

The Young Man and the Old Man

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A metaphysical story  
set in a mythical Land  
during a mythical time  
before the Great Flood

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by vic smyth

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Introduction

If you are a first-time reader of an introductory sample, we strongly suggest that you scroll down to Chapter 3 where the story of the Young Man and the Old Man actually begins.

Why?

The first two chapters form an integral Prologue to the entire story and serve as a quiet overture, rich in meaning. However, as you progress, the story unfolds as a fast-paced and exciting narrative, starting from Chapter 3. All is magically tied together in Chapter 11, the Epilogue. As one reader put it:

“The book starts out kind of slow, but soon draws you into the story, and blows you away at the end! As soon as I finished it I started re-reading it from the beginning.”

~ Anonymous Reader, 2009

Chapter One

Before time and space was ONE. ONE was all there was. Nothing else existed other than ONE.

ONE caused the universe to be created. ONE did this because it was ONE's Will. The universe was a perfect reflection of ONE. The universe was one with ONE. ONE and ONE's perfect reflection, the universe, was all there was. Nothing else existed but ONE and ONE's perfect reflection, the universe. This happened because it was ONE's Will. Nothing else happened that was not ONE's Will.

ONE caused the universe to evolve. The universe evolved according to ONE's Will. Everything that evolved in the universe was a perfect reflection of ONE. The universe and all that evolved in the universe was one with ONE—All was one with ONE. ONE and

the universe and all that evolved in the universe was all there was. Nothing else existed other than ONE and ONE's perfect reflection: the universe and all that evolved in the universe. All that happened was ONE's Will. Nothing else happened that was not ONE's Will.

ONE guided and provided for the universe and all that evolved in the universe. ONE guided and provided according to ONE's Will. The Way ONE guided and provided for the universe and all that evolved in the universe was the only Way there was. The Way ONE guided and provided for the universe and all that evolved in the universe was in Perfect Harmony. No other Way existed to guide and provide except ONE's Way. This happened because it was ONE's Will. Nothing else happened that was not ONE's Will.

Chapter Two

One of the creations that evolved from the universe was a Man and a Woman. One day Man said to Woman, “I wonder if there is something other than ONE?”

Woman answered, “Only ONE exists, nothing else exists other than ONE.”

The next day, however, Man still believed that something other than ONE could exist. So he asked Woman to go with him to find something other than ONE. Woman answered, “If we separate ourselves from ONE, who will provide for us, for all provision is one with ONE?”

Man said, “I will provide.”

Woman said, “What shall we do, where shall we go, for ONE always guided us?”

Man said, “I shall guide us.”

So Man and Woman separated themselves from ONE and looked for something other than ONE. Soon, Man and Woman experienced something unknown—hunger. Man could not find food for himself and Woman. Woman said, “When our desire was to remain one with ONE, we were one with All, since all was one with ONE. Now we have desired something other than ONE and we have this unknown feeling. This unknown feeling is not one with ONE.”

Man said, “The things that are one with ONE are Good, the things that are not one with ONE are bad.”

Woman answered, “Because we separated ourselves from ONE, we separated ourselves from all the Good things that are one with ONE. We may never have anything Good again. We may never be guided by ONE again.”

Then Man and Woman experienced another unknown thing—fear. Man said, “You are right, ONE will never guide us or provide for us again. We will have to wander to somewhere that is always unknown with this bad feeling.”

As it became later in the day, Man and Woman experienced more hunger and more fear of the unknown that lay ahead of them. Woman said, “Do you think we could call to ONE to ask for some provision and some guidance?”

Man answered, “ONE may not hear us because we have walked away from ONE. But we can try.”

So they called out together, “ONE, we do not know if ONE can hear us. If ONE can, we need some provision and some guidance.”

When nothing happened after a short period of time, Man said, “ONE is angry with us and has punished us with bad things and

with things unknown to us. We may never be one with ONE again. ONE may never guide us or provide for us again.”

Still, ONE had compassion for Man and Woman. So ONE placed some food in a cave that was just ahead of Man and Woman. When Man came to the cave, he found the food and exclaimed, “I have found some food!”

Woman said, “There is some Good here. ONE can hear us!”

