

REMEMBERING WHO WE ARE



50 WAYS TO TELL
YOUR SOUL'S STORY

Robert Atkinson

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50 Ways to Tell Your Soul's Story

ROBERT ATKINSON



Eliot Books

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Who We Are Is Where We Came From	6
1. Remembrance is a Spiritual Practice	12
Remembering What We Already Know	
Remembering Is Living In Gratitude	
2. 50 Ways to Tell Your Soul’s Story	24

Who You Really Are

by Kirtana

*Could there be more to this life we call "mine"
than a journey through space, or a story line?*

*More to life than the body can sense
than the mind can conclude from experience*

*Does who we are begin with breath,
depend on form or end with death?*

*Strip away these roles, these names
and tell me what remains*

*And who you really are,
who you really are.*

*We measure success by the things we accrue
or the bonds that we form, or the deeds we do*

*But these too shall pass, as hard as we try
to hold on to form; form will die*

But inherent in this dance of form

Is the chance to see what's yet unborn

And the choice to throw this chance away

*And be caught up in the play
of who we think we are,*

who we think we are

This is your lifetime; it could end at anytime.

Where is your attention?

Where is your prayer?

Where is your song?

*In a fortunate life, comes a call to be free
From the cycle of bondage and misidentity,
to wake from the dream and finally realize
the truth of one's being before the body dies*

*So before the final scene is past,
see the screen on which it's cast.*

See what's seeing this me and you.

And then you will see who...

who you really are, who you really are

Who you really are, who we really are.

Introduction

Who We Are Is Where We Came From

*Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles
is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?*

John Keats¹

*The whole world and all of life
are nothing but the raw materials for soul-making.*

Thomas Moore²

As human beings, we are all tied together by the same spiritual DNA. We realize our lives are sacred when we are drawn into the timelessness of the human experience. We do this by connecting with the eternal, or what is most essentially human, when we see that our own experience or situation in life is not unique, but is common to others and is timeless.

Beyond all the here-and-now stuff of our lives, we all come from a common origin, someplace deeper and longer-lasting than this surface level existence. Beyond the daily, mundane events of our lives, everyone also has an eternal soul.

Marion Woodman says, “When we connect with our souls, we connect with the soul of every human being. We resonate with all living things.” This is an awareness that comes from life lived deeply. She also says, “Real life is about suffering, loss, conflict, joy, the dark and the light. What Keats called the ‘vale of soul-making.’”³

As a young English teacher, Marion Woodman knew Keats before she knew C. G. Jung and James Hillman. She also knew that Keats was talking about “learning life by heart.” If we do come from an eternal place, where spirit prevails, being thrust into this

material realm would cause quite a bit of turmoil and conflict, just what Keats says the soul, a spark of God, needs to form its new identity.

Rather than viewing life on Earth as a “vale of tears,” as in the traditional Christian perspective, in which the world provided an experience of darkness and suffering that we could escape only through divine redemption, Keats preferred to “call the world if you Please ‘The vale of Soul-making.’” He believed there is a greater purpose to our time in this world, and that our true and lasting identity was formed through the lessons learned from life’s most challenging experiences:⁴

There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions – but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself . . . How then are Souls to be made? How then are these sparks [which are God]. . . to have identity given them – so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one’s individual existence? How, but by the medium of a world like this? . . . Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! . . . As various as the Lives of Men are – so various become their Souls, and thus does God make individual beings, Souls, Identical Souls of the sparks of his own essence.

Soul-making happens when the light merges with the dark, when joy and sorrow intermingle, when the eternal breaks through from the temporal realm, and when polarities are consciously acknowledged and confronted in our everyday lives.

When these opposites are experienced, and their lessons are learned, here in the classroom of the world, the soul remembers what it came here for and evolves as it is designed to. As the woodcarver who sees the carving he wants to fashion even before he starts to carve the wood, soul -making is a process revealing what is already there.

All of the temporal chaos, confusion, conflict, and suffering that results from the interaction of opposites in this world is the only thing that truly serves as a catalyst for personal change, growth, and transformation. The stuff that only this material world can provide us, the deep and jarring contrast between the temporal and the eternal, is the necessary stuff of soul-making.

For C. G. Jung, the psyche was the soul, and the soul is what links us to the archetypal world. Soul-making is all about communicating deeply with the inner realm, or being fully awake and aware as the numinous bursts forth from the unconscious,

flooding our consciousness with eternal images. He wrote: “My life is a story of the self-realization of the unconscious. Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desires to evolve out of its unconscious conditions and to experience itself as a whole . . . I can understand myself only in the light of inner happenings. It is these that make up the singularity of my life.”⁵ What he is getting at here is that at our essence, we are like all other human beings. Soul-making is about experiencing the universals of life.

James Hillman would see soul-making as what happens when we evoke the emotions and experiences of crisis and opportunity, of love and dying that give life a deeper meaning. This could happen at any reflective moment that turns the unique into the universal, the temporal into the eternal. This requires seeing the world, with all of its opposites and dualities, as Keats did, as providing the necessary stuff of soul-making.

A deeply lived life allows us to wrestle with our demons, dance with our angels, make plans with our inner guide, and ultimately, connect with our soul. This provides us with an opportunity to exercise our imagination and to use our creative energies to transform our lives by forming mental images of what may not actually be present, but what we would like to be. “Image” and “imagination” are both from the same root, *imago*, which signifies a likeness or copy of what we envision.

We may even be born with the image of the person we become, as James Hillman contends in his intriguing “acorn theory.” He says that every single person is born with a defining image, an innate uniqueness already present *before* we are born which asks only to be lived out with the life we are given. This innate image is our essence, yet only with the unfolding of a lifetime does this inner quality, or character defining who we are, become evident. As the mighty oak’s destiny is written in the tiny acorn, so our calling, or destiny, can only be understood as we look backward, reflectively, over a life lived deliberately.⁶

We are formed from archetypal images and grow gradually into our own image of the archetype, as we age and mature through life’s experiences. Another way of saying this, as many spiritual traditions do, is that we are formed in the image of God and we have the innate capacity to reflect that image in the life we live. But character and image are inseparable. Both are the essence of who we are. We get to the essence of who we

are by expressing how we have originated from divinity, or how love, order, beauty, and justice, or any of the other divine qualities of the holy have been demonstrated in our own lives.

We are given, as a gift, a “soul-companion,” a *daimon*, which is with us each step of our journey, guiding us through the *paradeigma*, or pattern, of the life we live, toward our destiny. This acorn-like inborn essence of who we will become is given different names in different cultures and traditions, from “soul” to “genius” to “calling” to “fate” to “character.” Though none really tells us exactly what it is, each confirms *that* it is, that we all have a purpose to fulfill with the life we have to live. Making sense of image has always been a function of myth, or of sacred stories.

Jung says “image *is* psyche,” and he said that at a time when “psyche” still meant “soul.”⁷ We cannot think without relying upon inherited mental images. In the Aristotelian tradition of imagination as a fundamental quality of the mind, Jung is pointing out that memory (*memoria*) is actually a storage place that we have the ability to access and return from, bringing back eternal images to the mind.

Memory, therefore, *is* soul. Remembering, which requires imagination, is a function of the soul. The entry to this storage place is often through the doors of life review, or by telling the story of our life. We can also find images there that may be beyond our own capacity to imagine, but that nevertheless come to us from some universal wellspring, enabling us to become more than we were, or could have imagined.

Rather than indicating anything like predestination, the inborn image serves as a spark of consciousness that will benefit our own growth. It has our best interests as its purpose. Other names for this mysterious force overseeing our lives would be “grace,” or “providence,” what we might think of as being invisibly watched over. Going further in this direction, we could also add “guardian spirit” and hundreds of other terms, until we finally got to God as possibly the source for all of this aid and assistance.

This theory provides a blueprint for human development, or a psychology of childhood, youth, and adulthood. It affirms an inherent uniqueness, even a direction or pattern, waiting to unfold for each person at each stage of life. Each of us has an innate gift to utilize at a time meant to lead us directly to our essence, to our soul.

Could it be that it is not the *I* that looks back to review our life, but the *soul*? That is who we really are. Memory, that soulful part of us, wants all of who we are to remember; it seems to push itself on us, bringing back to consciousness vital images, scenes, figures, and feelings that help us re-member ourselves and in the process find deeper meaning and solidify soul qualities we may have long cultivated.

Could it be the *intention* of the soul to bring back, or even cause to appear for the first time, those eternal images, coupled with those soul qualities and virtues, needed to ensure our further progress in our continuing journey? We cannot escape remembering. Reviewing our life helps us form, or re-form, our deep character when we need it most, as a final conscious preparation for the soul's ultimate destination.

As Hillman clearly puts it, "Life review yields long-term gains that enrich character by bringing understanding to events. The patterns in your life become more discernible among the wreckage and the romance, more like a well-plotted novel that reveals characters through their actions and reactions . . . Without stories there is no pattern, no understanding . . . merely habits, events passing before the eyes of an aimless observer." He sees life review as "character making its claim" or as our sign that the soul "doesn't want to leave this world innocent of the life it has been living."⁸

As each of the nine Muses in the ancient myth artfully formed her values by musing upon her mother, the goddess Memory, we too can muse over our memories, let them take the shape they want, and notice how they form our values, virtues, and character. Life review is really about musing the values our life is built upon into meaningful patterns, themes, and subthemes.

The necessary, essential context for soul-making is life's difficulties and struggles, as these are what contribute most to meaning making and pattern shaping. With time, the unpleasant becomes more pleasant, old hurts don't hurt as much, and what once felt cold becomes warmer. The soul naturally wants to lighten up in preparation for an easier lift-off. Could this vital work, Hillman asks, be the soul's "premonition of what religious traditions call heaven"? This is where the rest of the book is headed.

Soul-making is about preparing for our reunion with our Creator; it is a lifelong process of acquiring the attributes needed for our eternal journey – a process that also leads to both individual and collective transformation.

The book expands upon the idea that our lives – our spiritual existence from before birth to after death – may reflect a process of *knowing*, *forgetting*, and *remembering*. According to a number of sacred traditions, we may have had a kind of an innate *knowing* about our life to come before we came into this world. But our physical birth seems to have initiated a *forgetting* of what we could have once known, so we spend the rest of our lives *remembering* what we forgot in order to come into the *knowing* we started out with. Remembering is a way of getting back in touch with our soul, the source of that knowing; it actually represents the search within our selves for the ancient mysteries of creation, what Jung might include as part of the collective unconscious.

Those moments of wonder we've all had when something happens at just the right time to make it seem like we already knew what we just learned – sort of like *déjà vu* – are part of a cognitive process of being tuned into our soul. The soul is the storehouse of eternal memories. The more we can identify with our eternal self, rather than with our temporal self, the more we will be able to learn from our soul about its stored wisdom.

Living from our soul rather than from our physical self means not always needing to be in control: it is listening more, trying to hear and understand what our intuitions and emotions have to tell us, keeping our eyes on the whole more than on the parts, being as concerned for others as we are for ourselves, connecting with nature and remaining as much in sync with its natural rhythms and cycles as we possibly can, and remembering that our soul is our only lasting identity, the one that is given to us before birth and that we will take with us on the rest of our eternal journey. What the soul wants from us is to be remembered as that changeless, eternal part of us.

So, the important question is not, what do *I* want, but rather, what *is wanted* beyond my current consciousness? What does my soul *want*? What are my deepest longings? What is the spirit of my life? What is most sacred to me? Giving narrative voice to these questions is essential for practical soul-making and achieving wholeness.

The first part of the book looks at remembrance as a spiritual practice, how we are hardwired for transcendence, and how we can use our conscious powers to remember our essential spiritual nature. The second part of the book offers 50 short reflections and exercises for remembering and writing your soul's story.

The world's sacred scriptures contain much about remembering who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. This book offer a life-is-an-eternal-journey perspective, through which our lives in the here and now take on an entirely different purpose and meaning. Remembering is a spiritual endeavor reminding us of who we are in eternity.

Remembrance Is a Spiritual Practice

*As from a blazing fire sparks, being like unto fire,
fly forth a thousandfold,
thus are various beings brought forth from the Imperishable, my friend,
and return thither also.*

Mundaka Upanishad 2, 1:1⁹

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
. . . Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
can in a moment travel thither. . .*

William Wordsworth¹⁰

There is a great power in remembrance. Through remembrance we are brought to a spiritual life. Remembrance is a meditation that awakens us to an everlasting reality. The conscious effort to maintain this focus expands our view of the world and our role in it; we learn thus to better understand the conflicts that arise in our lives, to distinguish between the endless pairs of opposites that appear, to make wiser choices, and to carry out deeds that

become a service to others. This, in essence, is the basis for spiritual transformation, and remembrance takes us there.

The world's sacred traditions acknowledge the importance of seeking answers to the mysteries of life. At the heart of this quest for spiritual understanding are two essential questions: "Where have we come from?" and "Where are we going?" The mystery of our origin and our destiny is intricately tied to the nature of the soul. The world's sacred traditions agree that the soul is eternal, that it exists prior to birth, and that it continues after death.

