

# Spiritual Journey

A short guide to the spiritual path I have journeyed on through life

When I was nine months old, I was born.

I was brought up in ignorance of religion and spiritual matters as a child, but I think it would be wrong to assert that I was brought up an atheist, as nothing was mentioned either for or against the matter; although, perhaps you could say that the assumption of atheism in our life was a teaching carried through without words.

I also had very little religion at school, at least of any effect. When I was eight, we had a class known as 'Scripture', though perhaps it would be better known as 'Stricture'; here we had to copy down what to me were gobbledegook sayings, such as 'I shall make you fishers of men', from the backs of small cards with outline sketches of men, whose mode of expression was so economical that I quite failed to realise at the time what they were - I thought they were ghosts!

Needless to say, the whole lesson was utterly baffling, and the only understanding that we had in common with the teacher, was the 30-inch heavy-duty plastic ruler, 'with six inches broken off Ashley's bottom!' as we used to call it - for it was a weapon of tyranny, no less! I only ever received it once, though.

At this school I had also assembly, which involved standing tired-limbed for twenty tedious minutes, singing hymns I often didn't comprehend; I used to sing, 'lo he adores not the virgin's womb' - I thought 'abhors' was a mistake for 'adores', and I didn't know what 'virgin' or 'womb' meant!) Every now and then, a child would faint somewhere in the room with a crash - perhaps this is the true significance of finding it a 'crashing bore'?! Once there were three children fainted in two weeks; one of them was behind me - I heard a short gurgling noise then a thump, and he was carried out.

At the next school, when I was twelve, we had a period of a subject known as 'PEB', which stands for 'Predicament Experience Belief'. I enjoyed it very much; but we didn't actually do any religion in it as such, but culture - which is fair enough by me. We did, however, do a stint on Muhammad in Arabia. Not only did I enjoy this piece of work but whereas with everything else we were taught my interest had been intellectual, with this piece it was emotional, which I suppose might be quite unusual at that age, for such an alien subject; certainly it was for me. But I remembered the work with a nostalgia rather difficult to explain. I did not remember much of the detail, I just remember it was beautiful, and when I was maybe sixteen I tried to dig out the work especially, but I could not find it.

Next we had a most extraordinary RE teacher who used to arrive ten minutes before the end of the lesson - on the days when he did arrive. Very occasionally (presumably when his watch was wrong) he actually arrived on time, and then he never used to make us work, but let us do what we liked - and so we did! His

name was aptly called 'Hullah', and so I always used to refer to him as 'Hullah-lulah!' for he was very popular, as you can imagine. The only time I ever recall doing any work for him, was when someone else took his class; we felt most imposed upon, to have to do some work for once!

For a short while we had a terrible teacher, made worse by the fact that we were all looking forward to him as he did such wonderful assemblies! but once he had you securely in his nutcracker, your attitude changed - for we had to write about things, and I didn't like to! I wanted to talk about the issues that were raised in the videos he brought in. Indeed, I think we as children would have learnt more discussing them than slogging them on to paper. Often, however, at the end of the lesson he would put on some Victoria Wood or Marilyn Monroe ('Some like it Hot'). I didn't find these enjoyable; Victoria I couldn't understand; but I welcomed the respite from writing. We didn't ever have the subject of God or the supernatural broached in these lessons anyway though, so they weren't of any help in that matter. I am convinced the writing did little good.

After that, I had no more RE due to a timetable clash.

At that school, end of term service was held in the church opposite. Our greatest game, however, was to make bets on how long the sermonising would last. I didn't listen to it at all, as it was mostly about sports, and I suppose from the nature of the bet my friends hadn't been interested in it either. But if you were in the chapel part at the side, then nobody could see you and you could play games throughout the service, if you could do it quietly!

Such, then, was the educational religious studies that I received, from which I think I probably received very little. However, alongside this, was what I may describe as the unofficial religious education, from which I gained greatly.

When I was nearly four, I was run over by a car. This was to have the most far-reaching effects as I later grew up to adolescence under the shadow of its memory; from it, I learnt so many aspects of the human mind; on account of its importance, I have narrated it separately.

When I was six years old, I woke up one morning with a dream. In the dream, it was morning as I lay in bed, and my mother was not. Her presence was nowhere; the kitchen where she would be, was empty. I had no intimation of what may or may not have happened to her; just her not-ness.

