I Am Upset
Because . . .

Angry people are like storms: at their core, they're peaceful.
When times appear stormy, always move toward your
Center, for it's there where you'll find your peace.

Several years prior to my experiences with Dr. Hunter in New Mexico, I was driving around the streets of Brooklyn, New York, selling floor waxes, of all things. It wasn't the most exciting work for a young man eager to find his place in the world, but nevertheless that's what I was doing . . . perhaps a form of laying the groundwork for what was to come.

One day while I was on my way to my next appointment, my radio was tuned to WBAI, a listener-sponsored station in New York, and I heard an amazing program. It was a lecture called "The Transformation of a Man" given by former Harvard professor Richard Alpert, who had become a spiritual seeker now going by the name Ram Dass.

He talked about his recent trip to India, where he had met his spiritual teacher, and it was the first time I had ever heard anything quite like it. Or had I?

Let me pause here, for as I recall this incident in my life, I'm reminded of Dr. Hunter's words to me in Alamogordo: "You've had this awareness many times before. You just didn't recognize it for what it was because you had no conceptual reference by which to evaluate it. You've known about the reality of Spirit from the time you were born. That's why you've always questioned the meaning of life and why you majored in psychology."

I was so intrigued by what I was hearing that I completely forgot my appointment and pulled over and listened to that radio show for more than three hours. One of the things Ram Dass quoted his teacher as saying fascinated me: "No matter what is happening in your life, you can experience contentment." What a concept! The impact of that idea was immediate and stunning.

I remember thinking: *I can do this. No one has ever presented this possibility to me before, and I've never thought of it myself. But why should life's events make me feel a certain way? From this moment on, I'm going to choose to experience contentment no matter what's happening.*

Interestingly, I was actually able to choose contentment regardless of circumstance for about two weeks. Alas, my consciously chosen contentment didn't last long. I had no idea at the time that I couldn't decide to be more conscious in the same way I could chose a turkey sandwich over chicken. It's not quite that simple. For the next two weeks, despite my best intentions, life continued to present me with situations designed to surface unresolved disturbances residing within my ego-centered consciousness—which, of course, had remained intact. In the end, I could no longer hold the level of consciousness needed to sustain the "contentment no matter what" approach. It was just as John Bradshaw said, "If you don't do your ego work . . . it will pull you back."

It's not that the sense of contentment fell away one day; it's more as if it eroded over time. Because the choice wasn't based upon true issue resolution, my ego-based, perceptual reality eventually reasserted itself. But for those initial two weeks, I was higher than a kite. No matter what anyone said or did, an inner smile emerged, and I consciously chose contentment.

I didn't realize it at the time, but my two-week experiment in choosing my response proved something significant: *Events don't have to automatically make me feel a certain way.* Ram Dass's teacher was right! Things I didn't like had no real power to make me experience negative feelings. And, if that was so, things I *did* like held no real power to make me feel happy. The assumption that our feelings are *because* of something happening outside us is inaccurate and

illusory for both happy and unhappy emotions. (As a side note, I realized then that the only reason psychology focuses on negative feelings is because people don't sign up for therapy when they're so happy they can't stand it.)

This revelation flies in the face of popular belief. For example, suppose someone is involved in a less-than-satisfying relationship. In an ego-based sense of personal wisdom, that person might say, "I don't want to be in this relationship. It's not working for me. And the only chance of it working better is if my partner changes."

If you find yourself reaching this kind of conclusion in response to many of your life's challenges, rest assured that you're not alone. In fact, you've expressed the single most prevalent myth rampant in our culture today: *Everything in my life would be fine _if only_ just a few things were happening differently. It's those things happening the way they are that _makes me feel upset._*

And so our disturbance is expressed by saying something similar to: "I am upset because . . ." Here are some common examples you may have heard:

- "I am upset because people don't listen to me."
- "I am upset because people don't understand me."
- "I am upset because my spouse didn't call."
- "I am upset because I don't have a spouse."
- "I am upset because my boss sent me a particular e-mail."
- "I am upset because I don't make enough money."
- "I am upset because politicians have little integrity."
- "I am upset because you don't worship my God."

And on and on it goes. Almost all of us have been conditioned to relate to the world through an "I am upset because . . ." philosophy.

In fact, this approach is epidemic on the planet and carries huge negative consequences. To check this out for yourself, just turn on any news channel or read a major newspaper anywhere in the world on any given day; you will see story after story about

someone blaming someone else for his or her disturbance. While it's almost impossible to comprehend, you're probably only too aware that there are those willing to go as far as killing themselves and others they blame as the "because" of their plight.

It has even gotten to the point where the "I am upset because . . ." claim is rewarded in the court system with immense sums of money. We recently read a news report about a woman who successfully sued a clothing store because it failed to prevent a small child from running around the store, and the woman was injured when she tripped over him. Toward the end of the story, the article casually mentioned that it was her own child whom she tripped over. We kid you not. (No pun intended.)

And thus we come to the crux of the matter. "I am upset because . . ." is a complete and total victim position. It's an attitude that places the responsibility for one's emotional condition outside of oneself.