The world's religions further agree that the soul comes from and returns to God. The foundation of the Jewish tradition regarding the soul and mystic knowing is seen in Ecclesiastes (12:7), "The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." The long-standing mystical tradition of the kabbalah includes practices such as prayer, some forms of which are designed to evoke the image of God breathing the breath of life (the Holy Spirit) into man, which reflects the state of union we are born with.¹¹

The Christian framework for this mystic knowing is found in Corinthians (II, 4:1, 18), where Paul speaks of the duality we experience in this world, but acknowledges the ultimate union that exists: "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands . . . So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

The 20th century English monk Bede Griffiths recalled the timeless mystic vision of Reality when he wrote, "There is a window in my consciousness where I can look out on eternity . . . then I discover my true Self, then I begin to see the world as it really is . . . Here all is one, united in a simple vision of being."¹²

Mystic knowing in Islam has its source in the Qur'an. Similar to the Jewish and Christian traditions, the Qur'an speaks of our being created by God, being given a home in heaven, and emphasizes our reunion with God. The phrase, "Unto Him shall ye return," is oft repeated in the Qur'an (10:4; 19:11; 29:57 58; 31:14). The Night Journey of the Prophet to Jerusalem, and his ascent from there through the seven heavens to God, is symbolic of this return (Qur'an, 17:1). It has long been the purpose of the Sufis, in representing the mystical core of Islam, to experience and explain this journey back to God. The central Sufi doctrine of

tawhid refers to union with God, as well as the oneness of God, and has to do with shedding attachments to the world.¹³

At the heart of the Baha'i scriptures is the belief that our purpose in this life is to prepare for the life beyond, that the soul is on a journey from and back to God: "All things proceed from God and unto Him they return." Like all other divinely revealed religions, the Baha'i Faith is fundamentally mystic in character, with the goal of developing both the individual and society, through the acquisition of virtues and ethical values.¹⁴

When we look at Genesis (2:7), "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul," the dual nature of man, physical and spiritual, is clearly evident. Created by God of both spirit and Earth, these two forms merge and interact in the human being, causing a lifelong tension between the material and the spiritual. Our dual nature can therefore be seen as the source of many of life's struggles and difficulties throughout our earthly existence. We are continually pulled by both the physical and the spiritual worlds.

How we deal with those tests and trials brought about by the physical world the soul is thrust into; how we come to this mystic knowledge of our true nature, origin, and destiny; and how we best prepare ourselves for our return to where we came from are the keys to our progress and development here. The world's sacred traditions give us the best guideposts to follow in helping us to recognize our origin as well as our destiny.

There is a story shared by many sacred traditions that addresses, most likely metaphorically, how we learn, as unborn souls, what our nature and destiny are. But, as the story goes, we are born forgetting where we came from and why we are here. Our physical nature, and its needs and wants, take over at birth, and we seem to suspend our spiritual reality. So, we spend the rest of our lives trying to remember where we have come from and what we have already forgot, as Wordsworth hints in his poem.

One example of this story is the Jewish mystical legend, "The Angel and the Unborn Soul:"¹⁵

When the soul of Adam was created, the souls of all the generations were created and stored in the seventh heaven. God sends an angel to invite each soul from there to carry it to the womb of its mother. One time, when a soul is invited to come along to its mother, the soul protests, saying, "Don't take me from this place. I am well pleased here." But the angel assures it that, "The

world to which you are going is better than this one, and besides, it is for this purpose that God created you.” So the soul is dragged away and forcibly placed in the womb of the mother.

The next day, the angel returns and takes the soul on a journey to paradise, saying that these are the righteous who were “formed like you in the wombs of their mothers,” and, having followed God’s commandments in the world, “when they departed that world they became partakers in the happiness that you now see,” and the soul is assured that it, too, will be found worthy of abiding there if God’s commandments are observed.

Then the next day the angel returns to show the soul what hell is like, and on the following day returns again to show the soul what her life on earth will be like. After nine months, the angel returns one final time to tell the soul, “The time has come for you to go forth into the world.” But the soul objects strenuously, saying, “No, I like it here. Why should I go?” The angel replies, “As you were formed against your will, so shall you be born against your will and you will die against your will.” The soul continues to resist, but is brought forth into the world anyway, kicking and screaming. Immediately the child forgets all it has learned.

This legend addresses the descent of the soul, or its process of knowing and forgetting. Islam has a similar story about the common origin of all souls and their individual descent to Earth, in which they pass through all the basic material elements and finally become embedded in the physical body, where they remain hidden. (This also reflects the Sufi tradition of seven souls.)

“However,” as the Islamic version of the story goes, “God sent with the soul the Divine Attributes so that each individual is a link between heaven and Earth. Unfortunately, once embedded in materiality, we became blind to that secret within us.” But this story offers a way we can remember what we forgot. It says God also gave us the tools of “mind” and “will” to return to this original level of awareness.¹⁶

This legend common to many traditions may not be meant to be taken literally but rather figuratively for what is symbolically possible in this life. And we may even know of some exceptions to this process in gifted children, who may seem to be born with some remembrance of their life as a soul before birth.

But with each question answered, there are still other questions to ask. How do we remember what is buried within us? How do we use the tools within us? How do we regain

access to the forgotten knowledge of our divine origin and begin our ascent back to where we came from?

Our journey of descent from the eternal worlds, characterized by knowing and forgetting, continues in this world after birth as a journey of ascent, characterized by gradually gaining consciousness and then potentially remembering what was once known in the sacred realm.

The legend of “The Angel and the Unborn Soul” takes us right to the essence of our spiritual reality. The soul is our eternal identity, the only part of us we take with us through this life and into the next. Remembrance is the essence of spirituality. Remembering where we came from, who and what we really are, and where we are going, could even be seen as the purpose of life.

We might say, then, that we are hard-wired for transcendence, for going beyond what is seen. Transcendence could be so important to our individual and collective spiritual growth and well-being that we might not even survive without it in our lives and our communities. One cell transcends into many; many cells transcend into one body. Individuals transcend into societies, and societies transcend into world civilizations.

As souls born into physical bodies, we may be meant to go beyond what is not only most familiar to us, but to seek that which we truly are at our innermost essence. And this process has been a very long time in the works, matter transcending into mind, and the powers of the mind transcending to a consciousness of spirit. Imagine how yet-to-come levels of consciousness could add to our capacity for transcendence.

Consciousness is a unique characteristic of the self. Einstein showed us how the apparent restrictions of time and space are only illusions of this finite earthly existence. Being hard-wired for transcendence means having the innate capacity to grasp concepts beyond our experience and to utilize our consciousness to visualize infinity or eternity, enabling us to realize the potential we were born with.

Self-transcendence is consciousness fulfilling itself. A baby is not born with full-blown consciousness. Its consciousness naturally and inevitably undergoes a widening of perspective with accompanying experiences. As we progress through the life cycle, we gain meaning and maturity with each new experience. Unfolding from within is a built-in process of

transcending our own consciousness until eventually, we become conscious of the One who created consciousness.

Transcendence, then, is a process that brings individual consciousness into a closer, more connected relationship with the all-pervasive, superconsciousness, or universal mind that is called God. Through this process we take on new and expanding identities, but we do not lose previous ones. We retain our personal consciousness while merging our thoughts with a universal mind. This process becomes the adventure of a lifetime, of learning how to enter the realm of the infinite.

Such transcendence may also be the purpose of our lives on Earth. Self-transcendence, an educational device beyond any other, is designed to take us where we are meant to go, to the farthest reaches of what we are capable of becoming. It begins when we are still a seed soul, a fertilized egg in the womb, awaiting admission to the soul school of Earth, and does not end until we are reunited with the source of our being in the realm of the spirit. Our earthly life takes us along a path of growing awareness in an illusory space-time continuum, which becomes but an interval, a momentary note, in a song of eternal mystery, each breath of which moves us closer to an incomprehensible reunion.

Remembering What We Already Know

Transcendence and remembrance are two halves of a cyclical process. Remembrance, the conscious effort of reflecting on and listening to our thoughts in prayer and meditation, helps us to achieve transcendence. Transcendence helps us remember more of what we may have once known, as unborn souls having come from an eternal realm. As a regular practice, remembrance can help us become and remain conscious of who we are as spiritual beings, how we see ourselves in the world, and how everyday events and circumstances affect and influence us.

Oral storytelling was an essential method of education in the ways of sacred knowledge for the people in indigenous and native cultures.¹⁷ Teaching stories often contained codes, symbols, metaphors, and allegories telling about the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, or the metaphysical and the cosmological. A conscious, reverential approach to learning and remembering was adopted. To be aware of what is going on around us and what life holds in

store for us is at the heart of the spiritual practice of remembrance, as this verse from the Ute tradition illustrates:¹⁸

*Earth, teach me stillness
as the grasses are stilled with light.
Earth teach me suffering
as old stones suffer with memory . . .
Earth teach me resignation
as the leaves which die in the fall.
Earth teach me to remember kindness
as dry fields weep with rain.*

Through our various spiritual traditions, we have a variety of practices designed to keep us focused on this awareness of the pervasive sacred: the Eightfold Path, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the Five Pillars, and many other rituals and ceremonies that involve regular ways to draw our attention to the sacred.

At the heart of most spiritual practice, what is left when we move beyond form, constricting language, and what may be for some the stiffness of the prescriptions, is simply remembering.¹⁹ Remember who you are. Remember what you love. Remember what is sacred. Remember what is true. Remember that you will die, that this day is a gift. Remember how you wish to live, that you will return to where you came from.

When the prophets, such as Jesus, say “Remember me,” they are really saying “Remember God, who is in us as we are in Him.” This is designed to keep our focus on the sacred, on the spiritual aspect of life. This is where we will find our greatest comfort, the healing of our ills, the holiness of life, and the love that we will most cherish. One of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves is finding the practice, simple or otherwise, that will help us remember who we are, what we do know, and what we do not yet remember that we know. It can be meditation, prayer, writing, singing, walking, or even the mundane routines of life. Having such a means to keep our focus, a simple act that helps center us into a remembrance of what we already know is sacred and beautiful is essential to our spiritual growth. Simple acts of remembrance greatly enrich our spiritual life.

Remembrance can be simple and momentary, or it can be an entire review of one’s life. This practice helps us not only remember the important things that add meaning to our lives, but to let go of the unimportant things too. This helps us get to our essence.

Remembrance includes the recognition of what we would not want to live without, what gives us the simplest joys in life. Remembrance is also honoring both our joys and sorrows, because surely the sorrows provide some of the greatest meaning in our lives, too. Remembrance helps us find and give a constructive meaning to what we thought were the sorrows of our lives.

But this is not an easy process. Living in the material world is like having dust gather upon the soul. As Abdu'l-Baha explains, this dust is “attachment to the world, avarice, envy, love of luxury and comfort, haughtiness and self-desire.” These are some of the things that cover the light within us, and prevent “the rays of the Sun of Reality” from transforming us further into a reflection of its “intense brilliancy and radiance.” What will wipe the dust away, purify us, and make us radiant again, he adds, is “sincerity, justice, humility, severance, and love” toward others. And since the soul can also be seen as “the repository of the ancient, Divine mysteries of God,” remembering, through the lifelong process of soul-making, may well be the most powerful tool for achieving self-knowledge, as this knowledge is within us and accessible and essential to who we have always been and always will be.²⁰

Remembrance removes the dust and allows the light within us to shine. As we mature spiritually, our remembrance grows deeper and deeper and moves us along the continuum away from material attachments and toward a state of constant remembrance of the Divine.

There is no better way of understanding the mysteries of life, the process of transformation, the will of God, or how our own lives reflect a divine plan, than by remembering the lives of the prophets, not only for the spiritual message they bring, but for the trials and tribulations they have endured in their own lives. The term “remembrance of God” in its ultimate meaning refers to “the Manifestation of God, who is the consummate symbol, representation, and reflection of the divine hidden Reality within the realm of creation,” according to Nader Saiedi.²¹ In knowing and remembering the prophet, we come closest to knowing God.

Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith, as the latest in a long line of the prophets of God, asks us to remember him because this is what will truly be “the healer of (our) ills.” Baha'u'llah wants us to remember him not only as a prophet of God, through whom we can know and love God and retain our own light, but also for an understanding of and familiarity with the universal, archetypal experiences that we will share with him: “Lament not in your hours of trial, neither rejoice therein; seek ye the Middle Way which is the remembrance of

Me in your afflictions and reflection over that which may befall you in the future.” And similarly, “If tribulation touch thee for My sake, call thou to mind My ills and troubles, and remember My banishment and imprisonment.”²²

By remembering his days, all the trials and hardships they consisted of, during our times of difficulties, we bring greater meaning to our own lives, and recognize more clearly the purpose in everything that befalls us. Within the prophets’ own real-life experiences are a reflection of ours. As they overcame the severest of suffering, so can we; as their tests ultimately contributed to their life purpose, so do ours.

Baha’u’llah experienced the same challenges, tribulations, and persecutions in his life as did prior prophets.²³ And, as was often the case, it was under the worst of circumstances that he showed the greatest courage and achieved his greatest honor. Though he did not personally set out to reveal the word of God, it was in submitting to the will of God, which included severe tests and difficulties, that he was moved to speak the word of God, revealed unbidden to him.

Baha’u’llah’s life experience not only consists of perpetual change and multiple transformations occurring out of times hardship and persecution, it also expresses very vividly how the forces of opposition in conflict with each other paradoxically and dialectically merge to transcend the difficulty at hand. This is a pattern illustrated clearly in the lives of all prophets, as well as in the lives of the world’s mythic gods and goddesses and heroes and heroines. This theme of the pattern and process of transformation is taken up in Chapter 3 as the most important archetypal experience we can have in our lives. This is also why Baha’u’llah asks us to remember his days, so that we will become even more familiar with the essential role of struggle and transformation in our lives.

Remembrance Is Living in Gratitude

Remembrance is a meditation that creates gratitude, gratefulness, and strength of faith; this is essential preparation for spiritual transformation. Our greatest lessons of spiritual transformation come directly from the real lives of the prophets, from Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, and from Baha’u’llah. We nurture our own spiritual lives by remembering the lives of the prophets, the wondrous attributes and qualities they

expressed, and the tremendous struggles and hardships they endured. This helps us remember our own spiritual essence and potential, and that we will experience similar motifs of joy and sorrow, crisis and victory, and light and shadow in our lives, too.

