the expression of individual free will while at the same time establishing parameters within which that free will can be expressed without damaging the cohesion, harmony, and safety of the community as a whole. People are individuals; and individuals have their own characters and personalities, interests and biases, perceptions and misperceptions. Even in a community whose members are committed to the expression of their best character of goodwill for all, there will be differences of opinion, approaches to problems, preferred solutions to challenges, and matters of taste and culture. These differences generate a dynamic community of creativity – which is good for the community and its members. However, dynamic environments nearly always generate some friction, countervailing forces, and disagreement – which must be skillfully channeled and managed to avoid cliques and eventual social disintegration.

Joining and Leaving the Community

A community is comprised of members, and membership in a community can be determined by a multitude of considerations, including birth within the community, immigration into the community, invitation to join the community, and absorption of surrounding territories and people into the community. Also, membership in the community can be reduced by many situations, such as death, voluntarily leaving the community, being asked to leave the community, migrating to surrounding neighborhoods and towns while still attending community functions, and extended trips away from the

community due to jobs, education, or other compelling circumstances. Like all communities, a community of goodwill will have a dynamic membership, so the processes for joining and leaving the community should be smooth and well understood by everyone. Membership should be open to all who can commit to the community's principles, and separation from the community ought to be free of condemnation and guilt.

Division of Labor within the Community

Communities exist because very few individuals can be completely self-sufficient. Human beings are genetically inclined to form groups in order for the majority of its members to live in greater security, comfort, and peace than they could if they lived in isolation from other people. One of the greatest benefits of community is that the whole can become greater than its parts. This is due to the fact that members possess different talents and strengths.

A natural division of labor can occur within a community that is unified in its members' desire to improve themselves in a social environment. One key to the success of such a community is for everyone to feel encouraged to contribute what they can in terms of individual talents to the collective benefit of all. This requires that the community be sufficiently organized and directed so that everyone's efforts are coordinated towards some purpose. This degree of organization and cooperation implies good leadership and a general willingness of the part of all to work together to achieve common goals.

The actual categories of labor within a community of goodwill are very similar to those found in other communities. These categories are primarily determined by need and function. Many of these will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent paragraphs, but in general the needs and functions of communities might be considered as administrative, business, health, education, transportation, energy, culture and entertainment, farming, manufacturing, construction, water and sewage, security, fire control, emergency management, religion, and family support. How these functions are to be carried out is largely determined by the size and complexity of the community, as well as its relationships with nearby communities or metropolitan areas.

Common Goal of Pursuing Self-Mastery

Within a community of goodwill, it is fairly easy to move too far in either of two directions. The first direction is to be excessively spiritual; the second is to be overly pragmatic. If the community is too spiritual, then it will not survive for long because the essential functions that make a community sustainable will not be properly addressed. If the community is too pragmatic, then it can lose its spiritual purpose and hence unifying power that draws like-minded people together to achieve some noble end. To maintain a proper balance between the spiritual and material sides of the community, it is important to keep in mind that the community's ultimate purpose is to serve the needs of the soul in embodiment.

Fundamentally, the soul is here to learn how to master free will in the planes of matter – that is, learning how to make proper decisions as a human being. There are at least three ways this can be done: (1) following the guidance of a master or teacher who has learned the lessons of life and is sincerely trying to teach others how to do so; (2) following the inner ethical and moral standards of one's inner quality, or character of the soul, and thereby gradually becoming one's true self; or (3) attaining such a high level of self-mastery that one acts naturally in a correct way. Ultimately, the soul is

intended to return to the embrace of God in a state of oneness in spirit and consciousness. The soul is not intended to live perfectly forever on earth.

From the above perspective, the establishment and sustainment of a community of goodwill is not the end purpose of the souls who comprise the community's membership. The community's purpose is to serve as an incubator for the soul's development in the world of form, giving the soul opportunity to learn the proper use of free will and to become the fullness of its potential as a son or daughter of God.

Within the community at any given time, there will be a wide variety of souls in different stages of development and evolution. Some members will be seeking to discover and become their true self; some will be seeking the most direct way possible to return to a state of oneness with the Creator; some will be seeking specialized training to fulfill their individual missions in life. All of these purposes for the souls of the members need to be served in the community. So in this sense, the community of goodwill is like an extended family giving birth to, nourishing, and training the souls of its members to enable them to fulfill the purposes of their lives on earth. The community of goodwill is not an end in itself; rather, it is a temporary home for souls seeking to realize their full potential.