One of our all-time favorite cartoons showed a picture of three shabbily dressed panhandlers who are standing next to each other in front of a building in a large city. Each is holding up a sign. The first guy's sign says, VICTIM OF CHILD ABUSE. The second sign reads: VICTIM OF SOCIETY'S POOR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM. The third sign says: RESULT OF POOR CHOICES. The first guy has turned to the second guy and remarks about the third: "He's never going to get anything with that approach."

Let's take a closer look at this extremely important dynamic because, in many ways, "I am upset because . . ." is a very tempting route to take in the world, precisely because it seems so very logical and is a popular method that results in our feeling justified and righteous.

The Dynamics of a Disturbance

When you hear someone saying "I am upset because . . ." are you hearing his or her ego or Authentic Self expressing itself?

Since the very expression of pain or disturbance can only occur in the mind and emotions, there can be no doubt that "I am upset

because . . ." is an ego experience. And since the ego always wants to be *right,* it must create a dynamic such that it can be *right* even in situations when it knows it's behaving poorly, such as destructive expressions of anger. Thus, "I am upset because . . ." emerges as the perfect solution by which the ego can engage in negative behavior and still be *right.* How clever!

If you say, "I am upset because . . ." and you want to change something so that you would no longer feel upset, where would you seek to intervene? You would no doubt direct your energy into attempting to bring about change at the "because" level. You would logically reason, "If I can change the person or situation upsetting me, I will no longer feel upset." It makes perfectly good sense. And off you go in an effort to change someone or something *out there.*

Have you noticed that such attempts at effecting outer change, in those rare times that you're successful, can produce a temporary reduction in upset but rarely produce the long-term equanimity you're seeking? In the long run, are you ever any happier as a result of experiencing a disruption? Have you ever noticed that when you're upset and expressing yourself in out-of-balance ways, people often ignore and discount your demands? And even if you are successful in getting others to acquiesce to your annoyance, you're often left with the collateral damage to the relationship.

The "I am upset because . . ." dynamic is so ingrained in most people's awareness that when we present it, we often hear, "Do you mean there's an alternative?" Actually, there is!

Contrary to popular opinion, might it be that inner disturbance isn't *caused* by outer experience? Might it just be the other way around? Might it be that *inner, chronic disturbance* is being acted out in repeated outer disturbances? *And further, might this inner disturbance be "Soul-orchestrated" in service to learning a more direct and healthy approach to addressing the inner disturbance itself?*

For example, might it be that someone's disturbance about certain governmental rules, regulations, and laws is actually the surfacing of an unresolved issue with authority? If you don't understand how disturbance actually works in consciousness, you could easily believe that politicians affiliated with _____(enter here whichever political party you disagree with) are ruining the

country. It would be easy to blame them because you don't know how to accept responsibility as the *author* of your experiences, and because it's so much easier to blame someone else for your upset. Without a working knowledge of how to resolve these disturbances in consciousness, it's easy to adopt the above victim-oriented position and experience all the suffering that comes with it. We call this *self-created victimization.*

And, yes, you can certainly take steps to improve social and economic conditions. And, yes, you can work to change laws and the governments that make them. But these outer activities will do little, if anything, to alleviate the inner sense of discouragement and lack of fulfillment. The good news is that there's nothing to stop you from working on both levels simultaneously. One does not preclude the other.

Over the years, we've noticed that when an inner disturbance is resolved, someone's effectiveness in making a positive difference in the world actually improves. In fact, changes often occur around such a person that appear to have nothing to do with anything he or she has done outwardly. Some refer to this occurrence as co-incidence. We call it *Grace.*

They Were Very Messy People

Susan was a USM student whose in-laws were staying with her for an extended period of time. (This is not necessarily a good idea—but that's another story.) One Saturday evening, she shared with the class that she was infuriated at her guests because they were very messy people, and she prided herself on keeping her home immaculate. Their sloppiness was driving her crazy. As she put it, "I don't believe they know the meaning of the word *neat.*"

Susan wanted to work on her disturbance because she was afraid that if she approached her in-laws from an attitude of resentment, she would probably say things she'd later regret. She was also concerned that she might even embarrass her husband—the last thing she wanted to do. What she did want was to approach her spouse's parents from a balanced and caring place inside of herself.

Right then and there, she did a significant piece of inner work, getting in touch with the part inside of her that judges messiness. In the course of the process, Susan had a deep healing experience in which she recognized how her own obsession with neatness and order reflected her desire for control. When she saw this pattern in her own consciousness, she experienced Compassion and Acceptance first for herself and then for her in-laws. She shared that she felt much clearer and *in balance* with respect to them.

Further, she realized, not as a concept but as a new sense of reality: "Just because I perceive they are messing up my house doesn't mean I have to judge them and make them wrong. I can talk this over with my husband in a caring way and request what I'd like. I'm confident he'd be more than willing for us to pay for them to stay at a hotel if my request doesn't work for them, and I need to check this out with him. But the main thing is, I don't have to approach them antagonistically. I don't have to make them wrong. I can communicate my request in a loving way."

Susan wanted to "strike while the iron was hot," meaning while she was in her newfound clarity. She committed to going home right after class and speaking with her husband in preparation for having an honest heart-to-heart talk with her in-laws about this situation. She promised to report back to us in the morning.

As you might imagine, the next day Susan had her hand up first to share, and as she stood up to talk, we were all ears. "You're not going to believe this! When I got home last night, not only was the house clean, but everything had been put back in its place!"

