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The Space Between Stars

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One

The Spirit Speaks of the Soul

JUNE 1995

IT WAS AS IF HE WERE SEEING THE STARRY HEAVENS AS A shooting star would if a star had eyes. At first, Stephen sped through space at such a rapid speed that the stars were a blur of streak lines. He suddenly slowed down to a near standstill, and he began moving in slow motion. He was floating in space as noiselessly and effortlessly as a helium-filled balloon being carried aloft by a gentle summer breeze. A framed doorway appeared. An earth-mother stood within it. She was a Native American wearing a beaded deer-skin vest and skirt. Her long ebony-colored hair glistened. Her face was welcoming and happy.

Another framed doorway appeared as he continued his journey through space. In this portal there stood a beautiful young woman with long chestnut-brown hair. She wore a full-length black skirt, high-buttoned black shoes, and a cream-colored high-collared blouse with long sleeves. Her arms were raised above her head while she attempted to pin up her long locks into an ample bun. Her hair style and apparel appeared to be Victorian. There was a slight resemblance to old sepia-colored photographs of Stephen's maternal grandmother.

Suddenly, he felt himself speed up. He was hurtling through space toward a distant doorway. It was empty and dark as though it was only a door frame suspended in the star-speckled darkness of space. No mother-figure was present in this one. He sped through it and came to an abrupt halt. At first, he felt encased in a small body. His tiny arms and hands were grasping for something to hold on to in order to feel some stability. He felt as if the tiny body was floating in a warm liquid. Without warning . . .

Three

Passion for Grace

OCTOBER 1955

“WHERE WOULD I BE IF I HAD NEVER BEEN BORN?” little eight-year-old Stevie asked himself aloud. He was alone in his bedroom one hot August afternoon. With school out, those “lazy, hazy . . . days of summer . . .,” that Nat King Cole crooned about, were perfect for daydreaming. Of course, daydreams usually took a backseat to catching frogs and tadpoles in the pond up the street or lazily watching dragonflies hover over the reeds and cattails. Immediately after his question, he had a vision of the star-filled night sky.

The profundity of his vision of the starry heavens was not completely appreciated by him as a child. He was, however, having a dim recollection of how all embodied souls have a heavenly origin. Flashing ahead four decades, Stephen considered how he had been introduced to the Mayan shamans who claimed that the Mayan people were descended from beings from the stars of the Pleiades. They also told him that the ancient Egyptians were descended from star beings who came from the stars found in the constellation of Orion. *Just maybe*, he thought, *there was more to his childhood vision of the stars than he had ever imagined. . . .*

When he was ten years old, he saw the opening scene of the film classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*. He felt a tingling flutter up his spine when the stars, representing angels, were talking about the film's hero George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart). . . . he wondered, *Maybe every child has a star appear at his or her birth, representing the radiant star of his or her divine sidereal self. It is just not so obvious as it was with the birth of Jesus.*

After envisioning the stars in answer to his question about where he would be if he had never been born, Stevie had the thought, *I very easily might never have been born so I'm lucky to be here. . . .*

Airborne Acrobatics (From Chapter Four: Ballet in the Air)

WHAT COMPELLED HIM TO ENGAGE IN THESE AIRBORNE acrobatics? Was he compelled to repeat the triumph over the paralysis of polio in order to master the trauma of feeling trapped? Wasn't his excitement over Flash Gordon breaking free of death traps in episode after episode a repeat of bridging the space between hopelessness and hopefulness? But was there something beyond his bout with polio? Was it something related to the fundamental experience of being a soul inhabiting a body and experiencing the whole range of human emotions? Was there a deeper drive shared by all human beings being expressed in the Flash-Gordon cliff-hanging element of his passion for the ballet in the air? Yes, it was this and more. It's something inherent in being an embodied soul captured and captivated by the material realm.

What was the deepest source of his fascination and passion for getting into and out of these defensive traps? What compelled him to see what he could accomplish in the air before gravity reasserted her hold? Could it have something to do with a deeply buried desire or urge to experience spiritual freedom? This is the freedom a soul feels before being in a body buffeted about by the desires, appetites, and hungers that are all part of being human.