This dream was so intensely disturbing to me, as you can imagine, that for several years onward from that day, my heart could never forget; I agonised about life, death and its meaning.

'What was I doing before I was born?' I asked myself; 'or when my brother was born?' I could see a yellowy-brown murkiness, like the sun shining feebly through a muddy water, which surrounded me. This was all I could see of the situation before I was born.

'What will I be doing when I die'? I asked myself. I imagined myself, a skeleton in the ground for a million years, eternally stationary, unchanging, uncommunicating, with many other skeletons in the same plight. This was appalling; it pained me to contemplate. Another time, I asked myself, 'What will I be doing in two hundred thousand centuries' time?' With this question, I came to the belief that after death I would become invisible to people, and yet I could see them clearly; and I would help others, but they would never know my presence, nor even that any help was coming to them. Quite where this advanced idea came from - I was only seven at the time - is now impossible to say; I do not recollect having it influenced from others, but no doubt children do often talk about such things and it is hard to say at this time. But the motivating force behind its acceptance, was the dream that I had.

We never went abroad, but only to Wales each summer holiday, for two-and-half months each year, living in our tents. I did not go swimming as the others did on the beach; but always I scouted the rockpools for fish and crabs, rescuing them, looking under stones and amongst the seaweeds and gathering rocks and shells - thus my life centred its pleasure around exploration and inquiry, which continued fully throughout my later life in an open, explorative mind, such that when I did come to the subject of religion, I studied and explored it dispassionately and without prejudice, as far as one ever is able to do.

And in home-life too, we always lived near lakes and woods, where I used to wander and search, and tend to the plants, instead of the more passive creativity that occupies many children today. I never used to be bored.

At about the age of nine or ten, I stopped drinking alcohol; for it had always been present at our dinner table, and as my parents used to drink it, the children used also to want to have some. I remember once being given a glasslet of banana brandy, and I drank it all down in one! One day, my mother mentioned of wine in passing that 'it stunts your growth' - and so thereafter I had nothing to do with alcohol, refusing to have any.

I used to read spooky 'true story' books at about this age; but curiously enough, this didn't seem supernatural - a monster coming out of a grave from the dead was simply a natural event like any other, and which one did not question or consider the implications of, such is the child's mind. And whilst I watched horror and ghost films - again, this seemed to have no more importance to real life than the antics of one's dreams, even though I was terrified to go to sleep for them; but rather, such culture shapes one's understanding and interpretation when one does finally take up the challenge to look into the subject when one is older; at least, that was the case for me.

When I was eleven, my brother did a great misdeed to me, and I decided that I had to return justice, for what he had done was clearly wrong; although, I have forgotten now his act. So, I planned how it should be done; and arranging the situation, a short while on, I took a bowl of sugar, and threw its contents all over him; and I rushed eagerly to my mother, and declared to her what he had done, and how he had met his deserts! but her only reply was, 'Yes; but it is I who have to clear it up;' and, as clear as the justice of my brother's discomforture had been, so now was the injustice of my mother having to suffer from it, and my enjoyment ablated. My heart felt so sad; and ever onwards from then, I always considered the repercussions of my actions and effects upon outside parties.

When I was twelve, we had bought for us a BBC B Computer. At first, naturally, I used it to play games; but I quickly became interested in creating things for myself in it, and within just one-and-a-half years, playing games had completely given way to programming.

Now in a computer, things either work, or they don't; and they don't just happen by wishing them to, or getting someone else to do it (most people don't know how to program) - you have to do it yourself. From this computer, I learnt to think logically, and the need to take things through to completion, organising their structure methodically; and I learnt endeavour, to be able to build one's own abstract universe and carry it through single-handedly without any aid. In this way, my thoughts became clear and independent of my peers, for it became second nature for me to follow what accorded with reason and which showed itself as true, rather than to tow outworn customs behind me like empty carts, customs themselves staggering to their graves. When I came to religion, I in like manner fashioned my own opinions, which differed radically from those around me and I upheld them without any feeling of insecurity even though I was alone in my views. This, I feel, was directly occasioned by my experience of the world of creative programming.

At about the age of twelve, I was offered the experience of learning the piano. This brought me into the music of the past, and from that moment on, the fragrance of beautiful melody has shaped my thoughts. At first I began by listening to Haydn and Mozart; but gradually my tastes spread out until I liked all music lacking the modern 'pop beat', be it the music of a millennium ago, or the music of today.