But Man replied, “ONE did not guide us here. We found the food ourselves.”

As Man and Woman ate, it became dark. Woman said, “What will happen when it becomes night?”

Man answered, “It is unknown. Do you suppose that ONE will provide bad things for us to punish us?”

Woman said, “It is unknown.”

So Man and Woman spent the night in the cave and were afraid.

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The next morning, Man and Woman awoke and were hungry again. They started searching for food. Woman said, “Maybe it *was* ONE who provided the food yesterday. Maybe we should call to ONE and ask for more.”

So they both called out, “ONE, if ONE can hear us, can ONE provide some more food for us?”

Again, ONE had compassion on Man and Woman. So ONE placed some food ahead of Man and Woman where they would be sure to find it. As Man approached the food he exclaimed, “Look! I have found more food. We do not need ONE. I can provide for us and guide us!”

Woman cautioned, “If this food did not come from ONE, maybe it is not Good. For Good only comes from ONE.”

But Man and Woman were both hungry and ate the food. Man said, “We shall not eat all the food, but save some for later. We will leave it here where we can find it later.”

Man and Woman wandered about until the afternoon. Then they returned to eat some more food. But when they came back to the place where the food was, they found that the food had spoiled.

Woman said, “This food is bad because it did not come from ONE. We have wandered in a bad land. In this bad Land what looks Good turns bad and spoils and rots.”

So Man and Woman left in search of food. Shortly, they came upon a creature that looked like it was sleeping. Man said, “Maybe the creature can tell us where to find food.”

As they approached, they found that the creature, too, was spoiled and without life. The Woman said, “This creature is bad, for it also spoils and rots.”

Man stood motionless, as if he also was without life. Then he said, “We also are bad. We also shall spoil and rot.”

Woman said, “ONE was Good. ONE’s universe was a perfect reflection of ONE, there was Perfect Harmony, nothing ever spoiled, we never lacked provision, we always had guidance. But now, since we walked away from ONE, ONE has punished us by leading us into a bad Land where everything spoils and rots. Everything was Good for us when we let ONE guide us. Now look at what we have!!”

So Man and Woman continued to live in lack and fear, worrying about each moment that lies ahead. Still, ONE had compassion on them despite their beliefs.

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Man and Woman had children. When the children were older they asked about life. Man and Woman taught their children: “In the beginning we lived in a Good Land created by ONE. There was Perfect Harmony. All was one with ONE. We were one with All. ONE provided for us and guided us. But we thought that there was something other than ONE. We separated ourselves from ONE, looking for something other than ONE. ONE punished us by sending us into this bad Land. Here we must provide for ourselves and are in lack of provision very often. There is no more guidance from ONE. We live in fear of the unknown that lies ahead. Everything spoils and rots in this bad Land. We do not know if ONE can hear us. And we cannot find a way back to the Good Land of ONE.”

Still, ONE had compassion on Man and Woman and their offspring, placing provision where they would be sure to find it, and guiding them when necessary. However, Man and Woman did not know that ONE still guided and provided for them.

One day, after being weak and feeling bad for many days, Man did not wake from his sleep. Soon Man's body spoiled. Woman said, "It is just like with everything else in this bad Land, it all spoils and rots."

Woman and her offspring were gripped with fear. "What happened to Man? Where did Man's life go?" the children asked.

Woman answered, "It is unknown."

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Chapter Three

The Young Man slammed the book shut and slid it across the table sending it onto the floor tumbling against the wall.

What sort of ONE is this? How can ONE punish all people because of First Man and First Woman's mistake? How can ONE cause or even allow such suffering? Young Man thought to himself.

Gulping the wine that remained in his cup, Young Man looked upward and shouted out loud, “Why!?”

Placing the cup on the table, Young Man walked over to the window overlooking the market street.

Look at them, he thought. The poor suffering vermin; dirty, hungry, twisted and diseased. The sellers always quick to cheat; the buyers bitter over

the little amount of goods that their wages can buy. There is one pleading with the seller, the seller justifying the high cost of his goods.

A shudder ran through Young Man, a feeling of disgust. The scene outside the window was repulsive.

“Why?” muttered the Young Man.

Just as Young Man was turning away, a voice from the street heard above the others, cried, “Catch him!”