Seeing it all through my spiritual eyes, I saw clearly what he was only beginning to glimpse. He was reliving the spiritual freedom he felt as an unencumbered soul floating freely in space without the weight of the body holding him down. During airborne acrobatics, he defied gravity. He was accessing a liberating consciousness. In other words, he was fully in contact with me without realizing it.

In this state of consciousness called flow or the zone, he bridged the space between the material and spiritual realms. The essence of this consciousness was beautifully expressed in those magical moments of hanging in the air or floating forwards during drives or backwards during fade-away jump shots. At a deeper level of awareness, he was mastering the . . .

Five

Delving into Dreams

SEPTEMBER 1975

SUPER MASSIVE BLACK HOLES ARE AT THE HEART OF LARGE galaxies such as the Milky Way Galaxy, the one in which the Earth resides. The center of the Milky Way galaxy is the “spout” of the teapot-shaped constellation Sagittarius. What appears to be steam rising from the teapot is millions of stars. Behind the stars are dense clouds of gas and dust that hide the heart of the galaxy: a huge black hole that is three-million times as massive as the sun. Could it be that at the heart of the personal galaxy (the personality or personal identity and sense of self) of every embodied soul is a black hole?

Sitting quietly on the train now leaving Trenton for New York City, he continued on his own train of thought; he was reviewing his life through the lens of the space between stars. He began to turn the telescope from outer to inner space by drawing upon his knowledge of depth psychology. He considered how depth psychology delves into the black holes existing in the space between the surface and depth of the personality. His head was reeling with the excitement of spotting the parallels between inner and outer space. It seemed to Stephen that this description of outer space applied to inner space. But how did it apply? The answer involved a consideration of the nature of black holes.

Black holes in outer space exert a strong gravitational pull on whatever comes near them. The gravitational force exerted by black holes is so tremendously powerful that . . .

Being Blessed (From Chapter Seven: Gifts, Signs & Wonders)

RED RIBBONS OF LIGHT STRETCHED ACROSS THE HORIZON as the sun was setting and the train pulled into Trenton. Stephen recalled something he had not thought of for many years. When the hand of the Episcopal bishop touched his head during confirmation, he felt a surge of energy shoot through his thirteen-year-old body. The bishop had said, “May you receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit from this day forward.” Back then, he knew something special had happened but he was not sure what it was.

Now, in retrospect, he thought, *Could it be that those rituals in church really did have some true and lasting significance for the soul?* More than this, he began to see the ever-present and eternal reality of Christ Jesus. He was always showing up in the most unlikely places: the Reiki Master meditation, various books on Reiki, the Mayan pyramids in the jungles of Guatemala and Mexico, and on his trips to Mexico City, Puerto Vallarta, Athens, Greece, and the Greek isle of Mykonos.

Wherever Stephen’s spiritual search led, Jesus appeared as the Good Shepherd watching over His flock. Stephen’s thoughts were drawn back to the question: What happened in the year of 1995 to prepare the way for this miraculous event of being blessed by the Holy Spirit with the gift of healing?

* * *

THE YEAR OF 1995 BEGAN WITH ANGELS IN SUNNY MEXICO. It was New Year’s Day and the plane Stephen was on was flying to the seaside resort town of Puerto Vallarta. As the plane was about to land, he finished reading a passage in a book entitled *Ask Your Angels*. In the passage, a man in England had climbed a stone tower. He sat atop the tower on New Year’s Eve, reflecting over the past year. The man was listening to the instrumental theme to the film *Chariot’s of Fire* which was composed by Vangelis. The composer’s name and this piece of music would turn out to be significant . . .

Love & Miracles (from Chapter Eight: Shifting Winds)

One thought kept reverberating in the chambers of his heart and mind, *Miracles occur naturally as an expression of love*. He knew that this was true. His reflections drifted back to the moment he witnessed a miracle on August 13, 2004. Friday the thirteenth. The miracle happened naturally as an expression of love at the very moment a great danger was about to strike. . . .

* * *

Suddenly, the reporter on the Weather Channel anxiously announced that Charley just became a category four with winds upwards of 150 miles per hour and was expected to slam into Sarasota and proceed on to the Tampa Bay area. Fear shot through Stephen. His beloved and her family were in danger! . . .