The mystic traditions all exist to help us remember what we forgot about our true origin and destiny. The journey of descent is one of forgetting; that of ascent, one of remembering. The soul's greatest challenge, not that surprisingly, is with the physical body it is connected to on its journey through this world. The constant pull between the physical and spiritual realms creates a series of trials and tribulations for both. Our daily discipline *in the world* is our training ground. The prophets make it clear that our call is to worldly action. Not escape *from* the world, but work *in* the world, is the real goal. There is a distinct service orientation to spiritual growth and the ascent of the soul.

The ancient legends, shedding light on the unborn soul, tell us that we already know where we came from and where we are going. The part of us that always remembers, that always lives in close proximity to God, is called the “secret soul” in the Sufi tradition.²⁴ Our remembrance of where we came from and where we are going will fundamentally change us and will transform all our relationships into relationships of authenticity, respect, and compassion.

The great mystic poets, too, knew that remembrance links us to the spirit we all possess, which links us to each other, as well. Rumi puts it this way:²⁵

*What I tell about “me” I tell about you
The walls between us long ago burned down
This voice seizing me is your voice
Burning to speak to us of us.*

And Walt Whitman says:²⁶

*I celebrate myself;
And what I assume you shall assume;
For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to you.*

The practice of the remembrance of God is a practice common to all sacred traditions. The pursuit of remembering one's true origin, identity, and destiny should not lead to “idleness and seclusion,” but to yielding fruit, to serving God and humanity, through deeds. Baha'u'llah states, “True remembrance is to make mention of the Lord, the All-Praised, and

forget aught else beside Him.”²⁷ This implies active, rather than passive, remembrance; it involves a two-part process of remembering what was forgotten and then making mention of God to others through our own deeds and actions that benefit and serve others.

If we consciously remembered where we came from before this life and where we are going after this life, we could dramatically alter each moment of our existence during this lifetime. Seeing our life within an eternal framework would give us a very different perspective, possibly even seeing it as “a fleeting moment” as mystics do.²⁸

There is a direct link between the Jewish legend of the unborn soul, the practice of the remembrance of God, and the Hasidic story of Rabbi Zusya, who gets to the end of his life with a great question unanswered. If we did automatically remember what we experienced as an unborn soul, this story would not even have come into existence. But since we do spend a good portion of our lives remembering who we are, we do have this companion story and its warning, which in a way picks up where the legend of the angel and the unborn soul left off. The legend is about the soul’s descent to this earthly plane of existence; the story of Rabbi Zusya is about the soul’s ascent to the spiritual plane. The story goes like this:²⁹

Once, the great Hasidic leader, Zusya, came to his followers. His eyes were red with tears, and his face was pale with fear.

“Zusya, what's the matter? You look frightened!”

“The other day, I had a vision. In it, I learned the question that the angels will one day ask me about my life.”

The followers were puzzled. “Zusya, you are pious. You are scholarly and humble. You have helped so many of us. What question about your life could be so terrifying that you would be frightened to answer it?”

Zusya turned his gaze to heaven. “I have learned that the angels will not ask me, ‘Why weren’t you a Moses, leading your people out of slavery?’”

His followers persisted. “So, what will they ask you?”

“And I have learned,” Zusya sighed, “that the angels will not ask me, ‘Why weren’t you a Joshua, leading your people into the Promised Land?’”

One of his followers approached Zusya and placed his hands on Zusya’s shoulders. Looking him in the eyes, the follower demanded, “But what will they ask you?”

“They will say to me, ‘Zusya, there was only one thing that no power of heaven or earth could have prevented you from becoming.’ They will say, ‘Zusya, why weren't you Zusya?’”

This story is meant as a metaphor to express a deeper meaning. If God did have an ultimate question for us, it would not be “Why were you not [fill in the blank]?” but rather “Why were you not *you*?” Are we going to satisfactorily answer such a question for ourselves? Are we going to become and be remembered for that unique person that only we can be? The rest of this book is designed to help you remember and discover more about the *you* that you are, at your core essence, at your soul level.

50 WAYS TO TELL YOUR SOUL'S STORY

*How then are Souls to be made?
How then are these sparks which are God
To have identity given them – so as ever to possess a bliss
Peculiar to each one's individual existence?
How, but by the medium of a world like this?
- John Keats*

Remembrance Keeps Everyone Alive

Some days are just made for remembrance. There's the annual National Day of Service and Remembrance. There's President's Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and on and on. These designated days of remembrance are secular, or social, ways of maintaining a spiritual practice. Each one of these days embody and engender many other forms of spiritual practice, including prayer and meditation.

When we remember anyone that has passed on, we keep them close to us, keep their essence alive, and also assist their souls in continuing on in their eternal journey, in their original form, as spiritual beings. Remembrance is about nurturing the soul, our own and those we remember or serve.

In his 2009 Inaugural Address, President Obama said, "As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages... So let us mark this day in remembrance of who we are and how far we have traveled." We all have important stories to tell about the lives we are living. Sharing our stories of remembrance with others inspires unity and builds compassion toward others. Remembrance reminds us that our personal fate is inherently tied to the collective fate of us all.

One way to tell your soul's story ~ As you continue to remember those who are already on the greatest journey we can imagine, reflect on your own life here and now, and what you have yet to offer, from the depths of your soul. A regular practice of remembrance allows us to discover more of who we really are and what matters most to us. Think about this question, "Who am I, even if I have lost a deep and meaningful part of me?" What remains of me even when part of me seems to have vanished? Is there any part of me that remains unchanged? How does this changeless part of me relate to others? How can I better keep the awareness that the answers to these questions provide me? How can I incorporate this awareness into my daily life and action? After you've reflected on these questions enough to have some thoughts you want to record, write down what you would consider to be your most important understanding from this reflection, and save this as a part of a foundation for your soul's story that you will eventually share with others.

Remembrance Connects Us to Others

A deep tradition, going back at least as far as the first Memorial Day, is the practice of “shared remembrance” where we have the chance to connect with other members of the human family in remembering those we love, and may have lost. In doing so, we remember more of who *we* really are.

How and why does this remembrance connect us to others? Well, there is a power deep within our life stories. Through the stories we tell of our lives, we tap into ageless themes that suddenly become familiar to us, adding greater meaning to our lives, and linking us to our ancestors, as well as those right next to us.

Our stories are always variations of one of the thousands of myths, folk tales, or legends that have spoken to us for generations of our inner truths. In telling our life stories, we recognize that there is something of the gods and goddesses inside us, too.

Life storytelling can transform our lives. Knowing our own stories is an essential part of a natural developmental process of personal transformation. Our life stories still serve the same classic functions as did the earliest known stories, myths, and folk tales: to bring us into accord with ourselves, others, the mystery of life, and the universe around us.

A 2nd way to tell your soul’s story ~ Take a moment to reflect on that deepest part of yourself. Where is it? What is it? Is it matter? Is it spirit? Is it energy? What is its purpose? Can you remember a time in your life when what you did or thought seemed like it was so familiar to you that you knew you weren’t the only person who had ever experienced that kind of moment? What was this déjà vu evoking experience? Reflect on what recognizing something in your own experience as common to others, maybe even universal, means to you. Write down, in a page or two, the story of how this experience impacted, changed, or transformed your life. How did it, at the same time, seem like it connected you to others? Then save this as a piece of what will become an important part of your longer soul’s story.

Life Stories Can Change the World!

Like the timeless wisdom stories of the past, our life stories can bring order to our own personal experience, help us center and integrate ourselves, assist us in forming an identity, affirm, validate, and support our own experience socially, clarify our relationship to those around us, help us understand our commonalities with others, as well as our differences, foster a sense of community, and even bring us face to face with an ultimate mystery. Our life stories take us beyond our everyday existence, allow us to enter the realm of the spirit, or the domain of the sacred, and render a world-view that makes sense of the natural workings of the universe we are part of.

Our life stories reverberate past the personal and into the collective realm. They carry a power connecting the deepest part of us with the deepest part of others. They are sacred stories, touching the life force that we all have within us.

From the earliest times, stories have been central to life. Through stories, what is enduring is transmitted. Traditional peoples understood the importance of sharing not only their sacred stories, but also their own stories of life lived deeply. They knew that this supported the cycle of life. Stories became the food of the soul. Today, this is as true as ever. Enough stories, truthful stories – told from heart, and of the soul – can stop hatred, prejudice, racism, and this *can* change the world.

We have much to learn from each other through our life stories, much that will help us understand and relate to others more compassionately. “Our lives are journeys toward a certain kind of wisdom, which is a love and appreciation for all living creatures,” says Mary Pipher in *Writing to Change the World*. As we tell and share the stories of our journey toward this understanding, this love and appreciation cannot help but bring us closer together; it cannot help but change our world.

A 3rd way to tell your soul’s story ~ Sharing life stories is a powerful experience, one that can touch us deeply, and give us great joy and satisfaction. It can give us a sense of inner harmony and connectedness. Think of an experience from your life that carries the power of an archetypal force, something that was challenging for you but that was not only yours but could have been anyone’s, that you overcame in time, and in so doing changed or transformed your life. Put this universal experience in your own words that will connect with others experience, and maybe even change something in them.

Life Stories Can Change the World Part 2

*“When things are investigated, knowledge is extended;
When knowledge is extended, the will becomes sincere;
When the will is sincere, the mind is rectified;
When the mind is rectified, the personal life is cultivated;
When the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated;
When the family is regulated, the state will be in order;
And when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world.”*
Confucius

Sharing life stories is a powerful experience, one that can touch us deeply, and give us great joy and satisfaction. It can give us a sense of inner harmony and connectedness. Telling our deeper life story allows us to express our truth, as we see it, so that others might learn from it. We typically include in our life story the constructive, or healing, aspects of our life and experience, rather than allowing destructive elements to become the focus, as is often the case in biography. This deeper level of telling our soul’s story is a movement toward perpetuating healing stories.

As Confucius shows, a crucial link exists between the individual and the rest of the world. The individual’s story inevitably impact others, spreading outward like a ripple in a pond, creating ever-widening circles of empathy from oneself to one’s family, one’s community, one’s nation, and finally to all of humanity.

Realizing such an all-human community founded upon the highest social ethic, as Confucius understood, is fully dependent upon the learning, and the morals, of each individual, as well as upon the harmony between all levels of society and between all living creatures. Authentic humanity evolves to its fullest extent when blind egoism disappears. This never-ending work of transforming the world has its roots in the ancient tradition of storytelling.

A 4th way of telling your soul’s story ~ Think of something you did that has had a ripple effect on the lives of others. What was it that gave this experience the power to transform? What was the essential truth of this experience? How and why did the telling or sharing of this experience have a healing effect on you and/or others? What was it about this experience that brought others together in some way? Write down the story of this experience that has in some way changed others; then reflect on how this is part of your soul’s story.

Life Stories Can Change the World Part 3

When Brother Blue, the African American storyteller, made the statement, “Enough stories can change the world,” he was most likely thinking of the traditional role of stories in community life. From the earliest times, stories have been central to life. Through stories, what is enduring is transmitted. Traditional peoples understood the importance of sharing not only their sacred stories, but also their own stories of life lived deeply. These supported the cycle of life, and became the food of the soul.

Today, this is as true as ever. Enough stories, truthful stories – told from heart, and of the soul – can stop hatred, prejudice, racism, and this *can* change the world. It is only through stories that we can come to understand something in a new, full, and intimate way that allows us to see that thing, that person, from the inside out. Thus a connection is established, and a relationship formed that precludes any kind of judgment. The shared story brings us together, and helps us to recognize our commonalities.

Life stories told deeply work the same way; these can change the world, too. When we share our own stories of the soul, when we put our life’s events and feelings into the form of a story, a spoken or written narrative, unity is maintained, and a greater respect for each other is found; we recognize deep within us the personal and collective truths we all share, as members of the human family.

A 5th way of telling your soul’s story ~ Have you ever seen a story change the world? Have you ever experienced a story serving as food for the soul, yours or anyone else’s? Think of a truthful story, one that comes from the heart or soul, one that carries the power to heal, to stop hatred, or to change the listener in some way. How is this story part of your story? How can you own this story as your own? Take some time to reflect on and put down in writing just the essence of this story. Maybe in time you will come to see not only how it is part of your deeper story, but also how it helps bring us all closer together, or helps us recognize our commonalities, as members of the human family.

What Does Remembrance Have to do With Climate Change?!

In a nutshell, remembering who we are is a spiritual practice that contributes to our spiritual development, which expands our consciousness of the universe we are part of, which gives us a vision of the whole, which helps us understand that nature reflects the qualities and attributes of its Creator and should therefore be greatly respected and cherished, which confirms that all things are interconnected and depend upon the law of reciprocity, which confirms the oneness of creation.

In remembering that we have been created from the same source as every other substance in creation, we recognize how important the protection of even the smallest element of the environment is, and further how vital conserving the earth's resources is. Biological and cultural diversity is the core of the rich natural and spiritual heritage we share as human beings. To show any less regard for any one element of this whole would be like showing less regard to any one of our own multiple identities or allegiances, or even to any one of the vastly diverse organs in our own body, because they each add their own richness, essentialness, and vitality in completing the whole.

Understanding nature as the embodiment of the Creator, and as the unfoldment of divine order, engenders deep respect for the entire creation. Every part of the universe is connected to every other part. This calls for action that sustains the inherent balance of the whole. When one thing in the environment, in the universe, is caused to change by any other thing, all things are changed.

If we remembered who we are, that at our essence we are linked to every other living thing on this earth, there might not be so many careless acts that make so many unanticipated changes to everything that surrounds us, including the climate.

A 6TH way to tell your soul's story ~ Remembering that our soul comes from the same source as everything else in this creation, and that our soul connects us to all the diversity in the creation, what can we do, what have we already done, that acknowledges and maintains our oneness with the creation? This questions calls for a green story that illustrates in some way how or why you have come to recognize that we are all connected in one great big web of delicate life on this planet. What act that you've carried out, or seen someone else carry out, was an expression to maintain the inherent balance of the whole? Reflect on this, and then write down a story that will become a central part of your soul's story.