Young Man turned towards the window only half interested in the commotion. He could see what seemed like a small bundle of rags scurrying through the crowded, narrow street, a seller chasing after it. In moments two men grabbed this small bundle of rags—a kicking, screaming boy, hands clenched around a piece of bread. The seller ran up to the men holding the dirty ragged little boy, “Let go of that bread!” The man

holding the boy squeezed him till he cried out in pain.

Then an Old Man with a heavy, once-powerful frame, slightly hunched over, with a balding white head, and dressed in an old worn coat, put his hand around the seller's arm, turning him away from the boy. With that, the man holding the boy loosened his hold a little and the boy quieted down. Young Man could not make out all the words. The seller seemed to be bickering with the Old Man, pointing to the piece of bread clenched in the little boy's hands. "But the bread is ruined. I can't sell it now," shouted the Seller, gesturing with his arms towards the mangled piece of bread.

The Old Man, very calm and slow to move, reached inside his coat and handed something to the Seller. Young Man could tell that it was money by the way the Seller counted it in his hand. The Seller looked at

the Old Man in disgust and puzzlement and walked away.

Another very young man came up to the little boy. The man holding the boy let go of him as the Very Young Man grabbed the boy by the hair shouting, “What did you do?” Young Man could tell that the Very Young Man was related to the boy somehow. The man that was holding the boy seemed to explain to the Very Young Man what happened, gesturing towards the Old Man. The Very Young Man turned to the Old Man and started firing questions at him. The Old Man very calmly replied with a few words. The Very Young Man, with his free hand, shoved against the Old Man’s heavy frame, turning the Old Man slightly to one side, as well as knocking himself off balance. “Leave us alone you old fool! I can take care of my own,” shouted the Very Young Man, almost trembling from rage and shame.

The Old Man slowly lowered his eyes from the Very Young Man towards the ground a few steps ahead of him with a somewhat blank and sad expression. The Old Man slowly turned his heavy frame and started down the street. The Young Man watched the Old Man walk through the gaping crowd, seemingly oblivious to their eyes upon him.

By now the last cup of wine started taking effect. *What an old fool. Why did he pay for the bread that the little thief had stolen?* thought Young Man. Then the Young Man rushed to the other end of the house. There outside the window he could see the Old Man walking slowly, methodically towards the city gate. Young Man was curious who this Old Man was. *He must have been related. Why else would he give something of his own to a stranger, especially that little thief?* thought Young Man.

Young Man had an urge to follow the Old Man. *But why?* thought Young Man. *What is the sense of following that old vermin?*

But his curiosity, incited by the wine, got the better of him. Young Man got his coat and ran down the stairs and out the door. He walked briskly down the street towards the city gate, careful not to brush up against any of the vermin in the streets who, Young Man was certain, would be carrying some sort of disease about them. When Young Man reached the city gate, he could see the Old Man walking a short distance ahead of him on the secondary road. Young Man followed at this interval until they were a distance away from the main traffic so that no one would see him talking to the Old Man.

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When they were far enough away from the city, Young Man ran to catch up with the Old Man. “Hey, Old Man, stop!”

The Old Man did not stop. But Young Man could tell that the Old Man had heard him because there was a momentary pause in the Old Man's methodical walk when Young Man called out to him.

Young Man caught up to the Old Man and walked alongside him. The Old Man looked up at the Young Man, still walking at the same pace, then turned his head back towards the ground a few steps ahead of him. Young Man did not know what to say. It was as if he realized that it was ridiculous for him to have followed the Old Man so far.

“Why did you pay for the bread that the little thief had stolen?” This came from the Young Man's mouth unexpectedly, almost as if it was not Young Man who had spoken it.

The Old Man answered, “The boy's father already repaid me for my good act. Do you also wish to reward me bad for my good?”

“No,” said the Young Man nervously.

“Or do you wish for me to also buy you some bread?” The Old Man stopped, looked at the Young Man, then continued walking, looking at the ground.

The Young Man replied, “I have much money, I have everything I need. I certainly don't need food from you. Can't you see by the way that I'm dressed? I could feed you and twenty more like you if I were a fool!”