As he shouted these words [a prayer-command], he felt flooded with a massive amount of energy coming into the back door to his heart and out through the palms of his hands. In his mind's eye, he had a vision of a wide wedge of white light streaming into the middle of his back. It looked like an upside-down triangle: wide at the ceiling and narrowing down to enter the center of his back, passing through the back door of his heart. The very instant he finished his prayer-command . . .

“IT’S WOBBLING! . . . IT’S CHANGING DIRECTION! . . . IT’S turning! It’s not going to hit Tampa! It’s going to hit Port Charlotte. It’s losing power,” the announcer on the Weather Channel exclaimed, as if in total disbelief.

The very instant that he heard the reporter’s startling words, the following biblical passage became a reality to him: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

As thankful and relieved as he was, Stephen was upset when Charley struck Port Charlotte. He had intended for Charley to shift to the right, pass by the bottom of Florida, and then move into the Atlantic to dissipate and die out. But he started his intervention too late for that to happen.

8 Steps to Love

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Preface (8 Steps to Love)

LOVE? Freud called it “the only socially acceptable psychosis.” To Plato it was “divine madness,” and to Saint John love was nothing less than God, the ultimate power operating in the universe.

In this revised edition, you’ll find a new emphasis. I am now even more clear that the love housed in the heart of each and every one of us is nothing less than the ultimate power operating in the universe. Love *is* the stuff of every subatomic particle of all that exists. I once heard Dr. Wayne Dyer say, “Feeling good is feeling God.” To me, we feel best in life when we feel love. And since God is love, we are feeling God when we feel love. . . . This book demonstrates...how to return to love when we need it the most—the moment stress and conflict begin.

One final note, before you proceed to the pages that follow, I want to share something someone said about this book that moved me deeply. My friend Mary McLaughlin introduced me to the nuns ministering in the inner city of my hometown. While visiting with them, I gave them a copy of this book. I received a beautiful note from the head of the order. And with her permission, I listed it with the endorsements on the first page of this book. Mother Maria del Carmen wrote that, “Reading this book helps us fulfill the commandment of love which Jesus gave us.”

Just why I was so moved by these words can be found in the three books that detail my spiritual journey. *The Space Between Stars* describes the miracles in my life that began in childhood and just keep continuing. *A Matter of Love* takes you from my time with Mayan shamans in the jungles of Guatemala to my appearances on national news and talk shows. On one show after another, I discussed the psychodynamics of evil just months before and after the horror of September 11, 2001. *Words Become Flesh* zeroes in on my search for wisdom and delves into my discovery of the dark depths of the human heart and mind in my work as a clinical psychologist.

All three books reveal my return home to a deeper understanding of what I knew in my heart as a child, “God is love; and he that

Healing Loss With Gratitude: “I’ll Always Love You!”

Mary, an eighty-year-old woman cried with heartfelt sobs as she expressed to me, “I’ll never stop missing him!” She was referring to her deceased husband Carl, the love of her life. She had lost him over twenty years ago. I told Mary to picture Carl and SPEAK DIRECTLY to him the words, “*I’ll never stop loving you! I’ll always love you!*” As she did, she began to smile through her tears. Her face and her eyes lit up as she recalled how much she still loved him and always would.

Just days after that fateful day, September 11, 2001, I was on a national television talk show as a stress expert. I was to help people recover from the loss of loved ones in the World Trade Center disaster. A young man who had just lost his father was seated next to me. He recalled having pizza and Pepsi with his father on Sunday nights. It was a special ritual he shared with his father. I told this young man: “Because you will never stop loving your father, you will find yourself missing him from time to time.” Then I told him to “TALK DIRECTLY” to his father when he missed him saying: “My feeling angry and sad is telling me that I hate that you are not here to have pizza and Pepsi. And that’s because I loved having pizza and Pepsi with you on Sunday nights.” After the show, he turned to me with tears in his eyes and thanked me for helping him. He felt better now that he could not only see but *feel* the connection between the pain of his anger and grief, and the fact that he would always love his father.

