



Oneness

BOTH ANNIE AND SARAH SEEMED ONLY CASUALLY interested in the experience that Michael and I had shared with Eduardo the night before, and that was probably for the best. We three had traveled everywhere, and nowhere, but we didn't need to say a word to each other about it — we fully understood what the other had experienced. Besides, no words were available that could adequately describe what had transpired that night. Nevertheless, we made feeble attempts.

“So, did you see the ‘door?’” asked Annie, skeptically. I had slept until late morning and was brushing my teeth with a cup of water outside the hut, trying to remove any lingering taste of the previous night's potion. Michael and Sarah were nearby, eating breakfast underneath a banana tree.

“Door, hell, I didn't even see the *room*,” I mumbled.

“I think Eduardo was right, Annie,” interrupted Michael, between mouthfuls of granola. “Consciousness probably *is* unlimited. At least that's the way it seemed to me last night.”

“Or maybe it would be more accurate to say we're *part* of an unlimited consciousness,” I offered, putting my toothbrush in my breast pocket and hoping Pepita wouldn't steal it. She had already wandered off with several of Michael's possessions. “The brew seemed to cause the

boundary between me and everything else to disappear. It's hard to describe. And it made me sick as hell, too."

"It's fantastic to know that we can tap into that infinity," Michael said, philosophically. The four of us found seats around the smoldering fire.

"But what did you guys tap *into*?" Sarah asked. "How do you know it wasn't just all in your *minds*?"

Michael and I both shrugged. "I don't know if I can explain it," I said. Michael agreed.

"First, I know I got sick as a dog."

"So did I," added Michael.

"Then, I started seeing lights out of the corners of my eyes."

"Me, too."

"After that, I saw *everything* differently, and *heard* everything differently. I could actually *see* sounds, and feel them, too. I could hear the individual voices of the tree frogs. They sounded human. I could almost understand what they were saying. Then each voice took on a shape and color of its own. It was incredible. Each croak rolled over me like a gigantic magenta bubble. I could even see things with my eyes closed."

"Like what?!" asked Sarah.

"Patterns. Moving shapes and forms in three dimensions. Lots of colors. It was amazing, and it didn't matter if my eyes were open or closed. Did you see stuff like that, Michael?"

"Kind of. At one point I bent over to throw up and the stream of vomit turned into a huge snake that curled around my feet. I wasn't afraid, though. It was fascinating."

Annie closed her eyes and shook her head.

"I saw a person," I interjected. "I felt like it was Lucy. A woman stood in the shadows, staring straight at me, glowing white. I could feel a warmth radiating from her. I couldn't see her face, but I knew she was looking at me."

"How did you know it was a woman?" Annie asked doubtfully.

"I just *knew* it. I don't know how. The moment I

noticed her, she disappeared, and so did I.”

“What do you mean, *you* just *disappeared*?” asked Annie, incredulously.

“I just did. I wasn’t here anymore,” I tried to explain. “Well, maybe physically I was here; you probably would have seen my body sitting here if you looked. I don’t know. But my sense of *self* disappeared. I just can’t explain it. I went to the same place the woman did. A place where everything is one thing, where there was no separation between my consciousness and everything surrounding me. I didn’t just see the trees around me, I *was* the trees. I didn’t hear a sound, I *was* that sound.”

At that moment, we heard a stirring from Eduardo’s hut, and saw a pair of feet searching for the rungs of the ladder. Eduardo climbed down, looking a little bedraggled. He had probably been up most of the night too. Pepita scrambled out of nowhere and climbed up onto his shoulder. They walked off into the bush, and returned with a bunch of red bananas. Eduardo passed us each a banana, including Pepita, then sat beside us at the fire spot. The bananas were remarkably delicious, with a rich and tangy flavor that made the commercial bananas back home seem insipid. Pepita gleefully took her banana and scrambled off into the forest.

“Eduardo,” Michael broke the silence, “I think I found the door last night. I think I had some sort of religious experience! At the risk of sounding trite, I felt I was ‘one’ with everything!”

“Oneness is the essence of spirituality,” Eduardo responded. “There is only one thing — the Great Mystery. We are only a very small part of it. We can sense the oneness beyond ourselves in many ways, not just by plant helpers. It can be a daily exercise, even a normal state of mind.” He rested his chin on his hand and stroked his beard thoughtfully. “But, *religion* can have little to do with spirituality. Religion separates. It separates people from each other, it separates people from the Earth mother. Religion is based upon *belief*, whereas spirituality is based

upon *awareness*. You can believe *anything*, but you can only be aware of what is real.”

“Are you saying the snake that came out of Michael’s mouth last night was *real*?” asked Annie.

“Michael was aware he saw a snake in his mind’s eye, but he didn’t believe he saw a *real* snake. Awareness is flexible. It is always changing according to the information it is receiving from the senses. Belief is inflexible. It is reluctant to change. It requires no senses. That is why the spiritual person relies on awareness, and avoids belief.”