Although she was ready to confront them compassionately and clearly, there was no need. Somehow they'd received the message and responded accordingly on their own.

There are those who would explain such an event as a lovely and fortunate coincidence. However, we've seen this sort of thing happen so often that the word *coincidence* simply doesn't explain the data very well. Rather, we've observed that once people successfully do a piece of inner work, they are literally living within a new inner reality, and the outer reality will often come into alignment with it. We believe this is what Ralph Waldo Emerson meant in the talk

he delivered to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard University on August 31, 1837. In the ending lines of his well-known and well-received address entitled "The American Scholar," he told the audience, ". . . if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him."

Disturbance Is an Inside Job

To see how this approach fits into Spiritual Psychology and why it's so essential, let's consider "I am upset because . . ." in the light of levels of consciousness:

— *I am* is the only true statement that can ever be uttered. It's a declaration from the Soul identifying itself. Anything more will be commentary about what the Soul is experiencing, mostly through the ego's perceptions.

— *Upset* is a description of the state of the ego, small self, or personality. It is experienced as an emotional state and is usually what's meant when someone says, "I am upset." Actually, upon closer examination you'll find that emotional reactions are simply physiological responses to your thoughts based upon your perceptions and beliefs, as previously stated.

— *Because* is the method the ego uses to point at whatever it perceives as causing its disturbance. People tend to think they need a *cause* to blame so that they can justify their inner state of disturbance, as well as any resulting behavior: "What so-and-so did is a good reason for the way I feel and a justification for my actions, which *he* caused by whatever it was he did that I didn't like."

Here's the short course in how it works: You perceive through your perceptual filters, which are determined by what you believe to be true—your definitions of reality. These definitions are usually built upon limiting interpretations of early experience. The interpretations stem directly from your individual spiritual curriculum, which predisposes you to see in a particular way. Thus, something happens, your mind interprets it as good or bad

according to its previously determined definitions regarding such experiences, and you react emotionally. Your reaction is one of happiness if you've defined the event as good or of upset if you've defined the event as bad. The intensity of the emotional reaction, positive or negative, will be congruent with the level of importance the ego has attached to whatever has happened.

As we've said, disturbances are always found in the mind and emotions. Later in the book, we'll go into greater detail about how to use this awareness in service to issue resolution. In fact, we'll be presenting you with a comprehensive step-by-step healing process.

An Upset in Search of a Good "Because"

Have you ever noticed that sometimes a particular thing bothers you while other times the very same thing doesn't? Doesn't this give the game away? Doesn't this unmask the false claim of cause and effect paraded in "I am upset because . . ."?

And have you also noticed that, even after you've fussed and fumed and blamed and condemned someone for "upsetting" you, the unrest doesn't go away? That surely reveals inner disturbance to be a chronic, internal state rather than a onetime, outer-caused occurrence.

Agitation also appears to be cumulative in that it builds in consciousness until it reaches a point where it can no longer be contained. At that point you're set to blow up at the slightest provocation. Just prior to your blowup, unbeknownst to you, you've actually been walking around looking for something to become upset about. At such times, you're an "upset in search of a good because."

Those whose inner disturbances are easily triggered and intense are said to be on a "short fuse." We try to avoid such people as much as possible so as not to become a target for their blame. They always have a good reason for their chronic suffering, and they tend to be very righteous about their victim position.

Can you see how the "I am upset because . . ." approach (philosophy) erroneously assigns power to another person? Think about it. If an annoyance is externally caused, where is

the power? If "I am upset because you cut me off in traffic" or "I am upset because you left the cap off the toothpaste," then I have disempowered myself. I have effectively given my power over to you, and you can disturb my peace anytime you want by simply engaging in the behavior I've defined as objectionable.

When you think about all the things that have frustrated you lately, you may begin to become aware of how unwittingly you've disempowered and victimized yourself. By engaging in "I am upset because . . ." you're giving your power away to others.

So what can you do? For starters, you can accept the possibility that, whether you know it or not, you're evolving spiritually. Further, if you learn to utilize all of life's experiences for spiritual purposes—perhaps the most important of which is the resolution of issues—anything that disturbs your peace presents you with a golden opportunity. As stated in the third principle of *Seeing Through Soul-Centered Eyes,* physical-world reality exists for the purpose of spiritual evolution.

Attention: You've Just Entered a Reconstruction Zone

One of the hallmarks of Spiritual Psychology is the recognition that what disturbs you is as clear an indicator of your Soul's curriculum as you're likely to ever get—once you learn to see it within that context. When you become upset, it's as if life has just waved a big red flag signaling: "Attention! This is it! Look here! Here's the inner work that's next for you to do. Here's an opportunity to heal the place inside where this disturbance resides. Don't look outside. What happened is simply a triggering device intended to surface the disturbance. Take back your ownership of the disturbance and use it to heal the place inside that's in pain and separation. By so doing, you reclaim your power."

In our work over the years, we've found that as people develop in spiritual awareness, they come to the realization that it's their Souls, the very essence of who or what they truly are, that are bringing forward whatever it is that they need to experience next

in service to their growth. Each negative feeling can actually be considered a spiritual opportunity to work with it and possibly heal or resolve it for the very last time.