The Community's Economic Basis

Every community has, as one of its foundations, an articulated or assumed economic theory which forms the basis of most of the community's economic activities. Two such theories are the communal and free market systems. A communal system is one in which all members of the community contribute their labor for the common prosperity of everyone. A free market system is one in which individuals work primarily for their own benefit but also contribute to the community through some sharing of their labor, resources, and profits. Between these two systems are numerous hybrid arrangements in which individuals are free to make personal profits in whatever capacity they choose, with the understanding that each person must also contribute substantially to the commonweal.

The economic system of a community of goodwill could be any of the above, depending upon such factors as the size of the community, its style of leadership, the community's purpose, the talent and skills of its members, niche opportunities within the overall economic environment, the amount of capital and kinds of resources available, existing or potential infrastructure, and other such considerations.

It is essential, however, that the type of economic system adopted be suitable to the community of goodwill that it supports. The common problem with an economic system is not too much abundance but rather lack of sufficiency. Determining the proper economic system for a community of goodwill requires a careful calculation on the part of community leaders, planners, and businesses to find the optimum system for the community in which they live.

Governance

Every community has a system of governance, that is, the way in which the community is governed. It is important that the system of governance match the economic basis on which the community is built and that it reflect and support the community's purposes. In the case of a community of goodwill, the fundamental purpose of the community is to provide security, shelter, and opportunity for the souls of all members as they individually and collectively learn the proper use of free will in the world of form.

In the taxonomy of political systems, there are a large number of basic types, with the most common being defined by forms of leadership: rule by one (monarchy or tyranny), rule by few (aristocracy or oligarchy), and rule by many (democracy). Each of these basic types can be further subdivided into many other forms of government (e.g., constitutional monarchy or representative democracy). Over the centuries, no single form of government has proven itself superior across all political, social, economic, cultural, and geographic situations.

From this consideration, it would seem that a community of goodwill could have several alternative forms of government, several of which could be efficient and effective – as long as it matches the unique circumstances of the community and the government itself is properly staffed. Regardless of its form, however, community governance ought to include outstanding leadership and administrative personnel to provide the necessary services and support to enable the community and its members to live safely and to enjoy a productive and happy life.

The types of services commonly provided by a large, modern community government typically include several of the following:

- Board of Elections (if leadership democratically selected)
- Community Resources and Services
- Corrections
- Community Administration
- Courthouse
- Economic Development
- Finance
- Fire and Rescue
- Housing and Community Development
- Health
- Inspections, Licenses, and Permits
- Office of Law
- Police
- Planning and Zoning
- Public Works
- Recreation and Parks
- Technology and Communication Services

Working with Cycles for Community Resilience

One of the spiritual keys to a successful community of goodwill is the ability of the community's leaders and members to work with the myriad cycles underway within and without the community which influence the community's resilience and wellbeing. Like a gigantic clock with wheels within wheels spinning harmoniously to indicate the proper time, so individuals and communities function best when the workings of the various relevant cycles are understood and coordinated wherever possible.

When community members look upon life as an intertwining of cycles, great and small, they can more easily acquire the perspective needed to adjust to the ebb and flow of circumstances that affect us all. There will never be a time of endless happiness, nor a time of endless sorrow. Nor a time of boundless prosperity, nor a time of constant want. These things, like all things, come and go in cycles. How we

react and adjust to the cycles is all important. Some cycles we cannot influence at all; however, we can nearly always control our reaction to these events.

What is required of a community of goodwill, then, is a strong and universally held resilience in the face of expected and unexpected change. That resilience comes from an understanding of the nature of cycles, a firm commitment to the principles of goodwill that define the purposes of the community, knowledge of one's true self, and a certain optimism that life goes on under the best and worst of times.