When I was fourteen, I became interested in dreams, and one lunchtime at school, I asked myself this question: 'If I were to dream of killing someone, would I be guilty in real life of this act, even though it occurred in the dream world; should I thus go to jail for a dream, or would the punishment be less severe? or should there be no punishment at all, as it was only a dream, and never happened?'

I spent the whole lunchtime thinking about this in great detail, and for two days more; keeping matters rather short (for I followed the argument through many twists and turns), I eventually came to this conclusion: that in any act, it is the intent that is important, and not the deed. Should a person try to assail a fleeing criminal and he was unaware that it was a criminal, he should be guilty of the crime and punished according to the assault of an ordinary citizen; for the assault, though turning out to be good, was accidentally so. And if a person did the most terrible of deeds, yet he had been well-intended in it and acted out of false information, then he is to be treated as if his information was indeed correct. He should not receive a punishment for it, maybe even a reward.

I concluded, of course, that since such a dream of killing someone would imply at least a partial, or complete, intent to do such a thing, then the dreamer stands before judgement just as a person who acting with the same intent had performed a real bad deed in the real world.

I stopped having birthday parties when I was fourteen; they ceased to interest me, and I found no interest in presents for my birthday, christmas or easter; unless they were oranges, which I liked very much, and which my mother availed herself of to buy me.

And at fourteen I became a vegetarian. Before then, I had eaten only beef and cod, but I went off the taste of even these two. Later I came to learn of the nutritional, financial, ethical, environmental and other advantages of being a vegetarian, which I held also to strongly, but not fanatically.

From the age of thirteen I began to become academically very bright - I had always been good at work, but I began to excel in all my subjects. I especially liked maths and the science subjects, although I always considered them as arts. When looking for a university course, I went to my teachers and inquired why I could not find maths being offered by any college as a course. After a little head-scratching, it was duly discovered that I had been looking under the Arts courses! I was really amazed; for I simply could not conceive of maths as a science - to me it was an art, like painting or sculpting!

This academic ability continued right until the end of school. I was constantly being praised for it; this had the very positive effect of leading me to believe that anything others could achieve intellectually, I too could equal or better, on my own without help. Under such a belief, the ability of the mind soars forward in its comprehension of all subjects. But unfortunately, it also leads to a boastful pride which takes quite a while to lie down and be humble and without a rank, and which took me several years to bring back to sea level.

One important consequence of doing maths, is that by learning probability I acquired an attitude to the universe that weighed up different possibilities without ruling anything out; for instead of ruling things out probability teaches you to assign a likelihood to things, which, however unlikely, may yet turn out to be true. This had the twofold effect of teaching me not to be like some who spend their time thinking that others have got it in for them; observation taught me to assign this as unlikely, so I am not paranoid about things; and further, it taught me that the way to determine whether a thing can happen or not, is not to guess, for though it might seem utterly unlikely, it might still be so. Therefore, when I came eventually to look at supernatural phenomena, I ignored how unlikely it might seem from my everyday experience, and took the approach of real investigation.

Moreover, when I was fourteen, we studied Chaucer's 'Prologue' to the Canterbury Tales, and Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar'. I really disliked having to study them, but I realised that they were wonderful works, and I quickly read all of Shakespeare's plays and Chaucer's output, and read through all the mediaeval and renaissance classics, even going so far as beginning to learn old english, commonly called "anglo saxon". Knowing, therefore, Modern, Mediaeval and Old English, and Greek and Latin, gave me some important abilities. Firstly, it brought to me a realisation of how words change in time. When I came to studying religion, this was important, as it meant I felt at perfect ease to set aside what later traditions read into earlier scriptural words. Secondly, of course, the New Testament is written in greek, and I found therefore that I had access to the originals, and did not have to live, like a person whose house is floating down a river, by the translations.

I read also through a degree course-book in astronomy when I was fifteen, which was quite hard but I learnt a lot from it, and combined with my general fascination with space, the stars and planets, and my interest in dinosaurs which I had had since I was about eight, I therefore helped myself for good to a keen interest in the 'origin' of things, which later was to find its expression transformed anew as I became more interested in the philosophical origins of existence.