Our Story *is* Who We Are

Without a story, we are not truly known. Within our stories, the truths of the ages are embedded. Our story speaks an inner truth of the generations. Our stories contain our common spiritual heritage. They are also our legacy for future generations. *All* we are is the story we leave behind.

Story is central to Native American life and to the healing traditions of indigenous peoples around the world. In the Lakota worldview, all things in the created world are sacred, the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, the winged creatures, the crawling ones, the finned ones, and the rooted ones. In fact, there is no clear division between the sacred and the secular. All life is sacred; human beings, and all other created things, are holy. In the Lakota language, the word for child *wakan yeja* - translates into English as “sacred being.” As such, we are spirit and flesh, sacred and material, and it becomes our responsibility to honor and respect everything around us. When we put the sacred aspect of our being first, the way we see everything else changes dramatically.

A deeply told life story is really the story of the soul of that person. The most powerful life story expresses the struggle of a soul living in, adapting to, and learning from the material world. The most important stories we tell about ourselves are the expressions of the timeless within us.

A 7th way to tell your soul’s story ~ James Hillman offers a perspective on this that is worth pondering. He asks, “Could it be that the soul doesn’t want to leave this world innocent of the life it has been living for ninety-odd years, and wants *memoria* to turn those years into character values?” What does this imply about the story the soul would tell? Think of just one memory (*memoria*) in your life that illustrates how you were born with a particular character value, how this was a gift “from the guardians upon your birth” that was brought to life by and through your soul, and how this could be what you may someday be memorialized for, what may become a part of your soul’s legacy that you leave to the world.

Telling our Deep Stories is Doing Soul Work

A story told well carries a power that sneaks up on us and pulls a layer of blinders off our eyes. It can teach us something important about life that we had probably forgotten we knew. The act of imposing a narrative framework on the raw material of our lives brings new order and clarity to something somehow familiar to us. A good story allows us to wrestle with our demons, dance with our angels, make plans with our inner guide, and ultimately, connect with our soul. Telling ourselves, and others, these deep stories of our lives is doing soul work.

Telling our story is crucial to the core task of identity formation. In many indigenous cultures, identity formation is the development of a coherent master story that links together the many stories we tell of our lives as sacred beings. It is said in Native American traditions, “All you are is story. When you pass over, the stories told by you and about you are all that remains... We are all the stories that have been or ever will be told about us.”

Everyone’s life story is meaningful, full of sacred elements, valid, valuable, linked to all others, and entertaining. To want to tell our story is to want to be part of the human family. We tell our life stories because they are a part of us. Our stories identify the influences that made us who we are today, help us to see ourselves better, and, ultimately, to accept ourselves more.

An 8th way to tell your soul’s story ~ How deep does your story go? Have you ever remembered something that you forgot you knew? Has putting part of your life in narrative form ever brought new order and clarity to something familiar to you? What parts of your story are most crucial to who you are at your core? What is the heart of your master story, that kernel which links together the many stories of your life, and says to the world in a loud and clear voice “this is who I am and always will be!” In a page or two, see if you can give voice to this sacred story, and then reflect on how it might fit into your larger soul’s story.

Our Soul Creates Lasting Connections For Us

We can easily discover in the process of telling our life story that we are more sacred beings than we are human beings. Telling the story of what will endure about us long after we are gone is transformational. This is a gift we can give ourselves at any point in our lives. Telling our story while it is in process, wherever we are in our lives, will help us gain a sharper perspective on our past and our present. Telling the stories of our lives can give us a clearer sense of what we really hope for in the relations we have with each other.

There are unforgettable moments in the telling of our stories when we recognize a connection in our lives, a connection that links one moment of our lives with another moment, maybe years apart, or a moment that connects us in some deep way to our parents, our grandparents, our ancestors, and maybe even to all of humanity. These are moments when our whole perception of the world and ourselves can change in an instant and we become totally transformed. They can occur often when we reflect on and share the stories of our life with others. In this moment, new insights take over, and all we want to do is savor them, and do whatever we can to not let anything else interrupt this new connection we have made to ourselves - to our own soul - or to others.

A 9th way to tell your soul's story ~ When we compose the story of our life, we can tell this story in many different ways, with any number of variations or emphases. For now, think of your life, from as far back as you can remember to the present, as one on-going, connected series of events, experiences, and moments to gain lasting meaning from. Think also of all your relations and what they mean to you now and what you hope they will mean to you in the future. How would you describe these connections if you were telling their story? How has your soul created lasting connections for you? Does this story, like all other enduring stories, have a beginning, a muddle, and a resolution? Tell this story in a short version that expresses how these meaningful moments in your life are the glue that holds everything together for you and establishes deep and lasting connections across time and space. Then, reflect on how this is part of your larger, deeper story.

All You Are Is Story

Stories have long played a vital and active role in the everyday life of people in traditional communities. They contained the lessons that needed to be learned, and they were also used to bring about healing. Stories define a three-part spiritual journey in which we: a) are well, or settled in to something familiar and comfortable; b) experience an imbalance within, or get dislodged from, the familiar; and, c) confronting the unknown, find something new that feels even more comfortable than what we had before, or we return to where we were but with a renewed sense of commitment to what now even more clearly matters most to us. This is the timeless pattern of transformation that we live out many times in our lifetimes. Bringing our stories into the open in order to understand the energies behind any of our discomforts can be critical to our healing, our growth, and to our transformation, so that we ultimately find solutions to the on-going muddles, or life crises, we find ourselves in.

Story is therefore crucial to the core task of identity formation. Throughout our lives we tell stories that describe who we are and sometimes we retell, or recast, old stories that we may have inherited that are no longer serving to contribute to our growth. In many indigenous cultures, identity formation is the development of a coherent master story that links together, or integrates, the many stories we tell of our lives as sacred beings into one.

As it is said in Native American traditions, “All you are is story. When you pass over, the stories told by you and about you are all that remains... We are all the stories that have been or ever will be told about us.”

A 10th way to tell your soul’s story ~ Take a few moments to see if you can identify your soul’s master story. Of all the stories you’ve told about yourself, or that others have told about you, which one is at the heart of who you really are? Which story do you want to remain? Which story do you want to be known by? Reflect on these questions, and write down what first comes to you as being who you are at your heart level. Then, begin thinking about how this core piece of you spreads out into and informs all of who you are.

Do You Know Your “Oughtabiography”?

Arlo Guthrie wrote some twenty years ago what he called “My Oughtabiography.” It starts out with, “I was born with a guitar in one hand in Coney Island, which is the good part of Brooklyn, New York...” After bringing us up to date, he goes on to say, “My personal life is somewhat of a mystery, even to me. Although it’s fun to be mysterious at times, it isn’t always convenient. People always want to know what you are, as if it made some kind of difference. Lots of people want to have something special in common with folksingers. They’d like to share their views on religion, pollution, nuclear power, human rights, truth, justice, and the American way with someone who sees things the same way. I have come to the conclusion that we are all one person with a few billion faces so we can see things in lots of different ways. I guess there really isn’t any mystery to me at all, unless I think of myself as being all alone...”

Now you know what an “oughtabiography” is, right? Wait a minute, what is Arlo really saying, anyway? Have *you* ever felt like “we are all one person with a few billion faces”? What in the world does that feel like?

An 11th way to tell your soul’s story ~ If we all are one person with a few billion faces, does that mean your soul’s “oughtabiography” would be the same as, but from a different perspective than, someone else’s? Arlo gives voice to his soul in his own natural style, by expressing himself, his own inner qualities, and his own personal experiences. What have you acquired along your journey that makes you who you are? What conclusion have you come to about what it all comes down to for you? Take a stab at telling the kernel of your soul’s story, in a way that expresses most who you are, in one sentence. You may want to let that one sentence sit for awhile, even a few months, and sometime later come back to it to see what else you can add to that kernel of your soul’s story that may even become a centerpiece for your “oughtabiography.”

**“From the Middle of the Middle of Me to the Middle
of the Middle of You” Remembering Brother Blue**

Dr. Hugh Morgan Hill, known widely and affectionately as Brother Blue, was an unforgettable storyteller. He would often stand forth at a corner of Harvard Square and regale passers-by with uplifting stories from his own life or by adapting traditional folk tales. Telling stories that connected listeners was his sacred calling. His message of universal harmony came through every line of every story he ever told. He passed away recently at age 88.

He often drew upon timeless themes to inspire others. “How many want to climb the mountain?” he would say to his audience. “Moses climbed the mountain. Jesus climbed the mount. The mountain is inside of you. Climb to that place where the higher self is. There is something else beyond names, beyond all words; words can’t grasp it. Climb this mountain of yourself...”

A 12th way to tell your soul’s story ~ What is that story you hear when you climb the mountain of yourself to your higher self? What story is it that wants to be told from the middle of the middle of you to the middle of the middle of everyone? What is the one story that connects who you most deeply are with who we all most deeply are? Take as much time as you need to listen to this inner story of your higher self, and when it feels and sounds familiar enough to you, write it down. Take some time away from it, then reflect further on what it really means to you, and if you have any new insights write these down as well.

What is Your Defining Image?

Every single person is born with a defining image, an innate uniqueness, which, according to James Hillman, is already present *before* we are born. This innate image is our essence, yet only with the unfolding of a lifetime does this inner quality, or character defining who we are, become evident. As the mighty oak's destiny is written in the tiny acorn, so our calling, or destiny, can only be understood as we look backward, reflectively, over a life lived deliberately.

We are formed from archetypal images and grow gradually into our own image of the archetype, as we age and mature through life's experiences. As many spiritual traditions put this, we are formed in the image of our Creator and we have the innate capacity to reflect that image in the life we live. As character and image are inseparable, both expressing the essence of who we are, we get to the essence of our life story by expressing how our life reflects the original image of all life as sacred, as having originated from divinity, and by telling the story of how love, order, beauty, and justice, or any of the other characteristics and principles of the holy, have been demonstrated in our own lives.

We are given, as a gift, a "soul-companion," a daimon, which is with us each step of our journey, guiding us through the *paradeigma*, or pattern, of the life we live, toward our destiny. This acorn-like inborn essence of who we will become is given different names in different cultures and traditions, from soul to genius to calling to fate to character. Though none really tell us exactly what "it" is, each confirm *that* it is, that we all have a purpose to fulfill with the life we have to live.

A 13th way to tell your soul's story ~ What is that part of you that was already present before you were born? How did you discover your innate capacity to reflect the sacred? What is your own story of divine love, order, beauty, or justice? Who is it that has been with you every step of your journey, guiding you through the pattern of your life? What name do you give to your "soul-companion"? How do you know for sure that it is even with you? Whatever your response to these questions happens to be, write down your thoughts, as this is will become an important part of your soul's legacy, what the deepest part of you can leave for the deepest part of others.

Remembering is a Necessary Function Our Soul

James Hillman's "Acorn Theory," that our destiny is written in our soul, not only takes us to the core of psychology (the study of the psyche, or soul), it is also at the heart of all the world's religions. Making sense of our individualized soul-image has always been an essential element of myth, sacred stories, and our quest to uncover the mysteries of life. It is how we come to the meaning of life.

Carl Jung, the first psychologist to hint at the convergence of science and religion, said, "image *is* psyche." We cannot think without using our imagination, without relying upon collected or inherited mental images. Jung is really pointing out that memory (*memoria*) is more than mere recall; it is actually a storage *place* that we have the ability to access and return from, bringing with us eternal images to the mind. Memory, therefore, *is* soul. Helping us remember who we really are, which requires imagination, is a function of the soul.

The entry to this storage place is often through the doors of life review, or by telling the story of our life. When we start down this path, we can also find there images that may be beyond our own capacity to imagine, but nevertheless come to us from some universal well-spring that enables us to feel more than we thought we were, and that make us more than we could have imagined.

A 14th way to tell your soul's story ~ What destiny is written in your soul? How have you been able to glean images, or indications, of this? Have you ever gone to a place in your memory that gave you a spiritual wealth, or wisdom, you thought you could never have imagined? How did this connect you even more with your own soul, or maybe with the soul of others? What remembrances, what stories from your own life review, have taken you beyond your own imagination, beyond who you once thought you were? What have any of these experiences or memories given you that you value most? Reflect on these questions for a few moments, then write down what stays with you; this will be an important part of what your soul wants to leave for others to know you better.

What Creates the Pattern of Our Life?

If our destiny (who we will become) is written in our soul, our life pattern emerges out of moving “nimble down the middle between” psychology and religion, as James Hillman says. These are the twin frameworks that help create the necessary pattern of our life. Rather than indicating anything like predestination, the intention of the inborn image is to serve as a spark of consciousness that will benefit our own growth. It has our best interests as its purpose. Other names for this mysterious force of life could be grace, or providence, what we might think of as being invisibly watched over. If we kept going in this direction, we might think of it as our guardian spirit, or whatever else feels comfortable to us, until we finally got to God as possibly the source for all of this aid and assistance.

This idea ultimately provides what might be considered a blueprint for human development, or a psychology of childhood, youth, and adulthood. It affirms that there is an inherent uniqueness, even a direction or pattern, waiting to unfold for each and every person at each stage of life. This means further that each of us has a gift to utilize at any point in our development, a gift meant to lead us directly to our essence, to our soul.

A 15th way to tell your soul's story ~ See if you can identify the pattern of your life. What is it that would repeat itself, and may already have, many times in your life which also tells you how you got into and out of a difficult situation as you were given just the right aid or assistance you needed at the time to experience what you would consider grace or providence? How has your own consciousness of this pattern benefitted your growth? Can you see this pattern, or blueprint, of how your life has unfolded, as a gift meant to lead you directly to your soul? Write down this story, and when you are comfortable with it, reflect on where it might fit with the rest of your soul's story.