Of course, like all good things in life, this is easier said than done. Most of us haven't been brought up this way. Rather, we've been trained to live an "I am upset because . . ." life without even being aware that there's another possibility. People actually believe that their *core definitions of reality* are the *real* reality. They avoid awareness of the subjective nature of personal reality. Rather than saying, "I'm currently perceiving myself as a victim," they're more apt to say, "No, I really *am* a victim because such and such happened to me. That's really how it is!" or "Get real! It's just the way things are!"

To be successful in your endeavor of spiritual awakening, you need to change priorities and turn your focus away from an obsession with Goal Line reality as all there is. You must dare to journey into the very structure of your consciousness and carefully examine the dynamics of how the ego functions. However, you need to do your examination within the context of Spiritual Psychology, for you'll never graduate to inner Peace and Love by attempting to intervene solely at the *because* level, since it's the ego's domain. This brings us to the tenth Soul-Centered principle:

> ***Principle #10:*** *All "becauses" are merely triggers to internal unresolved issues inviting completion.*

As the Authentic Self would say, "The process of becoming upset doesn't happen outside of myself. It happens within." Well then, what if the same thing happened and you *didn't have to become upset?* Wouldn't it be valuable to know that and learn how to master that dynamic?

What if all *becauses* were seen as methods for bringing your spiritual curriculum into your awareness? In this way of looking, the primary place to focus effort would not be on the *becauses,* but rather on the place in your consciousness where the disturbance itself resides.

After all, isn't it obvious that healing does *not* occur out there? True healing only happens within the consciousness of one single human being at a time. It's an inside job. And might it just be that this is the way humanity evolves? If this way of viewing life is valid, it would follow, as stated in the ninth principle: *Every time a single person resolves a single issue, angels rejoice and all of humanity moves forward in its evolution.*

So if *becauses* are merely triggers to internal processes, what are these processes and why are they operating in our reality? We contemplated this question for a long time until, one day, the following principle dawned on us:

> **Principle #11:** *Inner disturbances are themselves a major component of the spiritual curriculum you are here to complete.*

What a concept! In this context, anger, hurt, resentment, betrayal, abandonment, guilt, shame, rejection, disappointment, sadness, and so on are all spiritual curricula encoded into our consciousness to provide us with the God-given opportunities to heal or complete these unresolved issues for the last time.

This is an astonishing awareness. When you're willing to take responsibility for healing the disturbed places in your own consciousness, you have a way you can grow spiritually that is totally within your dominion and not dependent upon changing anything outside of yourself. At last, you have stumbled upon the empowering key that unlocks the "I am upset because . . ." dilemma. What you need to do is go inside and work directly with the place in consciousness experiencing the upset. Suddenly, by that simple shift in focus, the gateway to freedom appears in the form of the next principle:

> **Principle #12:** *Unresolved issues are not bad; they are just part of your spiritual curriculum and are an opportunity for healing.*

The ego would argue: "Nonsense! I'm justified in feeling the way I do when awful things happen. In fact, those who don't feel angry and outraged at injustices are not only brain-dead, but also cold and aloof and probably in denial."

The Authentic Self would gently and lovingly reply: "It's those very feelings of anger and outrage that you've come to heal. Once you heal them, when things happen that are not to your liking, you are free from emotional upset and can choose to use your energy to address the challenging situation with wisdom, caring, and effectiveness."

Early Learning Is by Association

Freud has yet to be disproved in his assertion that the basic personality structure is laid down in the human infant prior to the age of five. Moreover, developmental psychologists have determined that cognitive reasoning as a mode of functioning comes into prominence at around age six. Isn't that interesting? If these two observations are accurate, it means that basic personality structure is being formulated prior to the child's ability to reason! How do younger children learn—up to age six—if *not* by reason?

The answer seems to be that early learning is by association. As poet Sondra Anice Barnes penned:

> *The siren blew;*
> *The dishwasher*
> *Broke down.*
> *Now I know*
> *That sirens*
> *Break dishwashers*

(From the Brason-Sargar publication: *Life Is The Way It Is*, copyright 1978 and 1980 Sondra Anice Barnes and used with her permission.)

Let's imagine that I'm around 18 months old, playing in my crib with my toys. There's a noise at the door, so I look up. Wow! Here comes Mommy, and she has her arms out for little Ronnie. I know from previous associational experience that this means she's going to pick me up and we're going to cuddle, which is what I love best. So I stand up, put a big smile on my face, and reach out to her

as she's bending down for me . . . and then something happens: she turns around and walks away.

Now remember, I'm only 18 months old. I don't know anything about telephones, doorbells, teakettles, or any of the other possible things that could have called her away at that moment. All I know is that she left.

Of course, if I'm an 18-month-old, Self-realized, awakened spiritual master, I would say, "Huh, isn't that interesting? I wonder why she went away? Oh well, she'll be back soon enough, and in the meantime, I'll just have fun and build some piles with my blocks."

But I'm not an 18-month-old, Self-realized, awakened spiritual master. I'm an ordinary Soul learning through human experience. And I'm so devastated that I start to cry. Right then and there, I've begun to learn through association that *loving* and *leaving* go together.