“A poor person can dress like a great ruler and a great ruler can dress like a poor person.” The Old Man stopped again to look up at the Young Man. “But strip a person of their dress and you will know them by their eyes. A dress can disguise a person, the eyes will always reveal them.” The Old Man resumed walking.

“You can tell who I am by looking at my eyes? Then who am I? Where do I live? What is my business?” asked the Young Man, somewhat annoyed. The Old Man did not

answer. “Well?!” said the Young Man, now a little anger in his voice.

A few moments later the Old Man answered, “You say you have everything you need, Young Man, yet your eyes show that you are troubled and cannot rest. Your dress shows that you are indeed well-to-do, but your eyes reveal that you are as poor as the boy who stole the bread.” The Old Man paused to look at the Young Man’s face, which was curious and puzzled. “Yes,” the Old Man continued as he resumed walking, “I am the one who should feed you.”

“You old fool, I have the finest foods at my house, and you say you should feed me?” The Young Man was angry now.

The Old Man replied, “When I feed you, you shall hunger no more for your food. But you shall hunger for my food. Your own food shall not satisfy you, only in my food shall you find satisfaction. You feed yourself day

after day with more than a sufficient amount of food; it shows in your plump face. If you feed yourself sufficiently with my food, it will show in your eyes.” The Old Man stopped again to look at the Young Man. “Let me feed you, Young Man, so that you may have a nourished look, not only in your face, but also in your eyes.”

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“Wait,” said the Young Man looking around, “Where have you led me to? I am not familiar with this road. I am lost. Take me back to the road to my house.”

“I cannot take you back, Young Man. I can only give you directions. I can draw a map, but you must make the journey back home on your own.” The Old Man paused again to look at the Young Man’s face. Young Man’s face was confused. The Old Man smiled and placed his hand around the Young Man’s arm. The Young Man looked at the Old Man’s

hand, large and powerful, showing many years of hard work. Then Young Man looked at the Old Man's smiling face. Young Man thought to himself, *There was something about the Old Man's eyes that ...*

“Come,” the Old Man interrupted Young Man's thought, “I live a very short distance down this road. I can draw you a map to direct you back to the main road.”

The Old Man let go of Young Man's arm and walked down a road that was little-used. Soon they came to an old wood shack once used by miners.

“You live here?” said the Young Man as the Old Man had to lift the door open because the hinges were spoiled.

“I shall draw you a map. We made two turns that you did not notice. Here, the arrows will direct you. You must go now. I shall walk with you to the road.”

They walked back to the road in silence. “Goodbye, Young Man,” said the Old Man smiling. Young Man stared a few moments at the Old Man’s smiling face, then turned to walk down the road, pondering what the Old Man had said. He turned around and saw the Old Man standing there, watching the Young Man like a mother watches her child. When the road turned, the Young Man could see the Old Man no more.

What was that old fool talking about? thought the Young Man. *What sort of food could he have that was better than my food? What was he talking about my eyes being poor?* Then Young Man thought about the Old Man’s eyes. *There was something different. They were not as repulsive looking as most people’s eyes. There was something in the Old Man’s eyes. What was it? What is this food that nourishes the eyes?*

It then dawned on the Young Man that the Old Man never did answer him why he had paid for the boy's bread. There was something about the Old Man that was indeed curious and Young Man decided to find out what it was. "I will go to my house and eat and return to the Old Man's shack using the map he gave me. We will investigate this special eye food of the Old Man's," the Young Man thought out loud. As the Young Man approached the city gate, more and more questions came into his head. Young Man decided to eat and return to the Old Man as quickly as he could.

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Chapter Four

“Where were you, Young Man? I saw you come in through the city gate,” said Young Woman as Young Man sat down to eat.

“There was a field for sale at a low price, so I went out to inspect it. I will return there after I eat to inspect it further,” lied Young Man.

Somehow, Young Man knew that it was a ridiculous waste of what could be a productive day to go back to the Old Man. Yet he could not rest until he found out what this Old Man was talking about. So Young Man finished eating and set off to the Old Man’s shack with the aid of the map.