What Does the Soul Want?

Memory seems to step in at the right moment to always connect, or re-connect, us with what matters most; it brings back to consciousness vital images, scenes, figures, and feelings that help us re-member ourselves, and in the process find deeper meaning and solidify soul qualities we may have long cultivated.

Could the *intention* of the soul be to bring back, or even cause to appear for the first time, those eternal images, coupled with those soul qualities and virtues, needed to ensure our further progress in our continuing journey? We cannot escape remembering. Reviewing our life, telling our life story, helps us form, or re-form, our deep character just when we need it most, as a final conscious preparation for reaching the soul's ultimate destination.

As James Hillman put it, "Life review yields long-term gains that enrich character by bringing understanding to events. The patterns in your life become more discernable among the wreckage and the romance, more like a well-plotted novel that reveals characters through their actions and reactions... Without stories there is no pattern, no understanding, no art, and no character—merely habits, events passing before the eyes of an aimless observer." Life review is "character making its claim;" or, our sign that the soul "doesn't want to leave this world innocent of the life it has been living."

A 16th way to tell your soul's story ~ What is the intention of your soul? What are the qualities and virtues of your soul that will assist your eternal journey? See if you can remember those moments of truth in your life story meant to help you form your deep, or lasting, character. Does this bring greater understanding to the events of your life? What is it that your soul most wants you to be aware of before you leave this world? Is your life like a well-plotted novel revealing your eternal character through its actions and reactions? After you've reflected enough on these questions, see if you can tell this story of the character of your soul, of how it made you *you*. Then, after you're comfortable with how this feels to you, see where it might fit in your larger soul's story.

Let Your Memory Be Your Muse

Here is a thought for the day As we step into our future, it is our memory that most guides and inspires us! As each of the nine Muses in the ancient myth artfully formed their values by musing upon their mother, the goddess Memory, we too can muse over our memories, let them take the shape they want, and notice how they form our values, virtues, and character. Life review, remembering the story of your life, is really about musing into the meaningful patterns, themes, and subthemes of your life, which happen to carry the values your life is built upon.

This is the basic context for the soul's story. Life's difficulties and struggles, especially, contribute to this meaning making and pattern-shaping function of memory. With time, the unpleasant becomes more pleasant, old hurts don't hurt as much, if at all, and what once felt cold becomes warmer. Each step of the way, whether difficult or easy, awakens the potentialities we are born with. When our life stories are told in such a way as to reflect the timeless and universal motifs and archetypes that characterize our humanness, they not only transform us, they become the story of our soul, our sacred stories, carrying the power and force of a living myth for us and our listeners by bringing about insights, sentiments, and commitments that result in a new level of maturity, and possibly even a new status.

The soul naturally and innately wants to let go, to lighten up, in preparation for an easier lift off. Could this vital work, James Hillman asks, be the soul's "premonition of what religious traditions call heaven"?

A 17th way to tell your soul's story ~ Get in touch with your soul, and together see if you can identify your greatest muse, that which most inspires the deepest part of you. What values, virtues, and characteristics those qualities that most define who you are has your muse formed for you? What life patterns, themes, and subthemes does your memory hold? Your soul's story is shaped by the difficulties and struggles of your life. How are what was once your greatest challenges now the seeds of your greatest potentialities? How has your muse ultimately brought about your own transformation? See if you can help your soul lighten up, and let go of what really does not matter, to better cherish what really does matter, and to be better able to carry this forward with you in your continuing journey. Take as much time as you need to put together your musings on this part of your soul's story, and when you are ready write them down in a way you would want to share with others.

What Have You Known, Forgotten, and Then Remembered?

Our lives — our existence from before birth to after death — follow a process of *knowing*, *forgetting*, and *remembering*. According to a number of sacred traditions, we had some kind of an innate *knowing* about this world and our life to come before we came into it. But because our traumatic physical birth brought about a *forgetting* of what we once knew, we spend the rest of our lives *remembering* what we forgot in order to come into the *knowing* we started out with. Remembering, and telling, our life story is a way of getting back in touch with our soul, the source of that knowing.

We've all had those moments of wonder when something happens to make it seem like we already knew what we just learned. This is part of a cognitive process of coming to our soul consciousness. The soul is the storehouse of eternal memories, and everything else that feels familiar when we realized that what we thought was new may not have been new after all. Each time something pops up from that deep reservoir is just the right time for it.

The key is being conscious of knowing when we have remembered something we forgot whenever it happens. Consciousness is a necessity in telling the stories of our life, especially the story of our soul. The more we can identify with our immortal, eternal self, instead of with the temporal self, the more will we be able to learn from our soul of its stored knowledge and wisdom.

An 18th way to tell your soul's story ~ What did your soul know before you came into this world? What have been your most memorable déjà moments? How has your life been enriched by connecting with this storehouse of eternal memories? Think about these most meaningful moments of remembering who you were before you were born, and put them together in the form of a brief story that you can at some later time make part of your larger soul's story.

What Does the Soul Want? Part II

Living from our soul rather than from our physical self means not always needing to be in control; it is listening more, trying to hear and understand what our intuitions and emotions have to tell us. It is keeping our eyes on the whole more than on the parts. It is being as concerned for others as with ourselves. It is connecting with nature, and remaining as much in sync with its natural rhythms and cycles as we possibly can. It is remembering that our soul is our only true and lasting identity, the one that is given to us before birth and that we will take with us on the rest of our eternal journey. What the soul wants from us is to be remembered as that changeless, eternal part of us.

If we can take a before and after “this life” perspective on our life, if we can become more concerned with our eternal self than with our temporal self, we will gain an archetypal perspective on our life which will also shift our consciousness from the physical to the spiritual and lead us directly toward the healing or balance we most need in our life, even if we don’t know we want it.

A 19th way to tell your soul’s story ~ The important question is not, what do *I* want, but rather, what *is wanted* beyond and beneath my current consciousness? What does my soul *want*? What are my deepest longings? What is the spirit of my life? What is most sacred to me? Answering and giving narrative voice to these soul questions is an essential tool for achieving wholeness. Take as much time as you need to reflect deeply on these questions, and then write down, in story form, what seems to make the most sense to you from these musings. This can at a later time become part of your larger soul’s story.

What Inspires Us to Help Others?

We live in remarkable times, the worst of times and the best of times. It often seems like the worst brings out the best in us. Where does this ability, this virtue, value, or spiritual quality, to care for others we don't even know, and at the same time give up something else that may be so important to us, come from? Are we truly, at our deepest nature, "[Homo empathicus](#)," as Jeremy Rifkin says in *The Empathic Civilization*? (Researchers have discovered "empathy neurons" that allow us to feel and experience another's situation as if it were our own and our empathic consciousness has steadily been evolving over history.

Could it be that we are all born with these qualities, and that it just takes time or the right circumstances for them to emerge? Are [virtues](#) like love, compassion, caring, empathy, charity, mercy, service, sacrifice, helpfulness, cooperation, courtesy, kindness, thoughtfulness, and so many more, hardwired into who we are, as spiritual human beings?

We seem to either know intuitively, or we remember from gaining access to our inborn wisdom, that caring for and assisting others in time of need without concern for our own needs not only feels right but also contributes to our own sense of well-being and happiness. Altruism is compassion and kindness in action. What we are all witnessing more of recently is that certain natural tragedies in this world [set off a compassion trigger in the brain](#) and we feel called to action.

A 20th way to tell your soul's story ~ In a personal reflection upon the outpouring of compassion, caring, and charity the world has seen recently, think about those times in your life when you have been moved to action to offer some needed service to others, to be helpful to another, to sacrifice something because of your commitment to cooperate with others rather than thinking only of yourself. Why, and how, has your empathic response to others been unexpectedly rewarded? What has being altruistic in your own way done to bring peace, unity, or understanding to your life? Think about these questions, and when you have come up with a time in your life that has triggered compassion or inclusive caring, tell the story of what this has meant to you or how it has changed your life. This, too, can become part of your larger soul's story.

What is the One Thing That You Never Want to Forget?

Rumi said, “There is one thing in the world that should not be forgotten. You may forget everything except that one thing, without there being any cause for concern. If you remember everything else but forget that one thing, you will have accomplished nothing. It would be as if a king sent you to a village on a specific mission. If you went and performed a hundred other tasks, but neglected to accomplish the task for which you were sent, it would be as though you had done nothing. The human being therefore has come into the world for a specific purpose and aim.” If we do not fulfill our own specific purpose, can we say that we have accomplished our mission?

A 21st way to tell your soul’s story ~ Think about what it is that you might have been sent to this Earth to accomplish. How could you ever forget this, once you become aware of what this is? Wouldn’t that be the most important thing in your entire life? If there was one thing, one simple or specific mission, that was yours, and only yours, to carry out here, what do you think that is, knowing what you know about your life so far? If you can identify what your specific task is, tell the story of how you came to this awareness, how you might have gotten sidetracked once in a while, how difficult or easy it might have been to stay on task, and what it has meant to you to know your mission and to be working toward accomplishing the task for which you were sent here. This one story could become the heart of your entire soul’s story.

What Happens When We Notice the Unnoticed?

In stopping the daily flow of life, in noticing the things that often pass by unnoticed, in looking closely at images that appear as frames in a quickly passing movie, in focusing on the fragments of stories that come to mind, we can witness the emergence of our soul. This makes visible to us, maybe for the first time, the arc of our life, the path we now realize we were meant to undertake with our life, and this is what allows us to step for a moment out of time and into an eternal realm, which in turn gives us a new interpretation of who we really are. Finding that revealing space where the soul comes to life is where life renews itself, in the magical moment when past converges with present to give deeper meaning to both.

The stories we tell of our lives are like water, making more fluid the hardened events and facts of a life. Our life story softens us up, preparing us to see the things of our life more clearly. It dissolves the sedentary elements of our life, making us more ready to experience the flow of life, thus facilitating the necessary transformations of life, which ultimately move us along toward a unified consciousness.

A 22nd way to tell your soul's story ~ Reflecting on the flow of your life, see if you can identify a moment of truth when what you thought was solidified became liquefied, when you experienced the softening up of your self, maybe even the breaking down and the reforming of your essential self. What was it in particular that allowed your life to become more fluid? What was it that you suddenly became aware of that was always right before your eyes? What did this tell you about your soul and what you were meant to undertake in this life? After you have digested all of this as much as you need to, put your lasting thoughts into a story of stepping into an eternal realm. This will become an essential part of your soul's story.

What's Your Olympic Story?

We all have a story of Olympic proportions, whether we're aware of it or not. We've all seen or heard lots of great Olympic stories that emerge every four years. What about your own version of these mythic stories? I'm not talking about winning medals, but I am talking about experiencing the same motifs and archetypes in our own life stories as these great Olympic athletes have.

The Greeks knew well the archetypes of this mythic story, and we've learned much from their gods and goddesses. But they were not the only ones. Joseph Campbell, in his classic *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, first identified the universality of the mythic pattern. What he found was a pattern made up of the same three archetypes - *departure, initiation, and return* - in all the world's classic myths. It is the universal formula for transformation.

In my book, *The Gift of Stories*, I adapted this timeless pattern to fit the lives we live today. So, we can also think of this ageless pattern as - *beginning, muddle, and resolution*. The Olympic version might be - *challenge, struggle, and triumph*. Not all the stories ended in triumph, obviously, some ended with the struggle, but great struggle is always the key to whatever does happen next. The challenge continues through the struggle, and how we approach both largely determines whether we experience the intended transformation regardless of whether there is triumph or not.

A 23rd way to tell your soul's story ~ Think of a time in your life when you had a series of experiences that followed the pattern *challenge, struggle, and triumph*. These three archetypes coming together usually signal a transformation. What was going on in your life during this time? What did actually experiencing each of these three archetypes separately and together feel like to you? Who were you before this experience and how did you change after it? After you've thought this through as much as you need to, write down your Olympic story. Then, see how this chapter fits into your overall soul's story.

How Does Changing Your Perception of Your Life Change You?

Telling your life story has the power to connect you to your soul. You and your soul are the wings to elevating your life. Authentic, honest life storytelling stirs the soul, awakens its inherent qualities – like awe, love, unity, contentment, joy, and wonderment – and renews your life.

The important thing in reviewing your life story is to remember that out of the conflicts of life come its resolutions. And it is life's resolutions that allow us to soar in realms we had never seen before. The particular circumstances of our lives may not matter as much as *how we see them*. A change of perception can come at any time we are ready to accept what *has* happened to us as okay and providing some meaning and purpose to our lives. Anyway, the only thing we *can* change about our past is the way we look at it.

This reminds me of the bumper sticker, “It’s never too late to have a happy childhood.” That’s because the ability to find new or deeper meaning in our lives, no matter what has happened, can be the creative response that enables us to understand the flow of our lives, be accepting of it, and to truly experience transcendence and transformation.

A 24th way to tell your soul’s story ~ Think about the particular or unique circumstances of your life, those things without which you would not be who you are today. Are you comfortable or happy with these circumstances you have been given? If so, tell a short story of how and why you are grateful for the hand you have been dealt in this life. If not, this can be your opportunity to explore how you might be able to shift your perspective, rather than trying to go back and change anything about what you do have or who you are, and thereby see through a different lens the life you have lived. Can you find a new or deeper purpose or meaning in what did happen in your life? If so, take time to reflect on this change of perception, and after you’ve digested this, write down how this change of perception changes your life.

What Else Does Knowing Your Life Story Help You Know?

Telling our life stories may be the most important way we have of giving our lives meaning, healing those parts of our lives that may need it, making peace with ourselves, and gaining the deeper, broader perspective on life that they can give us. Through telling our life story we can experience release, recovery, resolution, or renewal, and, maybe most importantly, recognition of our connection to the world.