And if *rejection* or *abandonment* is part of the spiritual curriculum I came to work on and possibly complete in this lifetime, that pattern has now been "seeded" in my consciousness. I've now embarked upon a career of being attracted to and falling in love with women who will probably leave me. And if they don't of their own volition, I will most likely unconsciously push them away to validate the belief that people who love me will leave me, because the two are paired in my consciousness.

It's interesting how the psychology community has tended to look at these sorts of mechanisms and sought to explain them in terms of an almost Newtonian, cause-and-effect dynamic. Traditional psychology tells us that Ronnie's rejection pattern was "caused" by his early relationship with his mother, who rejected him.

But is this really an explanation, much less *the* explanation? Or is it a description of an illusion? If it were truly a cause-and-effect dynamic, then wouldn't all men who were seemingly rejected by their mothers have a lifelong rejection pattern? But they don't. Even siblings growing up in the same family have radically different interpretations of the same event. Isn't that a clue to the subjective nature of personal reality?

I recall one of my earliest experiences in a group-therapy

encounter of the type popular in the '60s. Everyone was taking turns going around a circle engaging in what today would be called some serious parent bashing. For example, "I'm the way I am because my parents didn't love me enough and did this to me and that to me."

When it got around to the last guy, he said, "Wow, I'm really amazed by everything I've heard. My parents treated me in all the ways you've all shared that your parents treated you, but somehow I always knew that that was their stuff and had nothing to do with me. So I never took any of it personally." Amazing! How did he know that?

If we stick with a purely psychological, cause-and-effect explanation for human sadness and pain, we'll be going around in philosophical circles for a long time because there is really no way to prove or disprove any such theory. However, once we shift into a context of Spiritual Psychology, we open the field for discovery. We begin to see that each and every Soul is born into the Earth School, as Dr. Hunter liked to call it, with a specific curriculum. And that curriculum predisposes our developing egos to make certain interpretations of early experiences so that the patterns we're here to work on completing are seeded in our consciousness.

Divinely Inspired Programming

It turns out that unresolved issues are programmed into the software package of your consciousness even before you're old enough to consciously distinguish one thing from another. Before you developed the capacity to reason, you've made associations based upon your spiritually inspired predispositions. You behave the way you do not because of genetics or environmental influence, but rather because you came in *wired* to develop in that way. Consider the possibility that rather than *causing* the challenges you face in life, your genetics and environment *support* the spiritual agenda you're here to fulfill. So what are these "interpretations" you're prone to make? And how do you make them?

When we get inside an individual's consciousness, we find something astonishing. There's often an early-childhood experience, followed by an *interpretation* of that experience, which functioned as a defining moment. At such times, a conclusion is reached about the way things are (definition of reality), and a decision is made about how to behave in order to survive and cope in a world where these sorts of things occur. Frequently, these early *interpretations,* and the subsequent behavioral choices, set the tone for lifelong patterns.

For example, if an infant *perceived* she wasn't sufficiently held and cuddled at birth, she may have *interpreted* that experience to mean she was unwanted. Even if it were accurate that she was unwanted by her parents, from the vantage point of the individual's spiritual curriculum, that circumstance of birth could be seen as the way in which a pattern of unworthiness was seeded in her consciousness. In other words, whether a child is wanted or not is, from the Soul's perspective, independent of how that Soul will *interpret* its early experience. The Soul will choose in accordance with its spiritual curriculum.

We have found that if we can get *between* the experience and what the child decided about the experience based on his or her predisposition toward certain interpretations, we can begin the healing process. Why? *Because it's the interpretation one gives to experience that's really at issue.*

Said another way, *the core of healing involves a recontextualizing process through which people evolve to the place where they're* <u>*Seeing Through Soul-Centered Eyes.*</u> *In so doing, they actually redefine their reality by learning to choose interpretations more in alignment with a Soul-Centered context. The result is an enhanced sense of Self-Compassion and a higher level of consciousness.* This is true healing. We'll be taking you through a step-by-step healing process that utilizes this contextual understanding a few chapters from now.

The ramifications of such a process are not only radical but also far-reaching. Consider, for example, the implications for a public-school system that would seek to require every child to learn the same lessons regardless of each Soul's curriculum. It was precisely

in response to this state of affairs that educators such as Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner founded their respective schools. They both had in common a dedication to providing an individual educational curriculum tailor-made to honor and support each child's Soul-directed uniqueness.

If what we're suggesting has validity, it would appear to lead into the philosophy of reincarnation. But does believing in reincarnation or not really matter? Sometime ago, a wonderful interview with Dr. Ian Stevenson appeared in *The New York Times*. Dr. Stevenson was then the Director of the Department of Personality Studies at the University of Virginia. He had spent the better part of his life on evidence-gathering trips to check out the accuracy of people's claims of past-life memories.

(As a sidebar, while writing this I remembered part of an early conversation I had with Dr. Hunter when I questioned her about the existence of so-called past lives. She simply said, "Don't be concerned about it. You didn't believe it in your last life either.")

Some of Stevenson's fascinating results can be found in his work *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. What was most notable about the book, however, was not the nature of the evidence, but rather Dr. Stevenson's response to the question: "If reincarnation were widely accepted, how would it change the world?"