As Young Man turned down the little-used road that led to the Old Man’s shack, he could see the Old Man doing some chore. The Old Man was standing over an old, large pot that

was over a fire. *Was he cooking the eye food?* thought Young Man. Young Man made noise as he approached so as not to startle the Old Man. However, it seemed that the Old Man did not hear him coming. As Young Man approached, he could hear the Old Man humming. It wasn't a work chant, but a slow, somewhat somber melody that reminded Young Man of Old Man's slow, methodical walk.

“Hello!” called out Young Man as he was not too many paces away from the Old Man.

“Yes, hello!” the Old Man replied, not at all startled.

The Old Man then turned around to the Young Man. The Old Man's face was smiling, his eyes beaming. Young Man could see that the Old Man was pleased to see him, but there was no surprise on the Old Man's face. Then the Old Man's face changed from smiling to a look of concern.

“Did you forget something?” Old Man asked as he turned his head first here, then there, as if he were looking for something that the Young Man might have left behind.

“No,” said the Young Man, “I just ... came back.” The Young Man could not find words. *Why did he come back?* he thought to himself. Again this feeling of doing something ridiculous came over him.

“I do not wish to be rude, Young Man, but I must finish my chore. If you could wait, I will be finished in a short time and then we will see what I can do for you.”

The Old Man resumed humming as he resumed working.

“What are you doing?” asked Young Man.

“I am washing yesterday’s soil from yesterday’s clothes to prepare them for tomorrow’s labors.”

As Young Man sat down on an old spoiled machine of some sort, he realized that the

Old Man, though dressed in a worn out coat, did not have that repulsive odor about him that many of the other vermin had.

“There,” said the Old Man. He pulled out a dress from the pot with a stick and hung it over a pole that was stuck in the ground. The Old Man examined a tear in the knee of the dress. “Seems like I’ve spent the great majority of my life mending what seemed to be spoiled,” said the Old Man as he chuckled to himself.

As the Old Man put out the fire under the pot, the Young Man thought to himself, *The old fool. Sees that his dress is spoiled and needs mending and, instead of becoming bitter, he chuckles and hums to himself.* A trace of a smile broke the corner of Young Man’s mouth. *Curious old fellow,* he thought.

“Very well,” said the Old Man to himself as he brushed his hands together, signifying

that he was through with his chore. “Now, why are we here Young Man?”

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“My curiosity took me here. I am very curious to know why you, an old vermin, would pay for the little thief’s bread? Then again, I came to investigate this eye food that you were talking about.”

“Ah, yes. The eye food,” the Old Man looked towards the ground and chuckled as he said this. Instantly the chuckle disappeared. The Old Man turned to the Young Man with a serious expression, “Many people saw me pay for the poor boy’s food, however you are the only one curious enough to seek me out and ask me about it. Why?”

The Young Man stared through the Old Man with a blank expression. As his eyes focused back on the Old Man’s face, he answered in a somewhat annoyed tone, “I don't know why. I was just curious.”

“It does not matter,” answered the Old Man as his face returned to smiling and his eyes beaming again. “You are here and that is all.”

“Must you smile all the time? What do you have to smile about?” Young Man said as he looked about in disgust. “Are you drunk?”

“Drunk!?” the Old Man let out a laugh. “Drunk, no. But I have wine,” the Old Man raised one finger to the air as if he was gesturing to the Young Man to wait. “Maybe I shall offer you some of my wine later.”

“I’ve had my fill of wine for the day.” When the Old Man mentioned the wine, Young Man’s head began to hurt as the wine he drank in the morning began to leave its unpleasant aftereffects.

“Drink my wine, Young Man, and you shall become sober.”

“There *is* something wrong with you,” said Young Man.

“Ha!” chuckled the Old Man, “Only in *your* eyes Young Man, only in *your* eyes.”

There was a pause.

“I'm sorry that my joy causes you sadness, Young Man,” the Old Man continued. “I cannot help it that I am always joyous.”

“What do you have to be joyous about?” The Young Man looked around in disgust again.

“My belly is full. There is even provision left over for tomorrow. My home is cozy and warm.” The Old Man paused to see the expression on the Young Man's face. As if reading the Young Man's mind, the Old Man continued, “Remember, Young Man,” the Old Man's eyebrows raised high, finger pointing towards the air again, “the smaller the house, the less there is that can seem spoiled and be in need of mending.”