Recall the examples of James and Debra. Both of them managed the pain they felt over the loss of their loved ones by remembering with an attitude of gratitude, the times they had with their former loves. Now recall important people or pets you have lost in your life and prepare to TALK DIRECTLY to them. Remember to breathe in deeply keeping your belly soft and softening all around your heart region. Say the words, “*I’ll never stop missing you.*” Now tell your lost loved one, “*I’ll never stop loving you! I’ll always love you!*” Notice how different you feel when you shift to directly expressing your love that underlies your pain.

A Matter of Love

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Preface (A Matter of Love)

THE MAYA HAVE PREDICTED *LA TIERRA MADRE* (Mother Earth) will be going through her “birth pangs” as we enter into a new era. Although I touch on the predictions of the Maya, I focus more on the *timeless* truths of the Maya and the spiritual experiences I had in my time with them. . . .

This book is both a *sequel* and a *prequel* to *8 Steps to Love*. It delves deeper into the boundless reality of love and, in so doing, it presents experiences I had that led to the development of the four inner and four outer steps to love that make up the eight steps. As I did in *8 Steps to Love*, when I include stories of people who consulted me, I have changed their names and identifying information to protect their privacy without sacrificing the psychological truth each story is meant to illustrate. . . .

This book details my firsthand experience with the Mayan shamans and is a *practical handbook* for learning to follow the thread of your divine destiny. There is a fundamental belief held by the shamans that help is everywhere if we only look. In the Mayan view, God is speaking to us all the time through people, events, and especially through nature. In my studying with the Maya, I began to experience God the Divine Beloved everywhere.

During my time with the Maya, I began to see myself and others who are sincerely following the spiritual path of transformation as *practical mystics*. The mystic seeks to experience the mystery of the Divine directly. And my passion has been to apply spiritual and psychological insights to daily life.

You will travel with me from the consulting room...to the jungles and ancient pyramids of Central America. One moment you will be with me on national television examining breaking news, or, more specifically, heart-breaking and shocking news. The next moment, you will be accompanying me amid ancient ruins as I uncover the treasure of timeless truths. . . .

Please realize that the spiritual, mystical, and paranormal experiences I have had do not make me unique or special. I include them because they point to the power and reality of *love*. . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

Sacred Fire

Everything in the world has come out of one Divine Being, the sacred fire. The sages are the direct manifestation of that fire. Sages do not belong to any culture, religion, caste, or creed. They belong to God . . . Their religion is the religion of love.

—Swami Rama

THE BLUISH-VIOLET FLAME OF THE SACRED fire was spectacular against the black velvet of the night sky that seemed to blanket our ceremony. The shamans were chanting as they slowly circled the fire. As the shamans made their offerings to the fire, the rest of us followed the shamans' lead and made our offerings. Here we were on the side of a mountain just before the summer solstice intending peace for our planet and for our individual lives.

We were offering up our lives to be healed in the heat and splendor of the dancing flames. The ancient spiritual tradition of Eckankar tells us that God, the Divine, is *light and sound*. The light and sound of the fire and of the shamans' chanting exercised a hypnotic effect on us all. We were joined in a group trance.

The concept of the sacred fire is found in other spiritual traditions as evidenced in the quote above. For those of us educated in the intellectual tradition of American universities, we have a tendency to look at the fire as symbolic. Although there is some truth to the fire as a symbol pointing beyond itself, the shamans were sure to help us realize the living reality of the sacred fire. . . . The healing energy swirled around us while the flames of the fire danced before us. Warm waves of love surged through us all as the heat of the fire seemed to penetrate our hearts on this cool night. Caught up in the rhythm of the ceremony, our individual hearts merged into one heart. . . .

Words Become Flesh

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Three

Empty Womb

LITCHFIELD, CONNECTICUT
MARCH 1981

RAINDROPS PELTED MY OFFICE WINDOWS LIKE PEBBLES. I stood there watching the tiny mounds of water cling until, unable to hold on any longer, they slid down the dotted windowpane like teardrops. *This is the first day of spring?* The voice in my head had a tone of disgust. I was grateful to be in the comfort of my office and not out in the rain navigating the streets of my small New England town. March was in reverse. She was roaring out like a lion and not *b-a-a-ing* out like a lamb.