He answered:

> It would lessen guilt on the part of parents. They wouldn't have as much of a burden that, whatever goes wrong with a child is all their fault, either through genes or mishandling during the child's infancy. People themselves would have to take more responsibility for their own destinies. . . .

Wow! Now that's empowerment!
And then he added a most remarkable statement:

> I don't expect any great moral transformation. On my first trip to India I met a respected Indian monk, a swami. I told him I had come out to see what evidence there was in India for reincarnation. He remained silent for a long, long time. Then he said, "We here in India regard it as a fact that people are reborn,

but, you see, it doesn't make a difference because we have just as many rogues and villains in India as you have in the West."

Freedom and Personal Responsibility

The important thing is that, regardless of the mechanism a Soul uses to bring forward its curriculum, it's your individual responsibility to heal, resolve, or complete that pattern. To be successful in such an endeavor, the *willingness to assume personal responsibility* is the cornerstone, and that leads to the following principle:

> **Principle #13:** *Personal responsibility is the foundational key that opens the door to Freedom.*

The ego would scoff, "Nonsense! You can only be responsible for what's under your control. When things not under your control happen to you, obviously you're a victim of them. Individual suffering is caused by external circumstances."

The Authentic Self would gently and lovingly reply, "Regardless of what situations or circumstances you find yourself in, you're always responsible for the way you choose to respond to them."

I remember my doctoral-dissertation oral defense as if it were yesterday. (By the way, isn't it interesting that it's called a *defense?*) The five faculty members whose job it was to intellectually attack my position and mercilessly probe for chinks in my academic armor were seated across the table. I can still see them brandishing their mental sabers while I—outnumbered as I was by these superior, authoritative forces—could only rely upon the thoroughness of my training stemming from my total immersion in my chosen subject matter: *values.*

I don't recall how it came up, but I made this statement: "Freedom is often assumed to mean that we can do whatever we want whenever we want to do it." It was met not with a clash of steel, but rather with an incredulous lowering of blades and a quizzical, "What? Are you saying it's not?" Without realizing it, I had inadvertently stumbled upon their vulnerability by presenting

a new way of looking at an idea. My *defense* was over. In that moment, we had become colleagues exploring the meaning of freedom.

From a Soul's vantage point, freedom has little to do with choices we make in physical-world reality. The Soul doesn't care if we take this road or that one, because it will use either road for its purposes of learning and healing. Freedom isn't about freedom *to,* but rather freedom *from.* In this sense it has much more to do with freedom *from* inner disturbance, independent of outside circumstances. *It is freedom from the bondage of unresolved issues. It is freedom from what we refer to as unnecessary emotional suffering.*

And yet, paradoxically, it's your choices that determine the quality of your life. Stephen R. Covey went right to the point when he wrote: "Until a person can say deeply and honestly, 'I am what I am today because of the choices I made yesterday,' that person cannot say, 'I choose otherwise.'"

Freedom is only possible when you enter into a willingness to take personal responsibility. Until you're willing to consider how the choices you're making contribute to your drama and suffering, you're involved in the plight of the victim, and you will report the situations in your life from the victim's perspective. As long as you insist upon blaming sources outside yourself for your circumstances and ensuing disturbances, you will maintain yourself in a victim position and will suffer accordingly.

But the moment you choose to accept personal responsibility for *all* your inner experiences *independent of what appears to have caused them,* the escape hatch *automatically* swings open, providing you with the opportunity for passing into the land of freedom. You become authentically empowered, and you discover there really is a calm at the center of the fiercest hurricane where you can reside. In fact, eventually you realize that you *are* that calm.

The willingness to take personal responsibility for everything in your consciousness is an essential component of Spiritual Psychology. There can be no exceptions. Taking responsibility seems like risky business and not at all attractive to the ego, for it involves the ego honestly looking at the times it may have contributed to the

current predicament or dilemma. The ego hates doing this because, living in a dualistic reality, that would mean that it might have to admit that it was, dare we say it . . . *wrong.*

In this regard, courage is the coin you most require in your purse, for it seems to your physically oriented ego that by taking personal responsibility, you are drawing arbitrary lines in the sand by which you may be judged as wrong. You are essentially saying, "The buck stops here!"

It takes great courage to accept personal responsibility, for when this idea is heard for the first time, one of two things might happen inside: (1) Your ego will say, "What a ridiculous idea—a good example of misguided, woo-woo, New Age nonsense!" or (2) you may be ready to consider the possibility that somewhere inside you're open to having a different experience. You may have that exciting Aha! experience that resonates as a truer *truth* than your previous truth. And the next new awareness may replace the new truth you just learned with an even newer truth, and so on. As you continue awakening, your awareness of *truth* evolves to the point where you observe life *only* through Soul-Centered Eyes, and you realize that truth and Love mean the same thing: that Truth *is* Love, and Love *is* what is True.

Once you begin processing life in this exciting new way, you begin moving into the full-responsibility mode. It's here that our next principle is found:

Principle #14: *Nothing outside of you causes your disturbances.*

There are no exceptions to this principle and no avoiding it. You can either do "I am upset because . . ." or you can do "I am 100 percent responsible for any disturbance going on in my consciousness regardless of what seems to have triggered it." There's no such thing as in between, and the choice is always yours. Always!