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The Old Man sat down. “Tell me, are you a seller that was in the market street where you saw me?”

“No. I have a business, but I hire vermin to do my work for me,” boasted Young Man. “I was up in the window of my house that overlooks the market street.”

“What was your purpose in looking out the window, Young Man?” said Old Man as he adjusted his seat.

“There was no purpose, I was just looking out the window.”

“A busy man such as you has time to be gazing out the window?”

“I have much free time on my hands. The vermin I hire do my work for me. All I have to do is check up on them every once in a while.” The Young Man paused. “As a matter of fact, I happened to be reading a book this morning.” Young Man said this to show the Old Man that he was schooled.

“Oh? What sort of book, Young Man?”

“Just a book.” Young Man did not want the Old Man to think that he was some kind of religious fanatic reading the Holy Book on a day that was not a Holy Day.

“A book about your business, no doubt?”

“Actually, it was the Holy Book of ONE, if you must know.” Young Man said this to show the Old Man that he observed the Religious Obligations.

“It must be a Holy Day,” the Old Man said with a very reverent expression on his face.

“Yes, didn’t you know?”

“Strange that the shops were open.”

The Young Man was flustered. *How could he let this old fool trip him up in his lie like that?* the Young Man thought. “Actually, I meant to say that it was the day before the Holy Day. I had some free time so I thought that I would do my Obligated Reading today since I will be busy tomorrow.”

“Then you are a religious-observing man.” The Old Man’s face had a reverent expression again.

“No, actually,” Young Man said in defense. “I was raised in the Religious Obligations, but stopped practicing the obligations when I left my parents. Though I still observe the Holy Days,” added the Young Man.

“Which Temple do you belong to?” asked the Old Man.

“I don't belong to any Temple any longer. I was raised observing the Obligation of the Most Popular Temple of ONE, the largest and most glorious in the Land, you know. Even an old fool like you must have seen it.” Young Man said this in a self-righteous tone.

“Ah, yes, I am quite familiar with it.”

“Familiar with it? They would not even let a vermin like you near it. This Temple is only for the well-to-do,” boasted the Young Man.

The Old Man just smiled. “Nevertheless, tell me, what were you reading in the Holy Book of ONE, Young Man?”

“What is the difference? What would you know about it?”

“A long time ago, I too went to a Temple where they used to read the Holy Book of ONE to us. But the stories are dim in my mind,” the Old Man said as he squinted.

“I was reading the very beginning about the First Man and First Woman.”

“Tell me the story, Young Man. I am curious to see if I still remember it.”

“Well, First Man and First Woman left ONE, so ONE punished them by sending them out of the Good Land. Because of First Man and First Woman’s mistakes, we are all punished. ONE has punished us all with bitterness and suffering.”

“You, who have everything you need, suffer?” the Old Man asked in feigned amazement.

“Well ... I don't suffer.”

“You do not look joyous.”

“What has anyone to be joyous about?” snapped Young Man.

The Old Man looked at the Young Man with compassion. “Yes, the story is the same as I remember it to be,” continued the Old Man, “a different version from the one read to me, but ... ”

“Each Temple has its own version, you know.” The Young Man, again, wanted to show that he knew something about these matters.

“The versions are different, the stories are the same. I realized this a long time ago. You see, Young Man, you scoffed at me when I said that I was familiar with your Temple. Many years ago I was the Mender of

Temples.” The Old Man smiled. “You see, I know your Temple better than you do. I know all the Temples. For I mended them all from top to bottom and bottom to top—whatever seemed spoiled and needed mending. As I mended, I heard many versions of the many stories, until all the versions blurred into one in my mind.”

Young Man remembered that the Old Man had said to himself that he spent most of his life mending what was spoiled. “What do you do to provide for yourself now?”

“Hmmm,” the Old Man thought, looking off in the distance. He then smiled and said to the Young Man, “I still do mending of sorts, but not Temples built with stone. I mend other things now.”

The Old Man got up abruptly. “I do not wish to be rude, Young Man, but I have an errand to attend to. I will walk you to the road.”