Constraints and Liberties

In a community of goodwill, there will always be constraints and liberties which impact the way people live. In terms of constraints, these will vary between individuals and between communities. There are both universal constraints and relative constraints. Universal constraints include such physical laws as gravity and the many constraints imposed on us by our environment such as weather, climate, topography, and geography. Relative constraints are more personal in nature, such as physical limitations, mental capacity, past experience, and social constraints such as economic status. Relative constraints do not impact everyone in the community, but rather relate primarily to the challenges faced by individual members of the community.

Liberties are somewhat similar in their universal and personal applications to the community and its members. Examples of universal liberties are those rights and privileges bestowed upon all citizens through the systems of governance affecting the community. Personal liberties would include such free will choices as whom to marry, taste in dress and appearance, and one's profession and hobbies.

Knowledge and sensitivity to the universal and personal spheres of constraints and liberties are important for the harmony and wellbeing of the community. It does little good, for example, for leaders to try to force the community to unite against the constraints of gravity or for a cultural committee of the community to try to force uniformity on all personal appearance and behavior. For the community to function best, everyone should know the constraints and liberties impacting the community and its members. Although the parameters of these constraints and liberties will vary over time, some agreement on their applicability can greatly assist the successful establishment and maintenance of a community of goodwill because such agreement helps to define the scope of the community's purposes and activities.

How Goodwill Can Be Expanded

If we assume that the will of God is good and, further, that it is God's will that goodness be expanded throughout the Creation, then the role of nature and mankind on earth must be related to that expansion of goodness in some way.

In terms of nature, we find that God's will is reflected in the evolution of physical objects, such that plants and animals, mountains and seas, all act naturally in their own ways which propel their evolution forward. From the perspective of mankind, we do not see God's ultimate purpose because its scale is so vast as to be incomprehensible to our minds. However, from a theoretical point of view, we can assume God has a purpose or goal in evolution that could include the expression of goodness through different lifeforms and objects that, together, create the unique environment of earth. In this theory, God's goodwill is baked into the forces of evolution so that goodness is part of a continuous unfoldment of the Creation.

In the more observable case of mankind, we know that we have a certain range of free will which enables us to modify our behavior and even evolution (think of genetic manipulation). We can use our free will to create new lifeforms and new types of physical objects; we can significantly impact nature and the environment. This power of free will and creativity suggests that we as a human species could do a great deal – if we so choose – to expand goodwill.

The objective of the community of goodwill is to enable people to learn how to use their free will and creativity to express and expand the goodness within their own character. I call this goodness, the inner quality or character of the soul; however, the seeds of goodness can also be found in mankind's DNA as shown by the near universal presence in people of empathy and altruism.

If the community of goodwill succeeds in its objective, then the community helps both the evolution of the soul as well as the evolution of the human species. We can, with conscious determination, use our free will and creative powers to expand goodwill in ourselves and in our communities. This is of practical value to humanity as a whole in that it leads to more peaceful conflict resolution and higher levels of social cooperation – both of great utility in the survival of the human species.

Security, Law Enforcement, Emergency Management, and Response

Every community needs systems of security, law enforcement, emergency management, and response to protect the community and its members from threats that originate from inside and outside the community. Security here is used in the larger sense of protecting the community from all-hazards, manmade and natural. Law enforcement applies mostly to police activities to ensure that applicable laws are obeyed with the jurisdiction of the community. Emergency management involves the planning and preparation necessary to respond to natural disasters and other emergencies that endanger the lives and property of community members. Response refers to fire department, ambulance, search and rescue, and other activities that provide immediate help to those in desperate need within the community. To be effective, all of the above activities need to be coordinated and responsibilities allocated, because there can be considerable overlap of authorities during a crisis.

It is sometimes tempting to think that a community comprised of well-meaning people would never be subject to threats, but that is not the case. The world is a dangerous place in many ways, and threats can be both personally directed at the community or its members, such as in a crime, or threats can be completely impersonal, like a flood impacting everyone in its path. Threats can also originate from within the community, such as house fires, sewage spillage, or domestic violence, and threats can originate from outside the community, such as severe weather, earthquakes, or hostile neighbors.

Threats need to be realistically addressed through planning, preparation, and operations so that the community and its members are protected to the fullest extent possible. Threats are best handled from an all-community perspective, so that members are educated as to what threats potentially exist and what steps can be taken – personally and collectively – to reduce the risk or to mitigate its effect should the worst come to pass. These training and operational measures ought to be undertaken by trained professionals, and they should be overseen closely by those responsible for administering the community.