During this time, whilst others went off to discos, got drunk and spent their time in frivolous affairs after school and in the weekends, I used to spend my time reading literature and science and nature magazines, working out new mathematical problems and programming the computer. We lived in the countryside, and so I never had the town influence that can easily lead astray; I felt little need to invite my friends around frequently, as I saw them regularly at school - as a result, I led a voluntary sheltered existence from society, in which I was free to develop my own self, unimposed upon. Later, when I went to university, it was a huge

shock to live with people and discover how animal they had become in their life. But that was yet to come.

Although I had been brought up without religion, it was not until now that I found myself taking a strongly atheistic viewpoint. Although I didn't know anything about religion, other than it believed in God, I nevertheless attacked the matter whenever it came up, saying that it clearly wasn't so, and that this material universe was all that is; I still remember going home to the railway station with a gentle, nice friend and putting my point very strongly across to him, and going home onto the train smug that I was in the right, and that perhaps he would learn something from the obviousness of what I said!

When I was sixteen, we were taken for a physics excursion to the RI Christmas Lectures in London, and it was on the way back, as we ambled along in our line, that I spied a tramp a short way to the side, rummaging in a bin. At first I didn't realise what he was doing, but then I knew that he was looking for food. I felt impelled to go and join him, and to help him in some way; great sympathy and passion mingled in my heart - and yet the line of children marched on, and the allure was equalled by this secure marching, to turn my face and marching on pretend I hadn't seen. I agonised on the matter in my mind, whilst I held my eyes straight ahead; but whilst I averted my eyes from seeing, I could not prevent my heart from seeing directly; this whole event disturbed my mind for several years, it interlaced my thoughts. For I had never met such a thing as a tramp before that time.

From then onward, I began to experience the traumatic repercussions of the car accident when I was three. In it were nightmares, darkness and depression. It has been detailed in a separate account, lasting until the age of nineteen.

When I went to university, I lost interest in everything academic. The trauma of the accident that I was suffering from turned my interest solely to the inner nature of one's relationship to one's self. I found that I could read nothing at all, and the discovery of what people were actually like now that the school rules were taken away, left me very cynical about everything, although I loved people very much as individuals. I did however pick up a classic book by the Society for Psychic Research, set up in the nineteenth century as a scientific study of the paranormal. I only picked it up because it had a chapter on Genius, as I was convinced we are all geniuses, and I wanted to become more of one! But I just couldn't feel like reading anything, and I set it aside for many months forgotten. It was later to exert a profound alteration to the course of my thought.

At the end of 1989, my cousin Katya became a Christian; this didn't mean much to me, but we did pass a few words in letter, and I passed on from the matter.

And now, my encounter with religion, went like this.

At University I spent my time reclusively, and ate my way through the depression I was enduring, buying twenty pounds of apples every three days as one portion of my dietary intake - and I ate much else besides! My whole room was redolent of fruit, and the cleaner used to enthuse about its fragrance. Yet I felt during this depression, that I was learning from it many principles I had been unaware of at school, and so I looked upon it as a wholly good thing, and hoped in some ways that it would continue as long as possible, painful though it was.

On one particular day of May, I had exhausted my apple supply, and so I went down to the city centre to obtain some more. It seemed all very quiet, and the shops didn't seem to be open. I noticed this as increasingly strange, and when I found that the Millburngate shopping precinct was closed, I was certain that there was something peculiar going on. And then I remembered - it was bank holiday monday!

I would have returned to my room, but there just happened to be a jazz band playing above the bedding centre to attract trade on that day, and although I wasn't into jazz at the time, I thought it sounded rather nice, and since it was free, I went over to a thin wall, and lay precariously along it upon my back, with a precipitous drop to my side. But I didn't care!!

As I was imbibing the music, a young girl of fifteen came over to me, and lay upon my heart a buttercup; I was really touched, but I was ever so shy of people then! She was with two other friends, and I just wanted to go and speak to them, but I couldn't muster up the courage. And before long, they had drifted away, and I was sad to have lost them.

But they again returned, and I agonised anew at how I could meet them! The last piece of music eventually ended, and I thought, 'now they will be gone for good.' Yet, I summoned up the nerves, and took to the girl a large dandelion flower in full bloom - I knew where they were, I had been eating them earlier behind the wall!

Her name was Zoe, and her two friends Emily, who had epilepsy, and Holly, who had a hole in her heart; Zoe herself had a problem, as I was later to find out!