The Old Man waited for the Young Man to follow him. When the Young Man hesitated in getting up, the Old Man said, “Or you may wait for me here if you wish. I shall not be gone very long.” Then, as if the Old Man could sense that the Young Man did not want to leave, the Old Man continued, “Please. My home is your home.” The Old Man spread his arm out towards the shack.

The Young Man smiled, “Thank you for letting me stay at your mansion,” he said, half in sarcasm, half in humor.

With that, the Old Man smiled even more broadly, turned, and left down the little-used road.

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Chapter Five

The Young Man could tell that wherever the Old Man was going, he wanted to go there alone. The Young Man thought that the Old Man was going to mend something for someone. He was curious as to how the Old Man provided for himself. Young Man thought that if the Old Man was, indeed, good at mending, that he would hire him for his own mending needs. So the Young Man set off to follow the Old Man.

Following the Old Man would not be difficult. If the Old Man could not hear the Young Man approaching when he was washing his clothes, certainly he would not hear him now. If the Old Man did hear him, he would be so slow to turn around that the Young Man could easily hide behind a bush.

After going some distance, the Old Man turned down a narrow path through the forest. Here it would be more difficult for the Young Man to follow. But he did not have to follow long. Soon there was a clearing up ahead. The Old Man sat down on a fallen tree and seemed to close his eyes. Young Man hid behind some bushes where he could sit more comfortably to await what would happen.

What could the Old Man mend here? the Young Man thought. *Curious that he doesn't have any mending instruments with him.*

Young Man, waiting for a long time, started to become impatient. The Old Man seemed to have fallen asleep.

Then he heard the voice of a little girl. Soon he could hear people rustling through the path towards the clearing. Young Man swung around to another bush where he would not be visible to the Old Man or

anyone coming down the path. On the path, a man passed by carrying a little girl, followed by a woman. Young Man assumed that they were the little girl's parents. As they entered the clearing, Young Man could see that the little girl had the twisting disease in her legs. This is a common disease that crippled one's legs so that the person could not walk.

The Old Man slowly lifted his head. He arose, took the child out of the father's arms, and sat her on the fallen tree. The Old Man took the mother and father by the arms and led them to the edge of the clearing. There he spoke a few words to them. He then went over to the little girl. Young Man did not notice earlier, but the woman was wiping her eyes as if she was crying. The man put his arms around the woman, embracing her, to comfort her.

The Old Man came up to the little girl and squatted down before her. Young Man could

see that the Old Man had that same compassionate smile on his face. Old Man shifted his one knee to the ground to better balance himself, and took the little girl's hand in his. Then he closed his eyes as he did when he was sitting on the fallen tree.

For many moments all was completely quiet. There was no sound of rustling leaves, no creatures chirping; all the Young Man could hear was the pounding of his heart and the blood rushing through his temples.

Then, in what seemed like an immeasurable amount of time, almost, it seemed to Young Man, as if time had stopped, the Old Man rose up pulling the little girl to her feet and then letting go of her hands.

“Mama!” the Little Girl shrieked. The man and woman both turned towards the Little Girl, their faces frozen in amazement. The

Little Girl took two shaky steps towards her mother and father.

“Little Girl,” cried the mother. The mother ran up to the Little Girl, threw her arms around her and started sobbing. The father, by now also crying, threw his arms around the both of them. The three held on to each other and cried. The Old Man seemed to be wiping tears from his eyes. Young Man noticed that his own chin trembled slightly.

After a few moments, the father got up and extended his hand to the Old Man. The Old Man gave the father a hug. The mother came up to the Old Man and clutched her hands in front of her, sobbing so much that she could not talk. The Old Man gave her a hug. Then the Old Man turned to the Little Girl who took a few steps towards him. Old Man bent over and picked her up high in the air before giving her a hug. He let her down and then walked the three to the path.

As they walked closer to where the Young Man was hiding, he could hear the father telling the Old Man that he was poor, but would someday, somehow, pay the Old Man.

The Old Man replied, “Payment is not important now. Someday, when you are able, the opportunity will arise and you will come across someone who is less fortunate than you are. Help that person in any small way you can. By helping someone in need, you will be making payment to me.”

The Mother, still sobbing, said, “Thank you for your glorious work.”