Healthcare

In addition to security precautions, every community should have a robust system of healthcare to maintain or improve the health of community members through the prevention, diagnosis, treatment,

recovery, or cure of disease, illness, injury, and other physical and mental impairments that may occur within the community. There are many elements in a healthcare system, including hospitals, ambulatory surgical centers, doctor's offices, urgent care clinics, nursing homes, hospices, rehabilitation centers, mental health and addiction treatment centers, pharmacies, and imaging and radiology centers. Not all of these facilities need to be located within a community; however, they should be accessible and plans should be in place to move patients to these external facilities when needed. The community of goodwill ought also to consider having counseling services available, as well as health insurance offices to conveniently advise and serve members who might need assistance in this area.

Retail Stores

The type and number of retail stores vary enormously, and which ones ought to be included in the community of goodwill depends on many factors. In general, the presence of retail stores will reflect the free market and the desires of members. From the perspective of community governance, there needs to be clear procedures allowing the establishment of retail stores and the setting aside of specific real estate within the community where such establishments may be built. Mostly, the retail stores provide a convenience for members and therefore the opinion of community members should be considered before major retail stores are permitted to be located within the community.

Rules and Regulations

In order to function smoothly, a community of goodwill needs rules and regulations. These ought to be clearly defined and widely distributed. The rules and regulations can be developed by different means, but a common method would be through a Board of Directors who combine their varied experiences and insights to ensure that the community has the legal infrastructure necessary to facilitate individual wellbeing and goodwill. The kinds of rules and regulations will vary, depending on factors internal and external to the community, but their number ought to be kept to a minimum. Also, procedures to change the rules and regulations need to be explicit.

In general, the larger the community, the more extensive and complex the rules and regulations. A common set of rules and regulations for mid-sized communities might address such issues as definitions of members, guests, residents, and non-residents; a set of standards for personal conduct to ensure member safety; processes for enforcement of rules and penalties for their violation; procedures to establish clubs and organizations within the community; how roads, sidewalks, trails, and other paths are to be maintained; traffic rules for those public access networks; how common recreational facilities such as swimming pools and exercise areas are to be used, managed, and maintained; how common areas such as parks are to be used, managed, and maintained; how property may be sold or transferred to other parties; construction rules for houses, electrical lines, water and sewer lines, and architectural design; and governance procedures such as selection of community leaders and administrators and their specific authorities and responsibilities.

A fair and just judiciary system is an important part of rules and regulations. In a community of goodwill, most people will be motivated by goodwill and their desire to see the community succeed. To support the community and its members, the judiciary system must be staffed by people skilled in adjudication, mediation, and counselling. While the community's rules and regulations need to be enforced, punitive measures ought not to be used except when necessary.

Families and Different Generations

Unless the community be comprised of only a small select group, residents of the community of goodwill will range in age between the newborn to very senior citizens. Within established households, there will be infants, adolescents, teenagers, young adults, newlyweds, the middle-aged, and/or senior citizens. Some households may contain those needing extensive care because of advanced age or disability. This blending of different generations and conditions of life is a good thing for the community, because it is the natural human condition. The old can always teach the young, and the young can always energize and care for the elderly.

Having several generations in a community of goodwill helps to preserve the community's traditions and identity, while at the same time allows new technologies, methodologies, and paradigms to emerge and nourish the community's environment, culture, and composition. The community ought to honor the elderly by publically recognizing their lifelong contributions to society and to praise the younger generations in order to encourage their best efforts.

Change is not something that should be avoided, but rather managed so that it occurs as an evolution not a revolution. Managing change is one of the most important responsibilities of community leaders. The community must be allowed to grow and change in a positive way as it adjusts to the ever changing environment in which it exists. Much thought must be given to how the community can preserve its foundations while allowing positive change. The committees assigned to work on this issue should come from several generations and positions within the community to ensure that a broad spectrum of views are considered.