The weather I was witnessing from my office reminded me of November. I imagine November in the New England of today can be just as dismal and dreary as it was in Melville's New England. Seems that Novemberish weather nudges me to nostalgically recall Ishmael's words in Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Yes, it was a "damp, drizzly November in my soul." The hope of spring was nowhere to be seen as I opened the door to my waiting room to find Jennifer. From what I knew of Jennifer, I was certain the weather in her soul was that of a drizzly and dismal November day.

Before coming to see me, Jennifer's abdomen had swelled up over many months as if bearing new life. She had *so* wanted to get pregnant. She sat before me looking forlorn. Her despair hung as heavy as the thick velvet Victorian draperies framing the windows of my office. For months Jennifer had appeared to be carrying a child. Why was her womb empty? The analytic dictum I had heard in my training echoed in my mind: "Make the unconscious conscious!" What hidden hurt was underlying the conflict between her obvious wish to be pregnant and her inability to get pregnant? . . .

"Sometimes our emotions can affect our body," I said trying to prepare her to explore the emotions underlying her false pregnancy.

Rabbi Ben & Kabbalah (from Chapter Three: Empty Womb & Four: Inner Sharks Attack)

THAT NIGHT I HAD THE FIRST OF WHAT WAS TO BE many strange dreams. I came to call them journeys through dreamland in honor of the many-volume set entitled *Journeys Through Bookland*. My grandfather bought the first two volumes when they were hot off the press in 1922. Thirty years later when I was five years old, my mother or father would read to me at bedtime. I would lie there mesmerized. Etched in gold and framing the title *Journeys Through Bookland* on the cover of each volume were the words: imagination, wisdom, character, truth and beauty. . . .His round face and ebony eyes reminded me of the face of the classic snowman with chunks of shiny coal for eyes.

His countenance catapulted me back in time to my childhood when my friends and I made snowmen. There was nothing like a snow-day when you would awaken to learn there was no school. That thrill has never left me. Something about Rabbi Ben lifted me to a timeless place of carefree reprieve from the worries . . .

Ben looked directly into my eyes and in his deep baritone voice boomed at me: “You are first and foremost a *soul* evolving upon this planet! Remember this always!” He then emphasized, “The true purpose of life is the correction of the soul. We call this the *Tikkune HaNefesh*.” . . . The Kabbalah is all about transforming ourselves from living as a being who is selfish into living as a being who shares.”

“Sounds like what Jung found in the practice of alchemy,” I said. “The troublesome and undeveloped areas of our personality are transformed into the gold of a fully developed personality.” . . . “Do you know what Zohar means in English?” he asked.

“No idea,” I answered.

“It means *shining*. Actually, the closest translation would be *splendor*. For it is the radiant splendor of the Light of the Creator that shines through the words on every page. Perhaps you now know why I am smiling?”

“Yes, I think I do,” I said. “Evidently, you are aware of what happened to me during my lunch break today.” . . .

Eight

Violet Shadows

LONDON & PARIS
JANUARY 1992

VIOLET SHADOWS. PURPLE HEARTS. BRUISED SOULS. I looked at the snow and I remembered the words of an art professor from a lecture I attended in New York City. "Shadows cast by the sun on snow are violet, not black. Look at the snow and you'll see a purplish hue. That's because a yellowish incandescent light like that of the sun casts its opposite. A violet purplish shade. Whereas, a cool fluorescent light casts a warm, brownish shadow."

Somehow this truth about light and shadow seemed significant to me. What is presented on the surface of our personality, or the personality of a family, has its opposite residing in the shadows. If not in actuality, at least in potential, the opposite of the light we attempt to shine is hidden in the shadows. It's the ever-balancing act of nature, of living in our dualistic world of light and dark.

San Francisco had spoken of the violet flame of transmutation. Rabbi Ben had reminded me of how the dark wick and dark blue flame of a candle support the golden-white light of the candle's flickering flame. No wick. No flame. No light. No shadow.

A victim of incest suffers as a prisoner of unspeakable horror committed in the name of love. Whispers of love in the dark attempt to conceal the purplish bruises inflicted on the body and soul of an innocent child. If incest was not bad enough, I also discovered another horror riding on the back of the beast of incest. Hidden behind the facade of family was pure evil. I came face-to-face with the fact that innocent children had been made sacrificial victims and violated in violet shadows . . .

