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- *Human life is for spiritual growth*
- *Everything encountered is sacred*
- *Both words and actions reflect one's current journey*
- *Transition (death) is a graduation*
- *Journey of life compared to ship on the ocean*

God joins all of you together. You're bound to one another in spiritual ways, and those connections are not unlike the connections that are experienced by many. But what you share together as a group is a microcosm of what is shared among all who are willing to explore and learn about a life unseen.

All individuals, all human beings, are given the tools to see in their faith. For some, that gift is readily embraced. For many others, that gift is ignored, either willfully or by circumstance. But the truth is, all have the gift to see beyond what they see with their eyes and sense in other ways.

You wonder at times about where your life must lead—its purpose, its direction. Is life a series of random events, or is there a kind of master plan that provides identity to the journey? We say to you no life is random, but we also assert that no lives are predetermined in any definitive manner. There is no randomness because life does have a pattern. That pattern is growth. That pattern is movement. That growth is an evolving ability to become loving.

The movement is essentially the change from where you are to where you can be. This is not a physical change in location; it is a change of awareness. A young child is aware of self. A wise individual is it who becomes more fully aware of the *other* in life. There is no change in position but a radical transformation in perspective. That is the movement—that is the only movement that is of real value.

You are given human life for such movement, for such change. You are given life because of the potential that life provides for your growth as spirits. The challenges you face may seem less spiritual challenges and more physical/emotional challenges. But the physical, the emotional, or psychological challenges are merely part of the greater movement, the greater growth that takes place.

Each of you is given life to be lived. For some, the choice of how to live calls for a withdrawal from the normality of life around them, but it is not the *withdrawal* into a monastery or some other secluded condition that provides for growth. That withdrawal is only an opportunity that may be taken, that may encourage spiritual growth. Indeed for some, that choice is most beneficial. For others, growth occurs through the direct and daily interaction with all that is around them—celebratory, painful, elated, debilitating as those conditions may be.

You are asked to grow. You are not expected to grow in one environment as opposed to another. Your efforts to grow are more beneficial as you choose how, in

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what environment, in what surroundings that growth is to take place. Your human growth is only partly emotional, only partly physical, but it is ultimately thoroughly spiritual, not in the sense of a formalized religious approach, but in the soft, quiet reality of what is sacred within all.

When you recognize the sacredness of absolutely everything you encounter, you cannot help but change your interaction with all that is. When you recognize a neighbor to be sacred, you then choose not to respond to that neighbor with disinterest or judgment. The affirmation of sacredness requires an expression of love. How is that affirmation expressed? It is expressed by listening. It is expressed by being there. It is expressed by being open to what others may feel to be sacred in their lives. You reflect the sacredness of something by the way you hold it. If you have an icon of great sacred worth held in your hands, you enfold that icon with great care, great respect, love.

Why is it that human beings often recognize in principle the sacredness of another and yet never hold up the other with equal affirmation, equal love, equal care? Human beings are to be caring, but you are also to be cared for. Both are part of your spiritual paths. Both are inherent to a life with purpose, a life with focus, a life of loving. You are given life as an opportunity to hold up another, to hold up others, to hold up communities, to hold up nations, to hold up religious philosophies, all as being sacred.

What you say to another is sacred. The words you choose are merely an expression of what you feel within. If you seemingly have no respect for another person, the words you choose in your interactions with another are far different than if you are speaking from the position of great love, of great respect, of great caring. You have an expression, "Actions speak louder than words," but we say, "Words themselves are actions." Words are one window to what lies within. Actions that are physical actions are another window.

Your response to all that is surrounding you must be characterized as being loving. For the individual with whom you have great disagreement, the only appropriate response is listening and speaking in terms that reflect respect, reflect love. The words you choose are for that moment the actions that you've chosen. The actions are not implying physical work, physical activity. The words are the actions. The words are the deeds.

Words, therefore, are as sacred as the individuals you encounter. Your choice of words is sacred. Your choice reflects your current journey. Is anger appropriate? Of course, but anger can be expressed as a divisive action. Anger can also be expressed as a means of showing love. When you are angry at a child, you are expressing your love for that child, for you want the best for that child. If the child is about to do something dangerous, your anger may save that child's life. You are angry, not at the child but at the situation, and you use your anger as a way of offering protection. That is a form of love.

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The words you employ are the actions. They are the deeds. Some deeds have no words and yet speak volumes about who you are. When you are impatient and judgmental, your actions indicate that impatience. Your actions can indicate judgment without the need for words.

Your lives therefore are gifts of the Spirit to the spirit. Your lives are a gift of God to all that is godly within. Your lives are a reflection of the light that surrounds you and a means of drawing out the light that is within.

You learn through these experiences. You grow and thrive through such efforts, but where does this lead? What is the purpose of all that you know of life if it ultimately leads nowhere? If all that you know to be true indicates the necessity of spiritual growth, and there is no result from those efforts, then what purpose can be served by such lives? All that you know would cease to have meaning. As you recognize the importance of finding ways to be loving, you acknowledge in that very way the reality that there is a goal, that this leads somewhere, that there is purpose, that there is a direction to be sought after.

You wonder about transitions—transitions from human life to something relatively unknown. There is, of course, always fear surrounding what is unknown. But from your own experience you also acknowledge that much of what you have fear of, you learn was of no value and often never existed. So it is with the transition from one kind of life to another kind of life. Because the transition is unknown—the nature of that transition and where it leads—the mystery remains strong, and consequently the fear of that mystery remains strong.