The Importance of Mercy and Forgiveness

In a community of goodwill that has a spiritual orientation (all residents are attempting to realize their full material and spiritual potential), consideration must be given to how to strengthen the connection between the member's soul and embodied self. Spiritual teachings and institutions mostly perform this service. However, the community itself can embed within its purposes a few fundamental spiritual principles. Two of these are mercy and forgiveness, which are distinctively human needs due to our persistent sense of duality in life.

Shadows exist in most people's lives, appearing unexpectedly by way of imperfect thoughts, feelings, memories, and actions. This shadowy upwelling clouds our consciousness and can, for a time, overwhelm our best intentions. They are temporarily part of ourselves, but we need to leave them behind if we ever are to achieve the potential given us by the Creator. Mercy and forgiveness are spiritual blessings which can clear these clouds and enable us to move forward in a positive way in our lives.

It would be a great service to the community if a ritual of mercy and forgiveness was suggested by community leaders so that every member of the community could free themselves and others from unnecessary distractions hindering them from expressing their higher self. This ritual would benefit everyone and improve the overall quality of life within the community. The form the ritual might take would depend upon the characteristics and needs of the community itself.

Decision Making within the Community

In all communities there will be periodic disagreement between well-meaning residents as to which policy or action might be most appropriate in a given situation. There is never complete alignment of all opinion about issues in the world of form, because perfection on this planet is nearly impossible. Indeed, almost every challenge has more than one solution and every human being sees things a bit differently from his neighbor. Even a community comprised of good people with good intentions will have different opinions about practical matters.

In a community of goodwill, there generally is consensus that goodness ought to be the standard followed by everyone. However, goodness can be expressed in a number of ways. In general, the decision-making processes within a community of goodwill need to (and will) align with its style of governance. The processes can vary, ranging from autocratic decisions to consensus of a group of advisors to majority vote by all the members of the community. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses; no single approach is best for all communities; and some approaches may be better for some communities than other approaches. Whatever works for the community is fine, as long as it works most of the time. Decision-making processes can always be changed if they are found to be inadequate.

What must be recognized, however, is the natural tension that exists within a community of goodwill with its idealistic purposes and the practical problems that always accompany a community of human beings living and working together on this planet. To survive, people may need to pray but they definitely need to eat. The problem that such communities sometimes face is that their style of leadership and decision making may be strong in the area of community ideals but weak in the area of practical community needs, or vice versa – although sometimes a perfect balance may be found. This tension and its associated problems must carefully be addressed and resolved if a community of goodwill is to succeed over time.

Relationships with Other Communities

Every community has unique characteristics, and this uniqueness is sometimes perceived by other communities as being threatening to their own interests. Often, the perceptions of threat can be moderated through education, greater understanding, acceptable behavior, transparency and familiarity, positive interaction over time, a history of non-threatening activities, outreach programs, participation in the activities of other communities, cooperation on issues of mutual interest, and so on.

For a community of goodwill, it is important that these and other mitigation efforts be made early and often so that a history of cooperation and goodwill can be established in community relationships. Efforts to hide the activities of the community or to isolate the community from neighbors is likely to produce negative perceptions and are almost guaranteed to make inter-community relationships more difficult. On the other hand, most people will respond favorably to truthful, thoughtful, and rational explanations as to what the purposes and activities of the community of goodwill are. It is probable that some individuals will remain hostile; however, these people can usually be isolated because of their bias or extremism.

Utilizing Expertise in the Community

No matter the organization of a community of goodwill, it is vital for the community's leadership to utilize the expertise that exists within the community's membership. People have different talents, and

it is one of the roles of leadership to encourage members to contribute their talents to the common good of the community. Some individuals will be very good businessmen, some will be architects and engineers, some will be capable security specialists, some will be experienced project managers, some will be excellent teachers, some will be talented artists. Even though many of these individuals will have careers, most will have some spare time and a willingness to help the community when possible. These people ought to be diligently sought out.

Caring for the Young and Elderly

The community of goodwill ought to offer two specific types of social support systems: day care and senior citizen care. Both types of institutions should be staffed with professionals as well as community volunteers. Day care institutions provide an invaluable foundation for the health, education, and social wellbeing for the very young. They also provide much needed support to working parents. Senior care institutions are highly appreciated services made available to the elderly whose families cannot alone provide for them. Caring for the elderly is a special obligation of the community when its senior citizens have long served the community during their productive adult lives. The provision of these services need to be part of the community's annual budget. What the community receives in turn from these services is a deeper commitment from its residents and a greater willingness on the part of everyone to do what they can to ensure the community's success.