Peter Pans or Enlightened? (from Chapter Eight: Violet Shadows)

PETER PANS? OR ENLIGHTENED SOULS?" I asked. Our society is so obsessed with celebrities. I myself love the movies. Movies aren't real but the feelings we get while seeing them are real. Are actors on to something? Or are they Peter Pans who never grow up? In developmental theory, actors are fixated in the phase of the grandiose self. They are three- and four-year-olds crying out, 'Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!' On accepting the lifetime achievement award at the Golden Globes, Dustin Hoffman said these very same words. He said them in answer to the question of why he became an actor.

"What I mean is that they play doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs and the list is almost endless. Yet they are never really anything. They play all these roles and professions but they never commit to one in reality. In one sense, it seems phony and hollow. I remember Clark Gable suggesting as much. He revered the real men doing hard labor, so to speak. I don't think that about hard labor, but I do wonder about committing oneself with blood, sweat and tears, to something in particular."

"Richard Gere practices Buddhism. I have heard that he loves its honesty among other things. Please continue," Tacomi said.

"I have wondered if, as you said, last time, we need to see the emptiness of all this fleeting world. And at the same time, we need to feel compassion for each and every being as precious. Precious yet insubstantial? How do we do that?"

"That's the difficult balance that an enlightened one, a buddha, is able to do," he said smiling knowingly.

"I have started to think that actors may be (or have the chance to be) enlightened more easily than others who take their profession seriously. I don't mean actors don't take their profession of acting seriously. I mean that there is a paradigm here for accomplishing the task of feeling genuine compassion and, at the same time, knowing that nothing is real . . . ultimately, the story is not real. Actor and audience realize this." . . .

"You could also understand emptiness and compassion by con-

Love Conquers Stress

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Chapter 6: The Stress of Road Rage

When we are behind the wheel, we are *protected* by all that metal surrounding us. This can easily allow repressed childhood rage to resurface. . . . Philip was the target of road rage. He told me how a man cut him off on a highway. Philip managed to pass him and exited the highway. The man followed Philip off the exit, pulled up at the red light, rolled down the window of his car, and yelled at Philip: “Don’t you ever cut me off like that again! Don’t you ever cut me off again! Father, I don’t care if you are wearing a priest’s collar! Don’t you ever cut me off!” The childhood rage of being cut off is transparent here as the man repeats his demand. The likelihood of the two men ever encountering each other on the road again is slim. Being cut off when driving can lead to *appropriate* adult anger. But when revenge and *reckless* retaliation take over then road rage has reared its ugly head.

Inner Quest Questions & Suggestions

- Remember a time you were cut off in traffic or imagine it happening. Try on the words: “Don’t you ever cut me off again! Don’t you ever cut me off again!” Now look through the driver you are addressing and see when you could have said that growing up and to whom you would say it. Say it with full force. How old are you?
- Then imagine backing up the child you and having the child you express his or her anger over being cut off. Picture the scene such as being at the dinner table. State directly to the person who used to cut you off: “I hate how you used to cut me off when I was talking. And that’s because I’d have loved it if you could have spoken to me with respect.”
- Do one *I hate it* to one *I love it* until you feel finished. Hug the child you back into your heart.
- Now as an adult decide to disentangle being cut off as a child from being cut off in traffic as an adult. Resolve to handle the situation without the helpless rage of childhood interfering.
- See yourself responding with no more anger, if you even feel the need to respond with anger, than is appropriate. Remember that a

Chapter 13: The Stress of Success (Success Phobia)

“MY THERAPIST THINKS I HAVE SUCCESS PHOBIA,” said Vivian, the thirty-five-year-old Afro-American woman I had hired to do some important public relations work for me. So often, as with Vivian, people casually speculate to me that they might have success phobia. The comment has always lacked any *angst*, any *real* feeling...

I told Vivian, “Look at your client and imagine expressing your feelings fully to her. This is not a rehearsal of what you would really say to her. It is a way to really get in touch with your feelings.” I then suggested she try saying: “I hate how you’re looking at me like I’m the best thing since sliced bread. And that’s because I’d love it if you would look at me with respect and appreciation.”