Knowing our own life story well helps us to know much more than just ourselves. We are only the beginning of what we come to know through our life story. Second, it also helps us to know all the others in our life better, what they mean to us, who they are, and what all of our connections to others, and to the world, ultimately mean to us. Third, it helps us to understand the mystery of life even more than we may have thought we knew it. We become much more intimate with the big questions of life we have struggled with and have come to understand better. And finally, it helps us get to know the universe around us better than we had before. As we remember our journey through life, we get to know even more how our life fits into the larger whole we are also part of.

A 25th way to tell your soul's story ~ These four realms we get to know better through knowing our life story can be thought of as the psychological, the social, the spiritual, and the cosmological realms. Which one draws you the most right now to explore in a little more depth? Pick one of these realms that you have gotten to know better through remembering or telling your life story, and reflect upon what it is that you have gained in understanding this domain of your life much more clearly. How did getting to know this area of your life enrich it, you, or your appreciation of life as a whole? After you have had time to put your thoughts together around this, write them down as part of your soul's story and its relationship with the world around you.

How is Telling Your Life Story a Transpersonal Experience?

The personal, or what we think is unique to us, is also what connects us to all human beings. No matter how personal we think telling our own life story is, we are also telling, at the same time, a universal story. In telling the very personal things of our life experience, we are also sharing what is common to us all.

Sometimes, we may not even be aware when we are making that shift from the personal to the transpersonal. One way to recognize this shift is to become familiar with the ageless motifs and archetypes that make up all the world's sacred stories, myths, and folk tales. One example of universal archetypes, or themes shared by all humanity, is the pattern of renewal and transformation in life. This pattern is most noticeable in nature, what we observe all around us all the time. With the coming of spring, we witness an annual renewal.

In our own lives, too, what we may think of as a very personal experience of renewal, or moving beyond a hurdle, suddenly allowing us to experience a new perspective, is really one of the most universal of all experiences. This experience consists of one of the most common patterns pervading all of creation. It also offers a clear set of guideposts for us to follow along the path of our spiritual development. From our personal, or what we think may be unique, experience, we can recognize a universal pattern (*beginning-muddle-resolution*). This not only makes the personal transpersonal, it gives us even more reason to act upon the natural inclination to tell and pass on our life story to others. Turning the personal into the transpersonal clarifies even more for us how the truly universal takes place through everyday life experiences, identifying an organic pattern of transformation in our lives.

A 26th way to tell your soul's story ~ Think of a time in your life when you were surprised to find that something you thought was a very personal experience was actually quite universal. How did you discover the universality of this experience? What new information or understanding did this give you of yourself or your world? Reflect on this for awhile, then put your thoughts into a story that tells how and why the personal became the transpersonal for you. Later, reflect on how this story will fit into your larger soul's story.

How Big is Your Family Tree, Really?

Ancestry.com and NBC partnered on a TV program called “Who Do You Think You Are?” that puts tracing family roots in the living rooms of families everywhere in a way that not even Alex Haley’s “Roots” could have.

Using a worldwide network of genealogists, the world’s largest online resource for starting your family tree, and the latest in genetics research, some interesting surprises have emerged for the celebrity’s on the show researching their own family trees. But none would be more surprising than if they were able to go back a mere fifty generations. Now, with new tools like DNA research, this is not only possible but would turn what we think we know about race into an illusion.

Leading geneticists have long known that the family trees of all of us, of whatever origin or color, meet and actually merge into one inclusive family tree for the entire human race. All humanity has the same family tree; no human being (of any background) is less closely related to any other human being than approximately 50th cousins, and most of us are a lot closer than that!

And our DNA tells us that all 7 billion of us alive today are the descendents of ancestors who set out from central Africa some 70,000 years ago (that’s 2000 generations ago) on a long migration that spanned the Earth; one that has continued right up to the present, with many new waves of forced migration across oceans.

The Lakota principle of Mitakuye Oyasin (We are all related) takes these findings beyond human beings to include the interrelatedness of all forms of life. What it all comes down to is that we all belong to the same human family – we are one species, one human community. It is an illusion that there are “races.” In all our diversity, [all of us are related, each of us is unique](#). It may just be that telling our life stories is a way to weave the thread that will yet connect the human family.

A 27th way to tell your soul’s story ~ In what ways have you discovered your relatedness to others who you would not have thought of as part of your family tree? Think about your experiences that have connected you in meaningful, deep, and lasting ways to others beyond your “blood” relations. What was this experience like for you? What did it tell you about yourself that was new to you? What did it tell you about your real family tree? What did it tell you about how we are more alike than we are different? Turn the answers to these questions into a story that will become part of your soul’s story.

Ever Remember Something You Didn't Know You Knew?

What is really going on when we remember something we didn't even know we ever knew? The world's sacred traditions acknowledge the importance of seeking answers to the mysteries of life. At the heart of the quest for spiritual understanding, for mystic knowing, are two essential questions: "Where have we come from?" and "Where are we going?" The mystery of our origin and our destiny is intricately tied to the nature of the soul. The world's sacred traditions agree that the soul is eternal. It exists prior to birth and continues after death.

Poets, too, understand the lure of the mysterious. William Wordsworth provides a clear perspective on this fascinating phenomenon of remembering what we didn't know:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar: Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness, but trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home: Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
...Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither...*

It is through remembrance that we are brought to a spiritual life. Remembrance is a meditation that awakens us to, and focuses us on, the deeper, everlasting reality of the soul. When we suddenly remember something that is totally unfamiliar to us, we may be getting a soul memory, something we may have even known before we were born. When this happens, it provides the key to knowing where we have come from and where we are going.

A 28th way to tell your soul's story ~ Think of a time when you may have gotten a glimpse of what your soul knew before you were born. Did this provide you with a sense of home, of compassion, of belonging, or of contentment? Did this also give you a sense of connection to an 'immortal sea' that brought you forth? How did this experience give you a clearer sense of where you are going? Reflect on the times of knowing what you didn't know in your life, and put this into a story of how this has added a deeper understanding to your life.

How Does Mystic Knowing Help Us Remember? Part 1

The Arabic term *Irfan* explains mystic knowing as “knowledge of a divine nature dealing with a realm ‘beyond’ the earthly,” or the “sacred” and “holy” realm. Its sister term, *Gnosis*, from the Greek, signifies “immediate knowledge of spiritual truth.”

The world’s religions agree that the soul comes from and returns to God. The foundation of the Jewish tradition regarding the soul, and mystic knowing, is seen in Ecclesiastes (12:7), “The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” The longstanding mystical tradition of the *kabbalah* has evolved over the centuries to include practices such as prayer with the intention of uniting with the divine, which could even evoke the image of God breathing the breathe of life (the Holy Spirit) into man, or the state of union we are born with.

Such practices are to facilitate what a story from many traditions tells us about how we learn, as an unborn soul, what our nature and destiny is, but are then born forgetting where we came from and why we are here, and that we therefore spend the rest of our lives trying to remember what we forgot, as Wordsworth hinted at in his poem.

After arriving in this physical world, and being immersed in our new and on-going physical needs, we can only really remember who we are when we are truly conscious. Only a fully conscious effort enables us to remember our essential spiritual nature, which begins the process of moving us from the world of matter toward the world of the spirit, which then brings us back in touch with our spiritual destiny.

A 29th way to tell your soul’s story ~ This mystic knowing, or being aware of a sacred and holy realm and our direct link to it, is an essential tool in the practice of remembrance. Knowledge of spiritual truth is also essential to remembering who we are. Can you identify any times in your life when this awareness of a realm beyond the earthly gave you any insights into your life meaning or purpose? Can you remember ever transcending your physical needs and, in this state of deep, unified consciousness, gaining a new understanding of your spiritual nature? Reflect on these times of transcendence, or union with the holy, and write down the essence of this story of mystic knowing about the deeper, hidden levels of your life.

How Does Mystic Knowing Help Us Remember? Part 2

As noted, the world's religions agree that the soul comes from the spiritual realm, spends a lifetime adjusting to life in the physical realm here, and then returns to God. Paul speaks to this duality in our eternal existence and what we can do about it in Corinthians (II, 4:1, 18): "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands... So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Many Christian mystics throughout the centuries have sought union with that 'eternal house in heaven' while still living this life, each one standing upon the shoulders of those who went before. The 20th century English monk, Bede Griffiths, recalled the timeless mystic vision when he wrote, "There is a window in my consciousness where I can look out on eternity... then I discover my true Self, then I begin to see the world as it really is... Here all is one, united in a simple vision of being."

A 30th way to tell your soul's story ~ As an essential tool in the practice of remembrance, this mystic knowing (being aware of a sacred realm and our link to it) brings us into contact with what is eternal, and therefore who we are at our essence. What happens when we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen? What has happened in your life to help shift your focus from the temporary to the eternal? Have you ever looked out onto eternity? What did you see there? Did you remember who you really are? Did you see the world as it really is? Did you see all as one? Reflect on these times of mystic knowing in your life, and write down, in story form, the most important understanding you've taken from the experience of what this 'simple vision of being' has given you. Later, think about how this story fits within your larger soul's story.

How Does Mystic Knowing Help Us Remember? Part 3

Mystic knowing in Islam has its source in the Qur'an. Similar to the Jewish and Christian traditions, the Qur'an speaks of our being created by God, being given a home in heaven, and emphasizes our reunion with God. The phrase, "Unto Him shall ye return," is oft repeated in the Qur'an (10:4; 19:11; 29:57-58; 31:14). The legend of the Night Journey of the Prophet to Jerusalem, and his ascent from there through the seven heavens to God, is symbolic of this return, and has a veiled reference in the Qur'an (17:1). It has long been the purpose of the Sufis, in representing the mystical core of Islam, to experience and explain this journey back to God. The central Sufi doctrine of *tawhid* refers to union with God, as well as the oneness of God, and has to do with shedding attachments to the world.

Regardless of our tradition or belief, connecting to our own divine nature, to our mystic core, is what will best help us to remember who we, where we came from, and where we are going. We all have our own Night Journey on this earthly plane, and it is not necessarily smooth sailing. Our existence here is made up of all kinds of challenges and struggles, each one key to uncovering the mystery of who and what we are. The important question is do we see the reason, purpose, or value, and yes, even the wisdom, in what vexes us.

A 31st way to tell your soul's story ~ What is your Night Journey, and where has this taken you in your journey back to God? What struggles, losses, failures, and imperfections have lead you closer to the mystery of your soul? How have you learned to appreciate everything that you have been given that makes you the complex, mysterious being you are? What wisdom have you found in your most difficult moments? How have you given up detached from certain things you thought you needed? How have you learned to embrace both the highs and the lows, both the fullness and emptiness of your life? How have you cultivated an attitude of acceptance of all that your life is and isn't? Reflect on these questions, and put as much of what you come up with in a story that represents your journey into and out of darkness, a journey ultimately toward the light that allowed you to see your life more clearly and in a more illumined way.

How Do We Access the Divine Mysteries Within Us?

Mystic knowing is essentially a matter of remembering what we once knew. Our birth into this world is not merely a matter of “sleeping and forgetting,” as Wordsworth and other mystic poets have hinted at. This is but the earliest part of a lifelong, even eternal, process. The rest of the story is, most importantly, a process of remembering who we really are. This is how and why remembering is a spiritual practice.

This process begins as a journey of descent, from the eternal worlds, characterized by knowing and forgetting, yet continues in this world after birth as a journey of ascent, characterized by eventually awakening to the reality around us, coming into full consciousness, and then gradually remembering what was once known from the sacred realm. Some sense that there might be something more to life, seek and often find what they are looking for, and then spend the rest of their lives striving to live in the ultimate balance of that remembrance. Others may spend their lives wholly in the temporal realm, forever in that state of forgetfulness, never knowing, or caring, that there was ever anything else to know.

All of the divinely revealed religions help us recognize our origin as well as our destiny. Similar to the other sacred traditions, at the heart of the Baha’i Faith is the belief that our purpose in this life is to prepare for the life beyond, that the soul is on a journey from and back to God. As the Baha’i writings put it, the soul “is the repository of the ancient, Divine mysteries of God.” The nature, path and progress, or the journey, of the soul, as it has been understood historically and universally, through these spiritual perspectives, is of the essence to living our lives today.

A 32nd way to tell your soul’s story ~ If the soul is our eternal identity, the only thing we take with us through this life and into the next, perhaps the one thing that makes us truly unique, then remembering where we came from, who - and what - we really are, and where we are going, could even be seen as the purpose of life. Who are you, really, in the eternal sense? In addition to all the usual identifiers we draw on to answer this essential question of life, what would you add to this long list of identities that truly makes you who you are, eternally? What divine qualities or virtues have you discovered that have been deposited into your soul? How has remembering what you once knew before your descent to this world helped you in your return journey, in preparing for the life beyond? Reflect on these questions for as long as you need to, then write down, in story form, the essence of what you’ve come up with.

How Do You Wish To Be Remembered?

How do we remember those who are closest to us, whether they are still with us or not? What is it that lasts the longest about who they are? What is it that we will never forget about them, as long as we live? Is it their authority, their accomplishments, the material legacy they leave behind? Or is it something else that stays with us forever about who they are?

“Everyone,” says Abdu’l-Baha, “wishes to be remembered.” This is the essence of our nature as human beings. We have a built in tendency and desire to not only review the life we have lived, to make sense of it and see it for what it truly is, but to want others to know this and remember it, too.

We owe it to those we love to remember them how they would truly wish to be remembered. And, we owe it to ourselves to be remembered how we truly wish to be remembered. Accomplishments, even material legacies, will pass, fade, and be forgotten. If we “hear with attentive ear the call of the spiritual world,” if we “seek first” its “perfections,” this will be what is not forgotten about us. This is how we will have “everlasting remembrance.” The eternal qualities and virtues that we cultivate and bring in to being through our daily actions make us who we are as spiritual beings; these are what will last the longest in the memories of those who really do know us.