Support for Families

For the long-term success of the community of goodwill, few things are as important as community support for the institution of family. The family is the foundation of all society and it must be protected and nourished as a matter of policy so that it can function harmoniously and well in the nurturing of children and the flowering of love between husband and wife. Most social activity within the community – schools, churches, recreation, libraries, parks, swimming pools, gyms, sports facilities – ought to be established and managed in such a way as to engage and support families. Every effort of community members ought to consider the impact on families and welcome their participation whenever possible. By making the community a welcoming place, families will come to the community and thrive, thereby making the community ever stronger, healthy, and balanced.

Spiritual Sponsorship for the Community

Communities of goodwill can be based on purely humanitarian principles, with little or no commitment to spirituality. However, communities that have a foundational belief in God and the Spiritual Hierarchy can be extraordinarily strong and resilient because its members agree on the essential role of spirituality in their personal and social life.

Finding a spiritual sponsor usually occurs during the founding stages of the community, when one or more of its initial leaders ask God for assistance and guidance in making the community truly reflective of God's will for mankind. The Spiritual Hierarchy responds to such requests because that is the nature of God's close connection with His Creation. Communities which have a patron saint or master as a sponsor have the benefit of not only the blessings that can flow from such a spiritual relationship but also the unifying force of the Holy Spirit which periodically visits those souls who share a sense of connection between themselves and the higher spiritual world of God and His Representatives.

Fulfilling the Purposes of the Community

Above all, the purpose of a spiritual community of goodwill is to enable its members to discover and become their true selves. In most cases, this is a gradual process, because life on earth is a combined material and spiritual experience and because most people carry on their shoulders both the blessings and weight of good and bad karma from previous embodiments and this lifetime.

The community is like an incubator for souls, providing time, nourishment, and opportunity for individual members to gather their energy and consciousness in a concentrated way to harmonize the various positive aspects of themselves and, by their free will, to learn to make proper decisions to advance their goals in life and to share their blessings with others in the community.

The community of goodwill is built on the principle that all sons and daughters and children of the Most High share the blessings of God and that the purpose of life is to discover and express those individual blessings to the greatest extent possible. The key to the success of the community is its members' realization that one's personal self-interest is best served through self-identification as a son or daughter of God. The community encourages the individuality of the true self while also facilitating the harmonious participation of everyone in the unity of God.

Center for the Study of Goodwill

Goodwill is not something that is the providence of a single person or community. Goodwill is a universal attribute that is present wherever there is mankind. In order to broaden the understanding of goodwill both among the members of the community as well as society at large, the community could sponsor and support a Center for the Study of Goodwill. To this center could be invited influential thinkers on the subject of goodness and goodwill to discuss their thoughts and present them in formal and informal settings for the public to consider. The influx of new ideas and experiences based on goodwill would help keep community members apprised of developments beyond the community and help others to understand the purposes of the community and what it is trying to achieve.

The next section of this book consists of a few reflections on government based on the existence of the inner quality in man.

Reflections on Government and the Inner Quality

The Purpose of Government

Government is established by man to serve his needs and interests. Mankind's needs and interests fall into two general categories: material and spiritual. The material and spiritual sides of mankind comprise the nature of man. In order to serve the needs and interests of mankind, therefore, theories and institutions of government need to consider the whole of man, not just his material or spiritual side. Government institutions do not need to directly address the spiritual needs of their citizens, but only need to protect those church or civil institutions which do support the spiritual side of individuals and society. All governments, however, must serve the material sides of their citizens. The material side of man is concerned with his survival, prosperity, comfort, and transcendence. All institutions of a particular form of government need to address at least three fundamental concerns: the security of society and the people; the opportunity for individuals and society to prosper and live comfortably through their own efforts; and the opportunity to transcend current understanding and limitations so

that individuals, society, and the human species itself might constantly improve its material and spiritual conditions.