After a long walk and a talk, in which we managed to lose Holly and recapture her again, I arranged to meet Zoe again, on Framwellgate Bridge a few days later, and we all swapped numbers.

The time and the day came, and I went to Framwellgate Bridge and I waited and waited - and she just didn't turn up!

But at last, Emily came, with a friend, and told me that Zoe couldn't come as she had attempted to commit suicide the night before, and had overdosed; as she

didn't want to let me down, she had sent these two in her place!

Her new friend whom I hadn't met, was Khadijah, also about fourteen years old, and we went and sat on the banks of the River in the shade from the summer sun, and talked about Zoe's problems. It would later turn out that Zoe's depression and suicidality coincided with her periods; and when the doctors prescribed her the pill, the matter receded.

I must have arranged to meet again, for a few days later, or perhaps the next day, I met Khadijah once more, this time she brought with her her sister Taira, who was sixteen.

They were unhappy with life, for though living in a western society, they were caged in a traditional Pakistani upbringing; at home, they weren't even allowed into their front garden in case any man might see them!

But it was however the law that they had to go to school, and by pretending to be studying at the library after school, they used in fact to wander along the riverside, and live in a dream world of flowers and nature; until the time for the bus would end their fantasy and they returned home to their unhappy prison. They also had a system with their friend Fiona, who had agreed that whenever she were asked if they were staying with her, she would say yes, so that they for their part could simply say to their Parents that they were staying at that friend's whenever they wanted to go off to town, and enjoy the riverside and flowers they loved so much.

That first afternoon, Taira had to stay on until seven, and so after Khadijah had gone, I took Taira up to the Botanic Gardens and showed her everywhere around amongst the plants; which is quite remarkable, as it later turned out that she disliked and detested all men, but she would seem to have made an exception with me, and continued to do so for many years (she learned not to hate them over the years).

It was from Taira that I learnt about humbleness, and it was through her and for her that I dissolved away all that pride that I had acquired in my school days. Everything I had always done, until then, I had been proud about - even admitting mistakes made me proud to be admitting them! but from Taira I perceived in my life that, just as the sun is not proud of its glory, how much more so everything lesser should be free from pride.

I realised from what they said, that they were from a different culture (I didn't know about cultures then), and I learned that they followed a book called the Qu'rán; so, I thought, rather than ply them with questions about it, which I thought unfair and lazy since I could read it myself, I should go to the library, and borrow it out. This I did not out of religious interest, but just to paint some background for me to place them into.

I enjoyed reading it and the vivid power of its words, and its message demanded from my mind an answer! And it made certain claims about the Bible, so I decided to read that book too, and compare it to it. Both the Qu'rán and the Bible I read in June and July of 1990, thus breaking my absence of reading.

Now I was really interested! I discussed the two books in letters to them (writing as a girl, for their parents and sisters opened all their letters!), which I think they learnt from, as they hadn't read the Qu'rán themselves. But in the end, I couldn't reconcile what appeared to be the crucifixion claim with what was obviously the case, that Jesus was crucified. For whilst most Christians believe that Christ was crucified, most Muslims believe that he was not. The verses in the Qu'rán can be understood to support either view, but the Muslims make it into the likeness of their own assumption, and as Taira had mentioned Christ not being crucified, that is how I read the passage.

This, and the fact that the gospel was more in keeping with my perception at the time, meant that I took up Christianity rather than Islám. But my interest never flagged, and I began to spread my reading to other religions. Admittedly this was rather polemical at first; but I also greatly appreciated the wisdom that was in them.

About this time (I can't remember whether this was before or after reading the Qu'ran) I read also the book referred to earlier - called 'Human Personality and the Survival of Bodily Death' - and this inspired me to initiate my own investigation into the paranormal; and to do this, I went round all my friends whom I knew well and could trust, and asked them for any unusual personal experiences they might have to narrate on such matters. In this way, I could remove the fraud element, and had only to think about the accuracy and subjectiveness of what they said. I quickly gathered up quite a lot of these, including some of my own, and under scrutiny I found a number that really did indicate that such phenomena were genuine beyond doubt.

So I extinguished my library of about 250 works of literature, giving them to my mother and carting them off to charity shops, and began instead to collect books on spiritual subjects - not the later commentaries; but the original great works themselves, much as I had collected the master works of literature before.