Notice that we're not saying: "I am responsible for anything and everything going on outside of my life." While, to a greater or lesser degree, you may have *influence* over many of the events occurring in your life, rarely, if ever, do you actually have *control* over anything happening outside yourself. However, you do have

dominion over everything going on within your consciousness, and this is where true empowerment is found.

From within this position of personal responsibility, you're essentially saying that no matter what goes on outside, you have the power and clarity to stay in balance and at Peace. And when you don't, you can recognize that your school is in session and work on healing the part inside that's disturbed. But you can't have it both ways. You can't be willing to take responsibility for your disturbance *except* when something has happened about which there really is good reason to be upset. Yes, we are suggesting that there *really* is no such thing as a good reason to be upset.

You can play the victim role or the empowered role, but you can't play both simultaneously any more than someone can be pregnant and not pregnant at the same time. It's only when you're willing to claim 100 percent responsibility for your internal process, regardless of how good the reasons are for blaming others, that you have any chance whatsoever of completing your Soul-orchestrated curriculum. Prior to that time, you'll continue as if gains in the physical world are what life is all about.

Humanity will probably continue at its rapid technological pace and arrive at a time when, like Captain Kirk and the *Enterprise* crew, we'll have a Scotty to beam us up. However, regardless of how much external-world technological progress we make, we'll still find that no matter where we go, there we are. For technological progress in itself will never fulfill our Souls' desire and destiny . . . which is to beam up into the waiting arms of God.

Soul-Centered Practices

The domain of responsibility is both crucial and very interesting in that it operates on both the Goal and Learning Lines of Life. For that reason, we have two practices, one for each context. Let's start with *Facilitating Responsibility I: Choice,* which functions primarily on the Goal Line.

Facilitating Responsibility I: Choice

What can make taking personal responsibility challenging is that the word *responsibility,* in Western culture, often has a sense of obligation or burden associated with it. Many people think the following: "If I find that I have responsibility for a certain situation or feeling, then that means I'm obligated to do something about it." But the word simply means the ability to respond, and you always have a choice in how you do this: You can choose to continue responding to something the way you have been, or you can decide on another course of action. It's up to you.

What also can make taking personal responsibility challenging is a reluctance to evaluate your choices because you don't want to be blamed or blame yourself for poor ones. It's the ego's right/wrong model. The Authentic Self isn't concerned with right and wrong. It's only concerned with learning, and utilizes the *evaluative* or *What works better?* approach to life. So if your intention is to live from within a Soul-Centered context, what you want to do is accept what *is* without judgment, take 100 percent responsibility for your choices, and begin making more positive choices. After all, one really good definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result.

For this exercise it's also important to recognize that the word *responsibility* is often paired with the word *commitment.* Making that connection is a mistake in that it will tend to limit your willingness to consider other choices that may be more productive. So when you engage in the following process, please divorce these two concepts from each other. All you want to do is consider the possibility of other choices. It's not necessary for you to commit to doing anything different at this time. We are simply asking you to consider other options. When you do the process, we think you'll see what we mean.

1. Center your awareness in your heart and consciously look for the Loving Essence within. Allow yourself to identify a current situation that you would like to be different.

Example: I've wanted to write a children's book for some time now, but I don't ever seem to get around to starting it.

2. Are you aware of any choices (inner and/or outer) you're presently making that tend to maintain the situation as it is?

Example: Well, inwardly I'm aware that when I think of writing, I tell myself that what I have to say isn't really very important anyway. And outwardly I choose to do other things, the result of which is that I put off writing until some future unspecified time.

3. Take your time and consider the possibility of other choices that might produce different results. It's not that you have to do anything differently; can you simply see any alternatives?

Example: Inwardly, I could choose to tell myself that what I want to share is valuable and worthwhile, and outwardly, of course, I could choose to schedule some specific time to sit down and write.

4. Without committing to doing anything different at this time, take a few minutes and visualize yourself in the process of making the new choices in the present, as if you were making them now.

Example: Here I am, sitting at my desk. I'm aware of the impulse inside of myself to write a beautiful children's book. I'm choosing to honor that impulse, and I've scheduled two hours in the morning, four days a week, for writing. And here I am happily writing, and the words are just pouring out of me. I feel wonderful.

Do you notice any difference in your awareness? Many people perceive a subtle shift in their consciousness just from doing this visualization once.

Our experience has shown us that doing Step 4—visualizing yourself engaging in the new behavior—daily for a minimum of 32

consecutive days often results in extraordinary shifts in a person's behavior. In case you're wondering why we use 32 days, there's something powerful about going beyond a typical month of 30 or 31 days that serves to anchor a new behavior pattern in consciousness. We recommend creating a calendar with 32 boxes, starting with the date you begin. So if June 5 happens to fall on a Tuesday, that would be day one and you'd build the calendar from there. June 6 would be day two, and so on. The best time for most people to do this short process seems to be in the evening just prior to going to sleep. In fact, many find it helpful to keep the calendar on their pillows as a reminder to do the process. Then, in the morning, they place a check in the box representing the previous evening. It doesn't have to take more than a few minutes each time, and we believe you'll find the results well worth the effort.