A 33rd way to tell your soul’s story ~ How do you truly wish to be remembered? If earthly accomplishments will hardly be remembered, what is it most from having heard the call of the spiritual world that *will* contribute to your everlasting remembrance? What spiritual virtues and qualities that you have nurtured throughout your life make you most who you really are? Reflect on these spiritual qualities that you would like others to remember about you, select just one, and tell a story illustrating how you have lived this virtue in your life. Then think about where this story fits within your larger soul’s story.

What Draws Your Attention to the Sacred?

Through our various spiritual traditions, we have a variety of practices designed to guide us to, and keep us focused on, an awareness of the pervasiveness of the sacred: yoga, the Eightfold Path, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the Five Pillars, and many other rituals and ceremonies. They all involve regular, even daily, ways to draw our attention to the sacred.

At the heart of most spiritual practice, what is left when we move beyond form, constricting language, and what may be for some the stiffness of the prescriptions, as Wayne Muller has said, is simply remembering. Remember who you are. Remember what you love. Remember what is sacred. Remember what is true. Remember that you will die, and that this day is a gift. Remember how you wish to live, and that you will return to where you came from.

Remembering these things on a regular basis will keep our focus on the sacred, on the spiritual aspect of life. This is where we will find our greatest comfort, the healing of our ills, and the love that we will most cherish. One of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves is finding the practice, simple or otherwise, that will help us remember who we are, what we do know, and what we do not yet remember that we know. It can be meditation, prayer, writing, singing, walking, even the mundane routines of life. Having such a means to keep our focus, a simple act that helps center us into a remembrance of what we already know is sacred and beautiful, is essential to our spiritual growth. Simple acts of remembrance greatly enrich our spiritual life.

A 34th way to tell your soul's story ~ What draws you to whatever is personally sacred to you? What one practice has most helped you remember who you are? What keeps you on a path that leads you to your spiritual essence? Where do you find your greatest comfort, your deepest love? What keeps you focused on what matters most to you? Reflect on these questions, and put your responses into a flowing narrative that tells the story of how simple acts of remembrance enrich your spiritual life. Then decide where this story fits within your larger soul's story.

How Is Consciousness the Key to Both Remembrance and Transcendence?

Transcendence and remembrance are two halves of a whole process. Remembrance, the conscious effort of reflecting on and listening to our thoughts, in prayer or meditation, helps us to achieve transcendence. Transcendence helps us remember more of what we once knew, as unborn souls having come from an eternal realm. As a regular practice, remembrance can help us become and remain conscious of who we are as spiritual beings, how we see ourselves in the world, and how everyday events and circumstances affect and influence us. Consciousness is a unique characteristic of the self, and is the key to both transcendence and remembrance.

As souls born into physical bodies, we may be meant to go beyond what is not only most familiar to us, but to seek that which we truly are, at our inner most essence. And this process has been a very long time in the works, matter transcending into mind, and the powers of the mind transcending to a consciousness of spirit. Just imagine what else might be possible as we continue to add more and more levels of consciousness to our transcendent nature.

A 35th way to tell your soul's story ~ As a way of remembering more of what you once knew, try to listen to your thoughts in a way you may not have done before. Try to reflect deeply not just on the events themselves, but on the feelings or emotions they evoke. Pick out a specific experience, incidence, circumstance, or situation from your life, and in meditation on it, see if you can take yourself beyond what is most familiar to you about that particular situation by looking at it from the perspective of the soul, the part of you that is on an eternal journey, so that you enter into a new realm of consciousness about it. How does this focused practice of reflective, meditative remembrance expand your consciousness of who you are as a spiritual being? After you've had enough time to reflect on this new consciousness of a moment in your life, write down the story of your deeper remembrance and transcendence, and how this spiritual practice and spiritual experience became two halves of a whole for you.

How Does Remembrance Transform All Our Relationships?

The ancient legends shedding light on the unborn soul tell us that we already know where we came from and where we are going. The part of us that always remembers, that always lives in close proximity to God, is called the “secret soul” in the Sufi tradition. What we seek is within us, as the sacred traditions also affirm. Our remembrance of this would fundamentally change us and transform all our relationships into relationships of authenticity, respect, and compassion.

The great mystic poets knew, ultimately, that remembrance links us to the spirit we all possess, which links us to each other, as well. Rumi puts it this way:

*“What I tell about “me” I tell about you
The walls between us long ago burned down
This voice seizing me is your voice
Burning to speak to us of us.”*

And, as Walt Whitman says:

*“I celebrate myself;
And what I assume you shall assume;
For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to you.”*

The practice of remembrance leads us from the depths of ourselves to the heart of our deeper connection with others. Remembering our true origin, identity, and destiny leads us ultimately to the service of humanity, through our own deeds and actions that benefit others.

A 36th way to tell your soul’s story ~ What secrets does your soul have to tell you? What is already within you that might lead you beyond yourself? How could remembering what is within you transform the relationships you already have and even those you don’t yet know you have? Reflect and meditate on these questions, asking your soul what it knows about the walls between us that are not really there, about the voice that is the voice of all of us, that burns to speak to us of us. How does every atom that belongs to you also belong to everyone? Savoring the very essence of what you’ve come up with, write this down as a story that your soul wants to tell others.

Who Are You, Really?

At the heart of our quest for understanding life are three questions: “Where have I come from?” “What am I doing here?” and “Where am I going?” The mystery of our origin, purpose, and destiny is intricately tied to the nature of the soul. The world’s sacred traditions have always provided answers to these mysteries of life.

Beyond this, it now seems that we are hardwired to remember where we came from and where we are going. Remembrance is a meditation that leads to a deeper reality. It is the conscious effort of reflecting on and listening to our own eternal thoughts that connect us to the heart of the universe. As our remembrance expands, our consciousness, our view of the world and our place in it, leads us to greater action in the world. Remembrance is a stepping-stone to spiritual transformation. As a regular practice, remembrance helps us remain conscious of who we are as sacred beings.

A 37th way to tell your soul’s story ~ Meditate on these sacred writings: “*The spirit returns to God who gave it.*” “*What is unseen is eternal.*” “*All things proceed from God and unto to Him they return.*”

Keeping your focus on the sacred, try to find that “window” in your consciousness where you “can look out into eternity” and “see the world as it really is” where “all is one, united in a single vision of being,” as Bede Griffiths noted.

Be thankful for the ability to remember; to remember who you are, where you came from, where you are going, and most of all for remembering that God’s love brought you into being. Be grateful for the gift of your soul, your link to the Imperishable.

Take a moment to remember all the gifts you’ve ever received as often as you can. Take twenty minutes of focused time out of your busy day, each day, to remember all those things that are most important to you, and to let go of the unimportant, so that you remain in touch with your essence. Remember to honor both your joys and your sorrows in your life, because both are what provide your life with its greatest meaning.

Keep up this practice of remembrance regularly. Ask yourself each day these questions: *Am I me? Am I in my everyday life who I am at the core of my being? Am I in the process everyday of fulfilling my own potential?* And if you ever find yourself answering no to any of them, then ask yourself: *What else do I need to be doing to be fully me?* With this regular practice, you won’t have worry about needing to rush to answer these questions at the end of your life.

Could Our Life On Earth Be But a Day in School?

When C. G. Jung reflected in his autobiography, *“In the end the only events in my life worth telling are those when the imperishable world irrupted into this transitory one,”* what was he really saying? He actually compared our lives to the life of a plant that lives on its invisible, hidden rhizome. The visible part appears above ground and lasts only a single summer. His point is he “never lost a sense of something that lives and endures beneath the eternal flux. What we see is the blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains.”

Following this intriguing analogy, what is most important in our lives, as well as longest lasting, are our inner experiences, the dreams, visions, goals, and values that carry us onward toward our becoming who we are inside us, that “splinter of the infinite deity,” as Jung puts it. Everything else withers in comparison.

Our lives are “so fleeting, so insignificant, that it is literally a miracle that anything can exist and develop at all,” Jung also says. So what do we do with what we have, before it all passes so quickly away? How do we address the mysteries of our lives, of life itself, and how do we fit into this wondrous grand mystery? Is the story we would tell of our lives that of the blossom or the rhizome? (Or, is it at least some of both?)

The story of human development, and the life story we would tell about our life as a whole, is incomplete without the recognition of the soul and what its existence signifies – not only spiritual development but eternal life as well. Mystics and poets the world over have long described how consciousness continues on, in the eternal human soul, after death. And now some scientists are saying the same thing.

A 38th way to tell your soul’s story ~ If our life on Earth is but a fleeting moment, if our soul is the medium for spiritual growth, and if Earth is a platform for the ascent of the soul, what is the most important lesson you’ve learned in your day in soul school? What inner experiences mean the most to you? Which moments when “the imperishable world irrupted into this transitory one” are the most meaningful to you? How have you learned to “isolate the eternal from the contingent,” as the mystics do, to shift your focus in this life toward eternity, toward the one, and away from the temporal, and the many? After you’ve reflected thoroughly on these questions, write down this story of your deeper remembrance, as a key aspect of your soul’s story.

Service is a Step Toward Peace, Both Inner and Outer

How far we have come in uniting the great divide between us? A little service to others goes a long way in helping us remember who we are and how much we are all connected. Stepping into the wounds of loss, separation, and grief with acts of altruism and selflessness leads to healing and reconciliation. Service can be the first step toward peace, both within and in the world. Service is prayer made visible. As Abdu'l-Baha said, "Service to humanity is service to God." What can you do today to serve and to remember?

A 39th way to tell your soul's story ~ In your own place of quiet, where you can reflect deeply, ask yourself these questions about service. What does service mean to me? How does service fit into my life, now and in the future? In 5, 10, or 20 years from now, what will I have done with my life that is most satisfying? What will I have contributed to the world that will be my greatest source of happiness? What strengths and capacities will I build upon, and what weakness will I overcome, to be of service in this way? What do I need to do, or change in my life, today that would enable me to carry this out? Take as much time as you need to put all your thoughts on this down in a way that sounds and feels right to you, and then write this story up in your clearest voice, so that your soul's story will be sure to include what you consider to be service to all of humanity.

Opposing But Complementary Forces Are Catalysts To Growth

There is an essential give and take, push and pull, up and down, to life that is both simple and yet a core mystery of existence. Through this dialectic we develop character, form virtues, and gain integrity. The symmetrical nature of opposing forces helps us remember our wholeness.

This inherent opposition of life is designed to bring about growth, change, transformation, and evolution in life; and, ultimately, to shift our focus from the familiar to the mysterious, from the physical to the spiritual, and from time to eternity.

Here we have a fundamental principle of life that, in presenting us with endless pairs of opposites, creates contradictions, conflicts, and problems, or muddles, to be resolved. Each pair of opposites, as complementarities, adds up to a whole. Problems only arise when the whole is broken down into parts. In some traditions, the central problem of the human condition is precisely how to bring the two contraries into equilibrium, yet maintaining them as complementary forces. Knowing how to balance the creative and destructive energies is a guiding principle of human development.

A 40th way to tell your soul's story ~ Identify a time, or an experience, when you were fully aware of a conflict of opposites going on in your life, a push and a pull between two forces that seemed to have equal power over you. What were the forces you were aware of, what kind of shift in focus or contradiction did this create for you? Did these opposing forces help you to understand any better your core values or virtues that you possess? How did you recreate a balance between these opposing forces for yourself? Reflect on these questions, then when you are ready, write down this story of how you overcame, or resolved, the muddle these two opposing forces created for you. Then figure where this will best fit in your larger soul's story.

We All Live a Universal Story

In addition to our unique story (our story like no one else's), and the group story we live (our story like some others), we also live a universal story (our story like all others). This one is a deeper, archetypal level story that is shared by all human beings due to the common patterns and processes we all share.

Myth and ritual is where these timeless and sacred patterns have had a home for millennia. They describe a universal process of change and transformation that is made up of elements known as archetypes and motifs that are repeated over and over in our lives at key transition points to facilitate the process of transformation.

Archetypes are latent potentialities, or pattern-forming elements, residing in the collective unconscious of the human psyche. As Jung might say, archetypes are part of our vast store of ancestral knowledge about the profound relations between God, man, and cosmos, that remain unconscious until our own real life experiences bring them forth into consciousness, making our individual experience part of the universal human experience.

When an archetype passes over into consciousness, it is felt as an illumination, or a revelation. The archetype itself is the original form of a *type* of experience from which all other forms of that experience follow and is copied. It is a recurring *type* of a common situation, or a *type* of universal figure, what we would think of as a literary motif, that is part of our inherited humanity. Examples of such archetypal situations would be “the hero’s quest,” “the battle for deliverance from the mother,” or “the night sea journey,” while archetypal figures would include the divine child, the trickster, or the wise old man. The archetype carries a power to impress, influence, awaken, and therefore transform us.

A 41st way to tell your soul’s story ~ When in your life have you experienced the archetypal energies that have always existed within you bursting forth into your consciousness? What was going on in your life at the time? How did this illumination from an archetypal level change or transform things for you? Reflect on this, and then tell this part of your soul’s story.

Our Universal Story Carries a Healing Function

Since our universal story is made up of archetypal experiences, this is how we connect to the source of the timeless elements of the human experience. Archetypes are ultimately the *Imago Dei*, or God-image, within us. When we consciously experience an archetype in our lives, the archaic becomes contemporary, and, most importantly, the universal becomes personally sacred.

Archetypes, thus, carry a transformative power. They keep us in the vital, nourishing riverbed through which the water of life has flowed for centuries, and which is the soul of our existence. They bring us to life, and keep us truly alive.