I suggested she then just stay with the expression of the negative feelings. Sometimes it is helpful to focus on the negative as we did with aches and pains. Remember with aches and pains we start by saying: “Stop hurting me like this! Stop hurting me like this!”

I then had Vivian say: “Stop looking at me like this! Stop looking at me like this!” Then, when she was *really* feeling the strong feelings behind these words, I urged her to look through the client and see who it was in her family growing up that she could say those same words to. She saw her father.

I asked her how old she was and she said seven. I addressed her as a seven-year-old and asked her what was happening.

Vivian then said, “I’m at the dinner table. Mommy and Daddy are there. I don’t like how Daddy is looking at me. It makes me feel uncomfortable. Mommy is looking at me funny, too. I wonder if she knows the secret Daddy told me to keep.”

“What’s that secret?” I ask.

She says, “Daddy touches me in my private areas and told me not to tell anybody especially not Mommy. He told me, ‘It’s our special secret.’” . . . [Vivian confronted and released her early hurt.]

“Now I can accept a compliment. Being successful does not equal the danger it seemed to when I was a little girl.” Vivian realized that was *then* and now is *now*.

Love, Stress & Sex

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Chapter 6: Plagued by Porn

People within whom there has not been a proper confluence of the affectionate and the sensual currents do not show much refinement in their modes of behavior in love; they have retained perverse sexual aims ...whose fulfillment on the other hand seems possible only with a debased and despised sexual object [partner].

—Sigmund Freud

“HE’S HUNG UP ON INTERNET-PORN SITES!” Rachel’s voice dripped with disgust. Her husband Brandon was either on internet-porn sites or secretly watching sex videos. Rachel had found him masturbating to a porn video. As she yelled, “What are you doing?!” she picked up the video’s cover. Ironically, its title was: *I Like to Watch*.

On this day, Rachel had dragged a bedraggled and humiliated Brandon into my office. How incongruous to see Brandon seated before me. A portrait of refinement. His clothes were immaculate.

Here was a distinguished looking man, a wealthy wheeler dealer in commercial real estate. But isn’t it so true, the pillars of the community often have a secret life. I had seen other men whose wives dragged or sent them to therapy under threat of divorce. The wives were sickened and felt debased by their husband’s behavior. Debauched and distinguished are not such strange bedfellows.

Brandon had a hard time expressing anything, even affection, to Rachel. He had a timidity about him that was frustrating for Rachel. Rather than hand her the beautiful Valentine’s Day card he picked out for her, Brandon left it in the bottom of the grocery bag for her to find. During our couple’s session, he admitted that he gets embarrassed by any show of affection. It doesn’t matter if he is the one displaying affection or the one receiving it. This is where we started getting him to *express* his *stress* over showing or being shown affection. . . I encouraged Brandon to fully feel his feeling of embarrassment over showing or receiving affection. [Brandon used the shift your focus and energy technique and look through technique to confront and release the hidden hurts driving him to view porn.]

Love & Sex Divided

The whole sphere of love in such people remains divided in the two directions personified in art as the sacred and the profane...love. Where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love.

—Sigmund Freud

“HE LOVES ME BUT RARELY MAKES LOVE TO ME!” Stella had only been married to Don for three months. “I’ve tried everything. One day when I went to the basement to bring him lunch, I tried to say something sexy. He was standing there wearing his tool belt. I handed him his sandwich and whispered in his ear, ‘I’d love to see wearing that tool belt with no clothes on.’” Stella’s words backfired.

Stella’s voice sounded sad as she told me: “He took the plate his sandwich was on and instantly pulled away from me. He had a look of disgust, almost scorn, on his face.” Don’s rebuffs were a frequent occurrence for these newlyweds. Don often recoiled from Stella’s advances. This spurning of her advances is what led her to seek therapy. Both Don and Stella were stressed: he by her wanting sex and she by his rejection of her sexually.

As I talked with Don, I could see he was a victim of the same kind of underlying problem that Elvis Presley suffered from. Elvis avoided sex with his wife Priscilla after she gave birth and became a mother. Just as Elvis was tied tightly to his mother, so Don was tied to his mother’s apron strings.