“But you believe the Earth mother is sick, don’t you?” Annie stressed.

“I am *aware* that the Earth mother is sick. You can also gain that awareness through observation of real things in the real world. I don’t have to believe it; I can see it with my own eyes. I can hear it in the silence that now blankets the night in many areas of the bush that once thrived with life. I can feel it in my heart when I see the poor, the malnourished, and the unfulfilled people in the villages.”

“When we rigidly believe things for which there is no proof,” Eduardo continued, “*that* is religion. Religion will show you the ephemeral nature of truth, because whatever you believe will be true, for you. No matter how ridiculous, no matter how foolish, no matter how harmful. If you believe it, it is true, and you will live your life by it. That is the danger of religion. So Michael, no, you did not have a religious experience. Instead, your awareness was expanded. You saw a truer nature of your total self. You had a *spiritual* experience.”

“Incredible,” Michael whispered.

“But what difference did it make in the whole scheme of things?” asked Sarah, always the analytical one. “What *good* did it do you?”

“Well, Sarah,” I spoke up, finally feeling like I was beginning to pull some of the pieces of Lucy’s puzzle together. “Let me tell you what *I* think happened last night. I think I understand now what Lucy meant by the ‘Eco and the Ego.’ My ego was stripped away last night by

Eduardo's rank brew," I turned to him, apologetically. "Sorry Eduardo, but it did taste horrible." Turning back to Sarah, I continued, "Somehow, the brew made my ego disappear, like popping a bubble. I had absolutely no feeling of self-importance. My *self* was like the air in that bubble; it simply merged with the surrounding atmosphere when the bubble burst. Lucy might say that the atmosphere is the Eco, the Earth mother, or the Great Mystery. When the bubble is popped and the Ego disappears, all that's left is the Eco. It all became crystal clear last night. I can see now why Lucy said there's a battle waging between the Ego and the Eco. The Ego is merely human self-interest and —"

"No!" Eduardo abruptly interrupted. "It is *not* human self-interest to destroy the very life support systems that humanity depends upon. The 'Ego,' as Lucita calls it, is human self-*importance*. That is a big difference. Human self-*interest* demands that we protect the Earth mother. But it is human self-*importance* that wages a war against the Earth mother. When we believe we are more important than the rest of life, our belief blinds us to the awareness that we are harming not only the rest of life, but also ourselves, our children, and our future, even as we poison the Earth mother under our feet. Your people suffer from spiritual blindness. They must be made to see for the sake of us all."

"What about the 'balance point'? How does that figure into all this?" asked Annie.

"What about it?" I asked.

"What does it mean?" she persisted.

"Annie, I think I can explain," Michael offered offhandedly. "Let me make a stab at it at least, if you don't mind. The 'balance point' would be when we realize we're only part of something bigger — a part of something that's real, something knowable by our senses, a 'living universe' as Eduardo said earlier. If we place too much importance upon our individual personalities, let's call it self-aggrandizement, we can do damage to that greater Being by over-consuming, creating waste, squandering resources, destroy-

ing species, and so on, all so we can have a home that's ten times bigger than we actually need —”

“Like a castle?” interrupted Sarah. “Some people want to be a king or queen, don't they? It's an ego trip.”

“Yes, and we'll eat ten times more than we need,” continued Michael.

“And get bloated and fat,” Sarah chimed in. “While people all over the world are starving.”

“And so on,” Michael added. “But if we find a balance point between ourselves and the living universe, we'll live harmoniously with the greater whole. We'll still place enough importance upon ourselves to lead healthy, productive, rewarding, and fulfilling lives. But it'll be without the waste and pollution and greed that's come to be the trademark of our culture.”

“Yes,” added Sarah, “a culture that obviously denies that there *is* such a thing as a future.”

“The balance you are speaking of, Michael, is spiritual fulfillment in the truest sense of the word,” replied Eduardo, “and it is different for each person. Some will remain imbalanced toward self-importance, and some imbalanced toward selfless devotion, but most will be somewhere in between. It is the natural condition of any creature to be in balance with the Earth mother; we know we are at a place of balance when the Earth mother is content and healthy.” Eduardo frowned, and looked pensive. “She is now ailing, though. She is sick. Too many of your people are imbalanced toward the ego, as Lucy would say, toward self-importance. They are locked in their rooms with mirrors on their walls. They forget they are part of something much greater than themselves. In their self-absorption, they are harming the world. When so many people have lost sight of their spiritual balance point, the entire planet is thrown off-kilter. For all of us to survive, your people need to change their obsession with self-importance into a focus on self-interest. They need to grow beyond their blind beliefs to become aware of the greater reality around them.”

“But how can you say that religion has nothing to do with spirituality?” asked Annie, who seemed to be hung up on this issue. “Isn’t that what people go to church for? Are you saying people should denounce their religions? Leave their churches?”