An archetype integrates into a meaningful whole all the illusory splits of apparent oppositions. It is in this way that archetypes also carry a “healing” function, in unifying the differing facets of the same reality, and their presence is felt as also having a profound spiritual significance.

A 42nd way to tell your soul’s story ~ It is important to grasp how and why living an archetype can help bring about healing. This will add much more meaning and depth to the life story we have lived. Think of any experience where some aspect of your life was healed, reconciled, or resolved. Then think of whether that experience could possibly be unique to you, or if it is more likely shared by others. Was it the uniqueness of the experience, or was it the universality of the experience, that ultimately enabled the healing to happen? Was it the fact that only you could have experienced it, or the fact that many if not most other people could have also experienced it, that made it healing for you? What is it about either uniqueness or universality that makes it healing? How and why is this awareness important in telling your life story? Incorporate these reflections into the telling of this part of your soul’s story, and then meditate further on this story’s significance to you.

Our Universal Story Carries the Enduring Truth of Myth

Contrary to popular usage, myth does not mean a falsehood. Myth is a very real representation of reality. For indigenous and ancient peoples, myth is the representation of the way things really are in the world. Just as scripture in the world's religious traditions, myth operates at the sacred level.

The most common and profound archetype in mythology is that of “the hero’s journey,” a form of the pattern of birth, death, and rebirth, or in Joseph Campbell’s words: departure, initiation, return. This pattern defines the process of transformation. Myth thus expresses a dialectic of opposites, which provoke an interaction culminating in a synthesis of the thesis and antithesis, which further combines and transcends them both. Transformation occurs by following a dialectical process which itself makes up the archetype of transformation.

We get to the sacred, mythic level of our life story by telling the story of our lives that connects us not only to those we know directly but also to all those throughout time and across distances who have lived similar experiences or archetypes as we have. This is how and why our universal story carries the sacred and enduring truth and power of myth.

A 43rd way to tell your soul’s story ~ Sometimes in our lives we are not aware of the truth that we are living, especially when we are in the midst of experiencing struggle, conflict, or tension. Yet it is precisely this kind of challenge or “muddle” that is needed to show us the truth and the necessity of the difficulty, which is really the only thing that can lead us on to a “resolution” and the completion of the transformation process. Think of a time in your life when you were able to turn what felt like a falsehood into a truth, when something that you didn’t want or didn’t like the feel of eventually showed its value and importance to you in a way that ultimately led to the completion of the process of transformation in your life. How did a new realization, clarity, or awareness assist the quickening of this process for you by helping to bring about the unity of opposites? Reflect first on your responses to these questions, then write down the story of what all this means to you now, as part of your larger soul’s story.

**Giving Thanks for Our Universal Story
For the Light *and* the Shadow in Our Lives!**

One of the many things we all share, as members of the human family, is our recurring experience of what we perceive as the clash of opposing forces, whether we see these forces as positive and negative, good and bad, or light and shadow. They are all parts of the whole of reality that are not only necessary but also extremely purposeful. Light and shadow represent the core opposition, the primary dialectic, we face in this life. And their purpose is nothing less than to bring about transformation in our lives.

When we can see the entire picture of reality in its wholeness, rather than get lost in or overwhelmed by any of its parts, we are much better able to appreciate both the light and shadow that does come into our life. These essential opposing forces in our lives not only create growth opportunities for us, they facilitate our progress toward reestablishing the original unity we were born with.

The intermingling of light and shadow in our lives is actually a blueprint for transforming our lives. Knowing that there is a blueprint to our growth (physical, psychological, *and* spiritual), allows us to see and understand both the detail and the whole while keeping us focused on the whole.

A 44th way to tell your soul's story ~ What is it that has brought light to your life? What is it that you are most thankful for in your life? How has the light in your life made you a better person, or more of who you really are? Would you have really known the value or benefit of this light if it hadn't also been for the shadows in your life, those things that greatly challenged you, created tension, or made things really difficult for you? Think of those times when you have been most aware of the forces of light and shadow in your life, and reflect on how they were at odds in your life, as well as the greater purpose of the whole they represent, and how either would not have the meaning they do for you without the other. After you've reflected on your responses to these questions, write your thoughts down, and tell this story of light and shadow in your life.

Why We Need Both Light and Shadow in Our Lives

Light and shadow are two halves of a whole, twin forces that direct our lives; they are essential to maintaining the balance of life. Light, an ancient symbol central to many sacred traditions, is represented by the qualities of radiance, sanctity, love, justice, and every spiritual attribute that emanates from divinity; light is even thought to be eternal, boundless, and changeless. Its opposite, shadow, or darkness, is most characterized by temporality, limitations, and continual change. It is even said that the entire physical world is a shadow of the world of light, a temporary dust heap, or an illusion that can vanish in a moment, ultimately a deception meant to distract our attention from the light it is reflecting.

And so, we are caught in the middle of the dual forces of light and shadow. Yet each can only exist because of the other. Without light there would be no shadow. For each to be understood, shadow needs light, as light needs shadow. Together, their opposition represents a two-fold process designed to bring about the spiritual evolution of humanity, and the transformation of individual lives. Both parts of the whole are needed for progress and transformation. Contrast and opposition create structure. They are necessary to make us who we can become. This is why Baha'u'llah assures us that our share of the Light is already within us: "Thou art my lamp and My light is in thee... within thee I have placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else."

A 45th way to tell your soul's story ~ Would a rose still be a rose without its thorns? Would the story of Christ be the same without Judas? Would poverty be an injustice without wealth? A conscious life finds meaning in these contrasts, meaning that impacts and punctuates, and that can even transform us. How has your life been transformed by the presence and interaction of light and shadow moments? How have they helped to maintain an essential balance in your life, given it a meaningful pattern, and given you a conscious awareness of wholeness? Write down this story of the contrasts in your life, and how you found the light within you to balance them all out.

Finding Our Inner Phoenix and Rising From Our Own Ashes

As winter turns into spring, as nascent flower buds begin to push their way up from sleeping leaves of life, we too can remember that it is our time to emerge afresh with renewed energy for the things we are most deeply committed to. This renewal is as much a part of our perennial process as it is part of nature's cycle. We also can and do arise from the ashes of our own exertion to become even more than we were.

The Phoenix, the mythical bird rising from its own ashes, is but one expression of a universal archetype of renewal and rebirth, one of the most powerful symbols known to us. It pervades many of the world's myths and sacred texts. The classic journey of the hero is another timeless expression of this archetype of spiritual transformation, which we also witness every time we observe the inner rhythm of nature unfolding all around us. What appears to be decay, even death, is but a moment in an ever-evolving process of evolution. This is our season to arise, to realize our potential for rebirth.

A 46th way to tell your soul's story ~ Like the mythic Phoenix, we carry light and hope within us, as well as the keys to renewal. Change, being the perennial constant it is, need not faze us, for it is a womb preparing us for rebirth. Think about a time in your life when you knew you could see all there was to see ahead of you, and there was nothing that gave you any hope beyond that. Then, suddenly something new opened before your eyes and everything became more promising. What was it that buoyed you beyond the despair of that moment, that gave you the hope to push on, and that allowed you to accept and embrace the inevitable change coming into your life? What was the catalyst that guided you out of your dead end, showed you the continuity of your own perennial process, gave you renewed energy, and got you back in the flow of your own natural cycle? After you've had enough time to reflect on these questions, write the story of this spiritual renewal in your life.

We Need to Know the Value of Our Own Soul

*You know the value of every article of merchandise,
but if you don't know the value of your own soul it's all foolishness.*

*You've come to know the fortunate and the inauspicious stars,
but you don't know whether you yourself are fortunate or unlucky.*

*This, this is the essence of all sciences—
that you should know who you will be when the Day of Reckoning arrives.*

Rumi

Is this the greatest challenge of our lives? How many of us, as Jung has asked, are really prepared for the second half of life, for old age, death, *and eternity*? For Rumi, this is all a very practical matter, as much so as knowing the true value of anything in the marketplace. This is a lifelong process that begins as early as we become aware of our own soul—that unique part of us that is with us throughout our entire existence, before we were born and after we die. What happens is we tend to confuse our identity with the multiple facets of our physical form that we know for only maybe eight or nine decades, a mere fleeting moment of our soul's eternal journey.

As we gain this deeper consciousness, we become increasingly reflective on what it all means to us. Could it be that it is not the *I* that looks back to review our life, but the *soul*? Why wouldn't who we are at our essence be in control when it matters most?

A 47th way to tell your soul's story ~ Memory is that soulful part of us that wants us to remember as much as we can before we leave this plane. Could it be the *intention* of the soul to re-member those eternal images, those soul qualities and virtues, most needed for the rest of our eternal journey? Think back to that time in your life when you first recognized that there was an eternal, changeless, ever-present part to who you are. What was this archetypal moment like for you? How did your own awareness of your soul change how you saw yourself? How did this knowledge of your soul give you a clearer vision of how you want to live your life? What was the greatest lesson that knowing the value of your own soul gave you? Write down this story of coming to know your eternal self.

Soul-Making is “Learning Life by Heart”

John Keats asked the question, “How then are souls to be made?” He wasn’t referring to how our soul is originally created, but how it is brought into its fullness of being. He knew that the soul is a “spark” of Divine creation. The question was, “How then are these sparks which are God to have identity given them – so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one’s individual existence?” Our soul is a work in progress, and this life is designed to assist it in reaching its fruition. We are placed in this physical setting, with all its contradictions and oppositions, so our soul doesn’t have all green lights on its eternal journey. There are some yellow lights and some red lights along the way; then the green lights follow. Developing an identity can become a very confusing matter. Knowing who we are is not meant to come easy.

Soul-making is what happens when we live life deeply, and learn by heart the lessons intended from all the conflicts and struggles encountered here. As Keats says, “How [are souls to be made], but by the medium of a world like this?... Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!” Or, as Thomas Moore puts it, “The whole world and all of life are nothing but the raw materials for soul-making.” There you have it. We’re here to learn from everything we encounter.

A 48th way to tell your soul’s story ~ Could it be that who we really are is linked directly to where we came from? Beyond all the here-and-now stuff of our lives, we all come from a common origin, someplace deeper and longer-lasting than this surface level existence. Beyond the daily, mundane events of our lives, we all also have an eternal soul. How has your soul’s journey through this physical quagmire given you your lasting identity? How has living deeply, learning from life’s intended lessons “by heart,” given you a sense of certitude in who you are and what your purpose is? How has your heart’s sufferings contributed to your changeless identity? Think about all the pains and troubles of your life, as well as the joys and successes, and tell the story of how the raw materials of the world have been a leaven for soul-making for you.

Soul-Making is Connecting to Our Deepest Nature

C.G. Jung wrote: “My life is a story of the self-realization of the unconscious... I can understand myself only in the light of inner happenings. It is these that make up the singularity of my life.” He seems to be implying that at our essence, we are like all other human beings. The soul is what links us to the archetypal world. Soul-making is communicating deeply with the inner realm, being fully awake and aware as the numinous bursts forth from the unconscious, flooding our consciousness with eternal images.

James Hillman sees soul-making as what happens when we evoke the emotions and experiences of crisis and opportunity, of love and dying that give life a deeper meaning. This occurs as the unique turns into the universal, and the temporal into the eternal. Only this world, with all of its opposites and dualities, as Keats said, provides the necessary stuff of soul-making. And, as many spiritual traditions say, we are formed in the image of God and we have the innate capacity to reflect that image in the life we live. This inborn image serves as a spark of consciousness that benefits our growth and has our best interests as its purpose. We can also think of this mysterious force overseeing our lives as “grace,” “providence,” or being invisibly watched over.

A 49th way to tell your soul’s story ~ Whether we remember it or not, we are always connected to our Infinite self. We are always living in the archetypal realm. We just have to be a bit more conscious of where we are each moment. Take some special time right now to communicate deeply with your eternal self. Listen carefully to what your soul has to tell you. Be open to all moments, to all dualities that have come your way. Knowing these polarities as well as you can will greatly assist your process of soul-making. As we become more familiar with this deeper, lasting sense of who we really are, we recognize more clearly that all that does come to us is purposeful. Take in deeply all of these moments of grace, reflect further upon their meaning for you, and, when you have reached some new or deeper clarity, write down your insights from this reflection in the form of a flowing narrative.

Soul-Making is a Lifelong Process

Remembering who we are, and where we are going, is a function of the soul. We can even say that there is a process guiding the soul. This process can be thought of as soul-making, or what our life here on Earth is really for. It is how we develop and draw out the potential we are innately endowed with. Soul-making is the lifelong process of acquiring the attributes, qualities, and character needed for our eternal journey. It helps us in both this world and the next.

As Marion Woodman puts it, “soul-making is allowing the eternal essence to live and experience the outer world through all the senses – seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching – so that the soul grows during its time on Earth. Soul-making is constantly confronting the paradox that an eternal being is dwelling in a temporal body. That’s why it suffers, and learns by heart. Soul hears with eternal ears, sees with eternal eyes, smells with eternal nose.”

Soul-making is not a solitary quest; it is for the benefit of everyone. It is a process of taking on a transcendent identity that results in nothing less than personal transformation which contributes also to our collective transformation. This is what the world needs most at this auspicious time.

A 50th way to tell your soul’s story ~ This is important stuff, be sure to give yourself enough time and find a quiet space to reflect on what you feel it is that really guides your life and where you think this is directing you. Think of times in your life when you became aware that you were drawing out a new virtue, quality, or potential that was already within you. What did this feel like? What was it like for you to discover for the first time that there was an eternal part of you along with the temporal part? Finally, after you’ve had enough time to reflect on these questions, write down the story of how your soul-making has expressed your own personal truth, as well as some part of the collective truth of us all.

NOTES

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- 4 John Keats, *Selected Letters*, 232–233.
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- 9 *Mundaka Upanishad 2, 1:1* Max Muller, trans. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15018.htm>
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