I also began a Wisdom notebook, to express my thoughts on life. One day, shortly after commencing it, I naively wandered down our footpath and, standing for a few hours in a fork between three paths, stood with book in hand to note down people's wise counsels for me on the meaning of life. Needless to say, I was not exactly successful!! - it was then that I discovered for the first time that people were not actively engaged in pursuing the wisdom hidden within Life. So I filled the book up with proverbs of my own, and followed them as my guide in life.

Now my turning to God came about, in the following way. It was the warm summery months, and the illumining rays of sunlight streaming through my window. In place of curtains, hung swathes of virginian creeper covering half my window, transforming their colours with the seasons between bright hues of greens, yellows and reds, and which rippled with birdsong as bluetits nestled

and fluttered amongst their leaves, sometimes seven all at a time. My bed was stationed in the very centre of my room, surrounded by space; and as I was lying there one morning, I suddenly felt that it was most arrogant that anyone should decide for themselves matters concerning God, when God, if He existed, would know best, and should be the first One to ask, as the Knower; and therefore upon that very moment, roughly 8.15 in the morning, I sat up upon the midst of my bed sheets, and prayed for a distinguishing sign. My hands rested upon my upper legs, and my head was lowered forward. Eager as ever to help, I recommended to God half a dozen signs He might find helpful to use for convincing to me, such as producing in my hand a coin with certain words inscribed upon, so that I could never fail to look back upon it and be convinced, whilst promising never to show it to others. After about fifteen minutes of thoughtful suggestions, I snuggled back into my covers, and began listening again to my music. After nearly an hour elapsing, I was quite forgetful of the prayer I had just prayed. I recorded the following, some months later, concerning what happened next:

"At 9.30am, 90% awake, I was listening to some music when I quickly flew across fields of green grass, passing some ball games of tennis or golf; then there was a very bright flash of light and a loud roar, and I was differentiated from my body.

And there were two worlds, for I could see in the spiritual world, yet I could see with my material eyes.

And when I raised my arm, I felt it lift, I saw it lift, I felt the breeze as it lifted, yet materially my eyes saw it did not lift: and that was the manner of movement.

There was an ache upon my heart, and I wondered who was breathing, me or me? [i.e. me physical or me spiritual].

And I wondered, If Pat [my mother], called to me, my response would be in the spiritual, yet not in the material: and she would see me silent and rush me to hospital.

There was no fear but the fear of not knowing what to do next.

And there came an Allurement to take myself upon an astral flight, for this was an unusual opportunity; yet God did not allure to me at all.

And I cried, 'Jesus Christ, Emmanuell!' and upon the fifth calling I was reincarnated. Nor was there anyone else I knew whom I could call."

The above differs from familiar accounts of leaving your body, in two respects: firstly, I was separated from my body without departing from its position. In the standard accounts one leaves one's body and looks at it from afar; whilst, secondly, normally the slightest thought of one's body or the wish to return to it will cause an instantaneous return to reality (unless your body is in a critical state). But in this experience, despite wishing with all my life, desperately, to return to it, I could not. It was a baffling and perplexing experience... so used to

three dimensions, you know where you want to be, judge your distance from it, and then strive to move to be there. But how to react to being clearly separate and at a 'distance' from your body, when you perceive you are in exactly the same position as it, is truly baffling and a wonder of wonders. No action, learnt or calculated, is of any help in solving this question. It was truly baffling and beyond solution.

At the time, I took the experience to be a call to Christianity, and only later realised it as an encounter with the spirit of God, contextualised into my own culture of understanding, and that the path called by Christ is the same path of the Spirit called for by others before and since.

Three days on, I happened to be in the attic, where my mother lived. It was 11 pm, and I vividly recall saying goodnight, and wandering down the steep stairway, ambling along the red carpeted passageway, past my sister's room... crossing my eldest brother's room... my elder brother's... and then, unsuspectingly, on this ordinary, commonplace day, opening the door to my own room.