You must acknowledge the naturalness, the appropriateness, the importance of those transitions. All human beings of course experience that, and for those who are left behind when you lose someone you love, that transition represents a loss. But for the individual who makes that change of life-form, it is a transition of enormous beauty and joy and strength. The goal is reached. The initial purpose of human life is then in some form or another accomplished. Yes, there are souls who choose to reincarnate for there is yet more to learn, but the transition is a kind of graduation. It is a kind of affirmation that growth has occurred, and it is a moment in your consciousness that is filled with enormous love and warmth and joy.

When you were children, many were afraid of the dark, not because there is something fearful about the dark, but because the dark held something within that was unknown. Children may have a strong imagination that lets them leap beyond what they know and see, but there is a natural fear of fully experiencing what it is that is unknown. As adults you are no longer physically children, but you do experience the same fear of the dark, fear of what you cannot see, what you cannot touch. But just as the dark results in the coming of light, so the transitions that all experience are followed by great light, great love.

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We don't criticize you for your concerns, but we do wish you to understand that such fear of the unknown, of the uncertain, belongs ultimately to the realm of evolving faith. When a child's parents leave and are out of sight, the initial reaction is that those individuals are no longer there. They have disappeared and the child is alone. Eventually the child realizes that the parent can leave, but the parent will come back, and the child really is not alone. For the first time, the child begins to learn that there is an existence beyond what can be seen and heard. That child realizes the parent is not next to them but also not gone. The parent will come back. The child is not alone.

So it is when you ask questions about the transition. When someone transitions to our side, the common response is "that person is no longer with us," with you. The person is somehow departed. Even using the term "departed" implies away, no longer present. But the truth is whoever is considered departed is not away any more than a child's parent who steps around the corner is away. That parent is present. The child learns; the adult learns. You begin to realize that there is indeed a life that you cannot see. It's a life around a corner from what is visible, and yet it is a life that is indeed fully present.

The physical trappings of life have nothing to do with what is permanent. You say you know this to be true, and yet deep down you may wonder, "Is it really true?" You are given life not because when it ends, it ends. You are given life because when it changes, it continues. You survive because you adapt. Your spiritual essence survives because it adapts to a new environment. The spirit remains and consciousness remains.

We, your guides, are fully conscious. Indeed, we are aware of far more than you can possibly see. We are conscious of what is permanent. We are conscious of what is good. We are conscious of all forms of love. We are conscious of all forms of reaching out. We are conscious of all acts of compassion, of listening, of being there. We are aware of your prayerful thoughts on behalf of another. We are conscious of the response of another's spirit to your prayers. We are fully conscious. The transition is one of moving from limited vision to full and embracing vision. It is from this greater vision, this greater acknowledgment of love that such joy fully counts.

Your lives do indeed have direction. The paths that you take do lead somewhere, and yet while you are on the middle of that path, you are not expected to easily see where you are headed. If you are on a boat in the middle of the ocean, you may not be so aware of where you are. You see where you are, but you have no understanding of where that is. It doesn't make sense. There is no land in sight. All you see is the sky and the water. Three days later all you see is the sky and the water, and it appears you have moved nowhere. The truth is you have been journeying forward, but have been unable to find evidence of that growth, that direction.

So it is with your lives on a daily basis. You are busy. You encounter your friends, you encounter family, you encounter colleagues, you encounter challenges, you

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encounter concerns for health—your own health, the health of others. It seems from day to day that you have not moved forward. It seems as if the ship you are on is engaged in getting nowhere. But the truth is the ship journeys onward. The truth is your lives journey onward. The truth is the transitions that you experience carry the journey onward. No life stands still. All life has a direction, even when you are unable to recognize appropriate markers to measure your progress.

Consider your lives to be that ship in the middle of the ocean. A ship has a captain. You have your spirit center, your soul. You have your guides. You have the loving presence of God. You are not in the middle of an ocean going nowhere. Everything you do is a part of that journey. Every individual you meet, every activity you participate in, every challenge you confront—all are part of that journey. The seas may be filled with storms, but the ship moves ahead. Just as you have faith that the ship is moving forward, you can have equal faith that your lives are moving forward, that you are growing in your spiritual development. You are evolving.

All human beings go through this same process. There are ships that find their course with relative speed through the ocean, and there are other ships whose pacing is more deliberate, but they are all crossing. They're all transitioning from one shore to another. Every human being is engaged in this sacred journey. You are guided through the calm winds and violent seas, but the goal is always reached. The new land is filled with new opportunities, and your vision is thereby expanded.

Have faith that you are blessed and guided by the journey itself, not just when you reach another shore. God's steadying hand provides shelter but also the potential of absolute inner peace along the way. Look around you as you contemplate your place along your path. All that you do see contains the same sacredness as what you perceive to be the desired goal. Embrace the present, whatever it brings, knowing that you are guided, led by the sacred presence of God, and that you will reach the shores you seek according to the needs of your spirit and the outreachings of those who surround you.

You are blessed in your gift of seeing beyond the sky and water, beyond merely standing on a path. You are blessed in your ability to take on greater understanding of the depth of God's presence in each stone, each molecule of water, in the moisture in the clouds and the beauty of the clear sky. Be strengthened by your confidence in the goal and the appropriateness of your place in the Journey.

Amen