Before Don and Stella came to see me. Don’s mother consulted me. She was panicked by fleeting fantasies of picking up a butcher knife and stabbing Don when he came to visit. There was no conscious feeling associated with the murderous fantasy. What emerged was that, indeed, Don’s mother was angry that Don was now married and she was *left* with an uncommunicative husband. Don had been her confidante; he had been her husband in an emotional sense. Once Stella became his wife, Don lost his passion for her.

Prior to marriage, sex was great. Now the incest taboo was unconsciously interfering with Don’s love life. [Don regained his passion for his wife as he declared his emotional independence.]

Slay the Dragon—Not Each Other

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The Dragon Within

YOUR HAIR IS BRISTLING ON THE BACK OF YOUR NECK. You feel the heated flush of anger shoot up through your body. The urge to throw something seizes you. Perhaps you're on the phone with an annoying client, and you feel your muscles tensing and preparing to slam down the phone. If you are a mother or father you find yourself, almost without warning, ready to scream at your kids. What's going on?

The dragon in its physiological form as the reptile brain has been activated. This primitive portion of our brain is governed by the innate fight-or-flight response to stress. Either avenue is an attempt to survive. The reptile brain is geared to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. The sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system takes over. You are prepared to fight or flee from a perceived danger. Rapid, shallow chest breathing begins. Facial muscles tighten. Eye muscles tense and you focus your gaze into a fixed stare. Your large skeletal muscles tense up and the small, smooth muscles around your blood vessels constrict. You are ready for danger.

All this physiological arousal is fine if the threat is physical: you need to jump out of the way of a speeding truck. But most stress is emotional. You are stuck in traffic and are going to be late for work. Or you're having an argument with your spouse or kids.

Once the dragon in you has begun to sink its teeth and claws into your heart, you constrict your heart, your feelings of love. You are angry, anxious, or depressed. On the one hand, you may feel like striking out verbally or physically. On the other hand, you may want to emotionally withdraw and give up or run away.

You know the scenarios. A potential for violence erupts. A mother hits her kids. A man attempts to hurt his wife. A soccer mom with a van full of kids screams at a man in his BMW: he just cut her off and made her swerve, endangering her young passengers.

In its drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain, the dragon within us sends us on the *outer quest* to find something external to us to relieve our stress: an argument, a cigarette, a drink, a piece of candy. To stop the dragon in its tracks, we must go on the *inner quest*...

How the Dragon Fuels the Stress of Conflict with Others

In conflicts with others, the enemy we need to attack is not them, it is the dragon within us. Unless we attack and slay the dragon's implied belief, we are at risk for throwing gas on the fire by trying to control others. We'll argue and fight *as if* we can't feel good and be at peace until the other person agrees with us, or until he or she feels better. It's as if we say, "I can't feel better until *you* do."

However, we make matters worse by acting as if we *need* them to feel good *before* we can feel good. This results in us being like runaway freight trains, riding roughshod over the negative feelings of others. We try to stifle their anger, fear, anxiety, depression, etcetera. Instead of helping them feel better, we make things worse by trying to force them to feel better by fighting and arguing. "You *shouldn't* feel bad about that. It's not worth getting upset over."

The other person feels forced to defend his or her feelings. But once we take responsibility for our own feelings, we can be more *effective* in helping the other person feel better. Once we have slain the dragon in a particular situation and we are feeling relaxed, we can then apply the four outer steps to effectively listen. With the four inner steps, we learn to relax first, and then proceed to deal coolly and calmly with the stress of conflict.

After we master the four inner steps for slaying the dragon, we focus on the four outer steps that keep the dragon from rearing its ugly head and wreaking havoc on our relationships. The four outer steps help us be more effective at managing conflict with others.

Doing a Daily Review of Your Progress in Slaying the Dragon

It will help you progress in developing the skills associated with each of the four inner and four outer steps if you keep a stress journal. Use a notebook or create a file on your personal computer. At the end of each day, keep a daily record of the situations that stressed you. It helps to organize your daily review in the following manner. You will dissect your reaction to help you become more