What I encountered in my room was beyond description, or human imagination; it was full to the brim with Forces on a truly galactical scale. Everything was overwhelmed by the terrifying intensity of these forces. There was no sense of running away, any more than you would attempt to flee from an exploding sun, they were there and all-encompassing, all-involving, all-touching. Never before, nor after, has my prayer ever been so perfect and complete as it was at this moment, such was the necessity, as my room filled with immense terror at the indescribable magnitude of such all-pervading power. I must surely have prayed all night; I cannot recall amidst the overwhelming experience. At length I awoke up the next morning, an entirely transformed person. Before, I was the shiest of all people, and suddenly I was now both outward going and also inward looking; before, I was afraid even of the dark, and of many things; yet suddenly, I was unafraid of all things; before, I was extremely unhappy, and now suddenly I had come into a happiness that never leaves. In retrospect, what had seemed to be three extraordinarily terrible and malignant forces within my room, were undoubtedly my own dark shadows cast into relief by the all-compelling and ineffable brilliance of the encounter. This awakening to God I account as my true and spiritual birthdate, taking place on 1.9.1990.

Roughly a week after, I figured I had better ring my brother Peter, and explain my sudden change of heart about spirituality and religion. He lived elsewhere in the town, and I had not seen him for some while, particularly since I lived the other end of the country. As I unravelled to him the sequence of events over the phone, he explained to me an amazing matter that had been occurring at his home. On the morning of my becoming separated from my body, he had suddenly been overcome by an inexplicable and great urgency to pray exclusively for me for 40 minutes; this happening each

morning, until the morning when I awoke transformed, at which point, the need to pray for me had evaporated. He had not experienced such a strange and pressing need to pray for another, before or since.

I felt a need to be baptised, since it seemed to be asking for this in the Bible. I considered who would be appropriate to carry out such a task; but on perceiving that no one on earth had the authority, except what they claimed for themselves, I realised only God or Christ would be right.

The night before I returned to college, on a wild, windy and rainy night, I made my way down to the local quarry beside the footpath, by then filled with water, and climbing over the barbed wire and surrounded by a sprinkling of trees on its water's edge, threw all my clothes off onto the ground and plunged into and under the water. It was freezing! coming out again, I tried to dry myself in the howling wind and rain; it was sufficiently dark that, though right near the path, no one would actually see me unless they looked carefully. Making my way home, I packed my bags for the journey back to college.

At college, having now become Christian, I began to talk to other Christians, and I started to notice something very unusual, for they were referring to Christ as God! When I myself had read the Bible, it had not occurred to me for a moment that Jesus had considered Himself to be God; everything that He said and was written about Him there indicated to me quite otherwise; I even discovered I had been reading a translation designed to promote the view that Jesus was God!

So I brought this up with them, and they quoted to me some verses for their point of view, which I consistently pointed out to them were quite ambiguous. After a while of this, I learnt that this was a common view, so I thought it important to correct the world upon the matter. To this end, I looked at the New Testament in the original greek, which only confirmed my viewpoint even more; and I studied the Jewish and Christian documents outside the Bible relating to the times, and they, too, convinced me further!

So I went to a Christian Union meeting, and they were having a Bible study. The whole two hours was spent by them extracting the fact that Jesus was God high and low from every ambiguous verse, and at the end of it, one of the members declared that she had learnt such a lot from the meeting. But you believed the matter already,' I felt like exclaiming, 'so in fact you haven't learnt a thing!' Instead, however, I asked more soberly, 'But we had already assumed that Christ is God when we came to look at these passages; why don't we see if the opposite notion will fit equally well into them?' The leader told me that he would happily discuss the affair with me individually afterwards. But I wanted everybody to discuss it! wasn't it a question of vital importance for them as well? I was scandalised by this attitude, and never returned to a second meeting, except once, very

much later, just to see if anything had changed; and it hadn't!! And they, for their part, prohibited their members from speaking to me. I was still 'finding my faith', they were told!! They even extended this ban to an atheist friend, who happened after many years to bump into me, and explaining how it came about, apologised for ending his visits to me at the time.

After one and a half years of being a Christian, my friend, who was the Reverend there, knowing that I was interested in Islám and other religions, mentioned the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh to me, and said that I might like to investigate them too. I could nearly have given up, for I could find them in no library book at the university; but I subsequently learnt that he had a contact number and address, and so I went along, borrowed some books out, and became rather interested.

I found people around me were uninterested or antagonistic to what I had found; the mere name of Bahá'u'lláh convinced them that it wasn't worth investigating, for it wasn't 'Jesus' - not that Jesus was ever Christ's name anyway. If Jesus happened to return in his original hebrew name of Yehoshu'a, they would reject him one and all for just that same reason!