The Nature of Reality and Man

The nature of reality is that it is both subjective and objective, with an infinite variation in perceptions and adaptations for the multitude of life forms and species that together comprise life in the universe. The fact that such differences exist between people is why cultures and civilizations are unique, and why individuals and societies are often so distinct from one another.

Government does not need to understand why these differences exist, but government should recognize that the differences do exist. From a governance point of view, ruling with a goal of sameness is absurd and self-defeating. Rather, the challenge is how to rule a given society in such a way as to preserve harmony, maximize creativity and productivity, and respect and honor the uniqueness found within individuals and their various communities.

The nature of man is that there is tremendous diversity, as well as certain similarities. We think of man as being both material and spiritual, body and soul. The architecture of the human brain enables it to process information multi-dimensionally. That we are still evolving as a species is suggested by the fact that we do not yet understand consciousness and therefore lack knowledge of ourselves.

What this human diversity means in terms of governance is that the organization and management of society to achieve some defined purpose needs to be flexible over time. As our understanding of human beings and their environment change, so too must our theories and systems of governance. Government is not a permanent fixture but rather a dynamic system that evolves to meet newly recognized needs.

Therefore, when we speak of ideal government, God government, or golden age government – we are not speaking in absolute terms. We are speaking of ideals within the context of our own imagination and current understanding of reality with its possibilities. These ideals will change over time. Because of this absence of absolutism in governance, it is important that political theory and governmental institutions be crafted to be evolutionary by nature – that is, able to change when necessary to better address emerging challenges and opportunities. At the same time, government should not change easily, because government helps to ensure stability and thus enables civilization to flourish. A proper balance between maintaining the status quo and allowing for necessary change should characterize all theories of governance.

The Importance of Freedom in Government

Freedom is an important ingredient in governance because it allows the expression of the uniqueness of the individual man, woman, and child in society. If freedom is denied the people by government, then a large portion of the creative genius of the populace is lost to society, and all society – government, institutions, and the people – suffer accordingly.

The soul of man is free by nature, having been given that gift by the Almighty. Therefore, the opportunity to express one's free will is a natural birthright tied directly to the freedom of one's soul. The soul of man can never gain self-mastery in the world of form without having the opportunity to learn from its mistakes and correct decisions while in embodiment as a man, woman, or child. This is a spiritual process which ought not to be interfered with by government.

Government was created by man to serve two fundamental purposes: (1) to improve the collective security of the group and to improve its chances for economic prosperity and personal happiness; and (2) to allow greater opportunity for free will decisions within a social context. Government, therefore, represents an evolution of the soul of man from a mostly selfish and self-centered individual to a willing and cooperative participant in a society. The community, in other words, enables the soul to increase its self-mastery of free will to include not only the selfish fulfillment of its desires but also the self-mastery of free will necessary to advance the interests of a larger collection of other human beings.

Freedom, then, is both an opportunity for self-expression as well as a responsibility to contribute to the common good.

It is the role of government to protect this dual aspect of individual freedom and to ensure that a proper balance is maintained within society to allow freedom of expression in a context of both self-interest and social interest. This is a delicate balance and one that needs careful attention at the founding of the nation and throughout its history.

The type of government best suited to preserve and maintain this balance is an evolving issue as the nature of society changes over time and the souls of mankind mature. What might work best for one culture at one stage in its development may not work best for another culture at a different stage of development.

The representative democracy form of government found in the United States is one example of a people experimenting to find how best to maintain the balance between individual freedom and social responsibility. That experiment is ongoing as we speak; however, the history of the United States has shown that such a system of government is flexible enough to handle most crises thus far encountered. It is historically important to allow this experiment to continue and for other nations and peoples to consider its strengths and weaknesses as they seek to determine the best system of governance for their own unique circumstances.

Is Ideal Government Possible?

Government is established and maintained primarily for pragmatic reasons. Morality is established and maintained primarily for idealistic reasons. At the same time, government and morality are linked and bound together. Like yin and yang, they are separate with their own laws and domains, yet each contains a portion of the other. Idealism resides within government, and pragmatism resides with morality.

Over the centuries, there have been many ideal governments postulated by philosophers, moralists, political scientists, novelists, and thinkers in all kinds of professions. At the same time, there has never emerged a description of an ideal government accepted by everyone. Generally speaking (and understandably so), the various descriptions of ideal government have been developed within the context of the political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions prevalent at the time and location of the authors.