“Annie, you must understand that spirituality is not religion,” replied Eduardo. “Spirituality is *everything*. It is our connection to the Totality. I am simply saying that religion is not necessarily spirituality. A person can be very religious and not spiritual at all. They can have no awareness of their connection to the greater being — the Earth mother. They can engage in all sorts of *religious* rituals and practices, and cling to all sorts of religious *beliefs*, yet have no *ethical* connection to the *real* world. Do you understand?”

“I think so.”

“Many of your people who are making the Earth mother sick are very religious. On the other hand, a person can be totally non-religious and still be very spiritual. A person can be both spiritual *and* religious too, if they so choose. Many people are.”

“How’s that?” asked Annie.

“It’s quite simple. Religion is based on belief. Do you remember me saying that?”

“Yes.”

“And people will believe almost anything,” Eduardo continued. “But a spiritual person can participate in a religion without actually *believing* the myths. They are *aware* that the theological stories are only myths.”

“Myths? Such as?” Annie demanded, somewhat defensively.

“Religious leaders try very hard to make people believe that the universe was created by one mythical creature or another. The very concept is absurd — quaint, perhaps, but unrealistic. Nevertheless, people do believe it. There is nothing spiritual about believing in myths; that is religion, dogma, and nothing more. Perhaps we believe in myths because we no longer want to think, we no longer want to

sharpen our awareness or evolve our understanding.”

“Then who created the universe?” Annie asked, somewhat smugly.

“Why do you think the universe was created by someone?” replied Eduardo.

“Because it exists.”

“And you believe something created the universe, then, because it exists?” questioned Eduardo.

“How could it exist if it wasn’t created?” she asked.

“If you think the universe was created, Annie, then who do *you* think created it?”

“God created the universe, of course,” she responded, defiantly.

“Does God exist?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then who created your God?”

Annie opened her mouth to speak, and, realizing that Eduardo had just checkmated her line of reasoning, shut it just as quickly.

“If everything that exists had to be created, then a Creator, if one exists, had to be created too, following your line of reasoning,” explained Eduardo. “And if a Creator can exist without having to be created, then, by the same logic, the Great Mystery could also be self-created. It makes just as much sense to think that the Great Mystery is not limited by time and space, even though *we* are, and therefore the Great Mystery has no beginning or end. A Creator, under those circumstances, is not necessary — its only purpose is to provide a basis for religion. ‘Creators’ are myths used to explain the unexplainable. In many cases, such myths simply amount to humans worshipping human deities, which again unnecessarily swells our sense of human self-importance.”

“What about the Big Bang?” I countered. “How can the universe have no beginning if scientists say it began with a bang?”

“Lucita, a nuclear physicist, was quite amused by this topic. She agreed that we humans are like microbes on a

grain of sand. We know very little about the nature of the universe. For some reason we want to believe there was a beginning, so we make up a theory. We don't know what happened twenty billion years ago any more than a microbe on a grain of sand can recite Shakespeare. Eventually, the Big Bang theory will develop into another theory. But they are only theories, beliefs, if you will. Sometimes science itself is like a religion."

"Let's get back to *real* religion," persisted Annie. "So people should denounce their churches? Is that what you're saying?"

"No. That's not what I'm saying. Please don't misunderstand me. Religious institutions have their purpose. They provide charity, social support systems, inspiration, and revitalization for many people. Now all they need do is adopt a more spiritual perspective based on *reality*. People need to feel a real connection within themselves to the greater life force they are *part* of. You cannot have a connection to a mythical human figure except in your imagination. That is not good enough anymore. We must evolve beyond that limited scope of awareness and realize we are part of something that is real, not imaginary. We are part of a living universe, a Great Mystery, and our minds are part of a universal mind. Our consciousness is part of an unlimited consciousness. The religious frameworks can remain as they are, but the hearts and minds of the people must change. Then, everything else will also change."

"But what about the afterlife?" asked Annie. "Is that only fantasy too? Are we supposed to throw out everything we learned in church?"

"He's not a doctor of theology, Annie, jeez, give the guy a break," implored Michael.

"She actually asked a very important question, Michael," replied Eduardo. "Look carefully around you, Annie. What do you see?"

"Well, I see trees and bushes. I see Pepita swinging on a vine over there, like a maniac. I see two huts. I see smoke rising from the fire in front of us."

“What you are seeing, Annie, *is* the afterlife,” Eduardo replied.

We all looked at him with blank expressions on our faces.

“*This* is the life that will continue after you have passed away. Religious people tell you to prepare for life after death. They do not understand that the life that exists after death is the life that continues on this Earth. *That* is what a spiritual person prepares for. It is our descendants who will live here after we are gone. We must prepare the afterlife for *their* sake. We, as people, will all die, Annie, but Life will never end.”