My transformation into a Baha'i proceeded from the following vision:

(At the time the only way I knew of describing the persian colour of skin was by 'african', being unaware that african was very much darker.)

4.00 am. There was a man and a woman. The woman appeared to be having trouble with something spiritual, and I gave my advice upon this; and I saw Muhammad, multicoloured, a poorly-outlined fiery vision. We moved on.

Before me were pews, whereon were seated roughly twenty of my peers; and a slip of paper arrived for each of us, saying:

A message from God:

Ring your bells;

Then see what happens.

091 .....

To my left was a bell, and the sound of tinkling began to sound within the room, and I thought, When I ring my bell, something will happen.

I began to ring my bell, and immediately a cool breeze began to blow into me and through the room; I rang my bell harder, the wind blew harder, fear was in the wind that blew, and I began to rise into the air. By now I was ringing the bell violently, crying out the words upon my slip, and a gale-force wind filled and rushed against us, fear was terrifying,



And I hovered to the left of my place in front of my peers, a spiritual force descended upon me and I began to prophesy to them; the words flew rapidly from my mouth until I was oblivious of what I was saying, and a terrifying man appeared in front of the pews. The man said that he was God.

After some moments, I stopped ringing, reappeared in my seat, and the man disappeared.

I began ringing again, the cold breeze blew, I rung harder, the wind blew faster, great fear was in the wind, until again I was ringing it madly, a gale was blowing, and then a terrible man appeared in front and said that he was God.

I stopped ringing, the gale was silenced, the man disappeared, and I reappeared in my seat.

I began ringing again, and an african-coloured man, tall and lank, beady-eyed and ruddy-lipped appeared in front. I wondered, This might be God, and I felt in the presence of a king, and, awed, I thought to kneel.

After he had gone, I rang again until there was a gale once more, and a terrifying man appeared, and he went again when my ringing had stopped.

Then the african returned and he said: I should not have rung the bell as I did, but few times.

And I said: Even only once - and softly!

I went over to him, and stood toward the pews with my back against his chest. We were in front of a mirror, and I observed curiously how he had no reflection. Suddenly I felt terror, vulnerable at having my back turned, and fled away from him.

I thought: Write this down now - but this was not an obvious thought.

(After thinking about writing it down with no response, I fell asleep again and wrote it down at 8.40 am.)

At the time I was a little perplexed about this vision. I had said to God, to show me something just like he had shown me that year-and-a-half before when I had prayed on my bed for a distinguishing Sign. And then I had added, wanting a little puzzle, 'but don't make it too clear cut!'

When I awoke, I regretted this extra remark - for I was unable to tell whether the fear in the vision was a commentary of something negative, or my own dark shadows cast by the light. I observed that I fled in terror at he who said he was God, for having no reflection in the mirror. I realised that by having no reflection, could well signify that he had no equal (reflection), or that the mirror was my self and it was I who was not reflecting God.

After being stumped by this all day, I said to God that night, "okay, I regret that, the puzzle was hard; please show me something clear-cut!" and when I awoke in the morning I wondered why I had had no 'reply'; for I was expecting, after such a vision, something similar to elucidate it. A little confused by the silence, I turned

open a book, and the very passage I opened it at, totally convinced me then and there. We each have our blinding passage - and that one was mine!

The first thing I noticed on becoming a Bahá'í, was that my dreams completely changed; before, they had been restricted to certain types of symbolism, but within merely a few days they had spread out to embrace and mix in everything in life's experience around me.

And as time went on, I found that all aspects of myself have become more integrated and fulfilled, and the academic side, and the ability to read, which had disappeared at the beginning of university, returned again to the full.

Very amazing was my transformation in working in groups with others, where before I had been a solitary traveller, now I am part of a large family of pilgrims on their way toward the supreme horizon.

This is a story of God's mercy and grace; His grace should never be confused with the worthiness of the recipient, who as a dormant seed may be without leaves or branches until from heaven the rains begin to fall.

And nor should the stories in life be confused with their purpose and goal; experiences are like fingers pointing to the sun, and you may turn your eyes away from the very rays of the Sun itself as you marvel at the shape and size of the finger... whose very form you could not see without the all-bestowing Sun.

All, therefore, must forget the mirage of the self, this evanescent world and all its trappings, and turn and be illumined by the Sun at the midmost heart of Reality.