Despite not being able to devise a model of an ideal government applicable to all peoples at all times, the theoretical quest for such a government continues today. Why this continuous search for an ideal government goes on is an interesting question, but one explanation is the near universal belief that

government, being a product of man's creation, can be improved by man over time and reach a higher level of perfection.

This points to the observation that, while an ideal form of government may never become a reality in an absolutist sense in material dimensions, the existence of the ideal itself remains present in the hearts and minds of people nearly everywhere. This is important, because the existence of ideals in most spheres of life – including the social and political – plays a key role in mankind's evolution. Ideals are goals to be strived for, a light at the end of the tunnel, a dream that someday may become a reality if one can only keep working towards its fruition.

An ideal form of government is a goal worth striving for, because it is a magnet which draws mankind's attention ever forward to improved political conditions on earth. Ideal government is a theoretical vision of the future in which the pragmatic concerns of politics and political institutions can be harmonized with the spiritual and ideal concerns over the morality of public policy decisions. The search for an ideal government, therefore, is part of the endless cycle of pragmatism and idealism trying to find balance and equilibrium. Whether that balance can ever be found and maintained is an open question. What is perhaps more important is that the search for the balance continues in the hearts and minds of mankind, and thus we can have some hope that our future may be brighter than our conditions today.

Political Accountability and Freedom

Every form of government needs to have in place systems of political accountability, so that the established and accepted rules of governance in that society are known and respected by all. The adherence to established rules and procedures is vital to the legitimacy, longevity, and functionality of government, because society requires clear rules of the road to demark what is acceptable and unacceptable. If these rules do not exist or if they are ignored, then society can descend into anarchy and chaos: a situation in which every man is accountable only to himself and civilization disintegrates to the harm of all.

Governments can have many forms. Those of a tyrannical nature have as their implicit system of political accountability the overthrow of the tyrant, usually by force, in a coup or in a revolution. Those governments that are democratic in nature have as their explicit system of political accountability some process of peaceful change in leadership, usually through elections which ought to be fair and free with a broad electorate. Since the harm to society coming from a violent change of government is much, much higher than change of government coming through peaceful electoral means, the advantages of a democratic system – in terms of processes of leadership change – are clear.

In between forms of government characterized by rule of a single person and forms of government characterized by rule of the many are forms of government characterized by rule of a privileged few. Examples are an oligarchy, aristocracy, ruling social class, theocracy, or ideologically-based single party. These types of government usually have internal mechanisms of political accountability, that is, their processes of leadership change occurs from within the ruling group itself. Only rarely are political mechanisms in place for a change in which group rules society.

One of the main differences between rule by the many and rule by the few, is that democracies are much less likely to be authoritarian or totalitarian than government ruled by the few. In a democracy, political power is shared among most of the people through the ballot box. In government by the few, political power is held by the few and is not shared with the many. In practice, this means that in rule by

the many, the majority of people have the power to hold their political leaders accountable; whereas in rule by the few, only members of the privileged group have the power to hold political leaders accountable.

This lack of accountability to society as a whole in forms of government ruled by the few can result in the ruling elite pursuing policies mostly favorable to themselves. The people may have no choice, other than through violence, to resist the ruling party's decisions. By contrast, the people within a democracy do not have to overthrow their government to change their leaders' policies. They have the option to vote their leaders out of office. Hence, in terms of political accountability, democratic systems are generally far superior to forms of government characterized by rule of a single person or rule by an elite group.

There is a spiritual element to this issue as well. The human race is gradually evolving. In modern times, individuals have an opportunity to decide more political things in their lives than in the past. This is reflected in the decline in number of single autocratic leaders around the world and the rise in number of democratic political systems. Higher levels of education, greater availability of communications and technology, expanding transportation networks, and an increased number of large metropolitan areas have all contributed to the wider range of free will choice available to people than their ancestors may have had. The expansion of free will choice may help the soul to learn the proper use of free will in the material world at an accelerated pace. In this respect, the institutionalization of democratic forms of government is more aligned with the needs of the soul than are tyrannies or governments ruled by the few, because democracies give the individual more freedom of choice than do these alternative forms of government.