Facilitating Responsibility II: Ownership

This practice functions primarily on the Learning Line. While the first aspect of *responsibility* has to do with simply giving yourself permission to see new possibilities for choices you're currently making, the second has to do with the willingness to take 100 percent *responsibility* for what's going on within your own consciousness. Moving into such willingness can be extremely challenging, as well as extremely empowering. It can be challenging since once you dare to look, you run the risk of entering into self-blame or self-recrimination. Believe it or not, we've heard there's even a name for it—New Age guilt!

Once the notion of personal responsibility became more widespread, some people began taking it in a direction it was never intended to go. Their reasoning went something like this: "What? Are you saying that I'm responsible for everything that goes on in my life? You mean I'm responsible for my cancer? Oh my God, why would I do such a terrible thing to myself? Why would I cause myself so much pain and suffering? This is even more evidence of what an unworthy person I am." Can you see how the ego is using the potentially liberating Principle #12 *(unresolved issues are not bad;*

they are just part of your spiritual curriculum and are an opportunity for healing) and turning it back on itself to maintain its original position of unworthiness? In other words, there's a temptation to take what has happened and use it as *proof of your unworthiness* rather than as an indicator that you likely have inner work to do regarding your reaction to whatever has happened.

What's the alternative? Within the spiritual context, you'd assume that you're responsible for everything in your life. However, you usually don't know the spiritual reason why your Soul would choose an experience such as cancer. What you do know is that all of life serves a spiritual purpose, and since illness is a part of life, cancer must serve one, too.

The question of purpose aside, *Facilitating Responsibility II: Ownership* allows you to move into a space where you're essentially saying, "Regardless of what I am working with, I am 100 percent *responsible* for my internal reality. I am *responsible* for my attitudes, what I tell myself about my experience, and how I choose to deal with it. And I'm especially responsible for any negativity I'm running inside myself that supports an 'I am upset because . . .' position. My intention is simply to accept what's present and not make myself, or my experience, wrong."

In summary, you must be willing to take individual responsibility for any disturbance you experience. Again, this is a four-step process:

1. Center your awareness in your heart and consciously look for the Loving Essence within. Allow yourself to identify a recent experience where you found yourself experiencing emotional distress and wanting to blame yourself or someone else for what happened and for your reaction.

> **Example:** I've wanted to write a children's book for some time, but I don't ever seem to get around to starting it. I tell myself that what I have to say isn't really very important or valuable anyway, and then I get upset because I keep procrastinating.

2. Utilizing the Soul-Centered Practices of *Seeing the Loving Essence* and *Heart-Centered Listening,* and without trying to change anything, allow yourself to move into a place of Acceptance: Acceptance of what is; of your feelings; of your actions; and even of any conclusions you may have drawn about yourself, others, and/or your experience.

> *Example:* I'm learning that the nature of God is Love and that since I'm a part of God, my nature is also Love. I don't have to like my feelings or my actions in order to accept them. I can simply accept them for what they are. In fact, that's the most Loving and liberating thing I can do.

3. Once you've entered a place of Acceptance, allow yourself to accept ownership of your feelings and actions without blaming anyone, especially yourself. Remember that no matter what you did, how you felt at the time, or how you're feeling right now, you're still a beautiful, valuable, and lovable Soul who's truly doing your best.

> *Example:* I can see that I don't have to make anyone wrong, including myself, for my feelings and actions. I can also see that by accepting responsibility for my feelings and actions I'm free to work on changing them. I'm no longer a victim of what's happening outside myself.

4. Gently remind yourself that anytime you feel upset, all that has happened is that your spiritual agenda is revealing places in your consciousness that are in need of healing, and that these situations are God-given opportunities for progressing spiritually.

> *Example:* I recognize that this entire situation is pointing out to me a place where I have work to do regarding my own sense of unworthiness and lack of value. And when I choose to accept responsibility for the situation and my inner process, I have a tremendous feeling of empowerment.

When you've completed *Facilitating Responsibility II: Ownership,* you may experience a sense of incompletion. You may be thinking,

Okay, I can accept my feelings and actions, but now what? What can I do with that awareness? It's helpful to understand that this is a door-opening process. Think of a baseball game: This Soul-Centered Practice is a mechanism that allows you to move from the stadium of spectators onto the field of play. You receive a bat, step up to the plate, and have the opportunity to hit a home run. Until such time, you remain a spectator. Later in the book, we'll introduce you to a process that you can use to hit home runs—sometimes with the bases loaded!

Facilitating Responsibility II: Ownership is another one of the processes that lends itself to a 32-day strategy like the one we described following *Facilitating Responsibility I: Choice.* Both of these processes often result in significant shifts in consciousness. Of course, there's only one way for you to find out how significant they may be for you: try them!

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Stem Sentences to Write Down and Contemplate

- If what happens outside myself doesn't *cause* me to be upset, but merely triggers upset already present in my consciousness, then . . .

- And if what happens outside myself doesn't *cause* me to be happy, but merely triggers happiness already present in my consciousness, then . . .

- If I am truly willing to take 100 percent personal responsibility for *everything* that goes on in my inner awareness, with no exceptions, then . . .

- If unresolved issues are not bad, then . . .

- If unresolved issues are part of my spiritual curriculum, then . . .

- I'm not so sure that I'm ready to let go of blaming _____ for . . .

Repeat as often as necessary.