“It is not my work,” the Old Man said, “but the work of ONE who sent me. I am just an instrument in ONE’s hands. Go to your Temple and praise ONE, and give the glory to ONE. But first, stop along the way and give the Little Girl something to eat.”

The three walked down the narrow path until they could not be seen. The Old Man

walked back to the fallen tree and sat down as he did before, with his eyes closed. The Young Man decided to wait a few minutes, until he was sure the people were on their way. Then he would go back to the Old Man's shack.

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Just then the Old Man called out, "Young Man!"

Fear shot through the Young Man's body! *How could the Old Man have spotted me? He must be calling for the Little Girl's father,* he thought.

"Young Man!" The Old Man rose and turned around slowly. "Come out where I can see you."

The Young Man decided to obstinately remain where he was. If the Old Man were to go back to the shack, the Young Man would explain the following day that he had gotten tired of waiting at the Old Man's shack and went back to his own house.

The Old Man approached the edge of the clearing near the path that led back to the road. Old Man seemed to be searching the bushes. Young Man decided to crawl from one bush to another to stay ahead of the Old Man should he continue to search through all the bushes around the clearing. The Old Man continued searching, and the Young Man continued crawling from bush to bush. In not too long a time, Young Man's legs got tired from crouching and crawling. He lost his balance and put his hand down on a warm, furry ball. The furry ball shrieked and scurried one way, and the Young Man shrieked and fell backwards the other way.

Young Man could hear the Old Man laughing as he approached. The Old Man came up to the Young Man, finally stopped laughing and said, "Take my example, Young Man, seek diligently and you shall find what you are looking for. It may even find you!"

The Old Man resumed laughing, “I knew your curiosity would not let you rest. Come. We must be getting back.”

The Old Man turned around and started heading towards the path back to the road, chuckling as he walked. The Young Man got up and followed, ashamed to be, once again, outsmarted by an Old Man.

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Chapter Six

“How did you do that?” said Young Man as they were walking back to the Old Man’s shack.

“How did I do what, Young Man?”

“That little girl’s legs were twisted and you made them straight. How did you do it?”

“What does it matter to you, Young Man?”

The wheels in Young Man’s head started turning. “That man could not even pay you. I know many wealthy people who have children with the twisting disease. They would pay you handsomely. Of course, if I bring them to you I would expect a fee.”

“Do you think, Young Man, that they would listen to you? Do you think that they would believe you? What would you tell them, Young Man, to bring their child to the forest to an old man who can straighten twisted legs

through some sort of magic? Go and tell them, Young Man. See how many you can bring to me. Not one, I assure you. They will all laugh at you and call you a fool.”

“Then why did *these* people come here?”

“They knew that their child could be mended through me. They believed in their hearts that through me their child would walk—their minds doubted, but their hearts believed. And it was done to their little girl as their hearts believed it would.”

“What do you mean that they knew with their hearts? Knowledge comes from the mind. The heart pumps blood. I know this from my schooling.”

“Maybe someday I will be able to explain it to you, Young Man.”

“Explain now! How did these people come to believe, as you put it, that you could mend their little girl?”

“Somehow, someone convinced them, Young Man. I don't know how they came to believe. All I know is that one day they came to my home and asked me to mend their little girl. I drew a map of the clearing and told them to meet me there on this day. They came seeking me, I did not seek them.”

“So if I could convince my friends of your mending ability so that they would believe, and send them here, you could mend them?”

“Young Man, I understand that your intentions are good. I do not mean to be harsh with you or rude to you. You are very welcome to tell your friends about my mending ability. If they come here with belief in their heart, then I will appoint a time in the clearing when they can meet me and I will mend their various discords. However, do not be too surprised if you fail. I assure you not one will come with a belief in their heart.”

“Can you teach others to mend twisted limbs?”

“Others?”

“Could I learn to ... Wait! The special food for the eyes. Is this the magic that gives you the ability to ... Let me have some of this food, I will pay you any amount for it!”

“The food for the nourishment of the eyes I have plenty of, Young Man. I will be happy to give you some. But the ability to mend only comes from drinking my wine.”

“Yes. I remember. The wine that makes you sober. Give me some of this wine. I would give you up to half my wealth for a cup!”

“This food and wine is very much different from what you are used to, Young Man. The food, at first, is very hard to digest. And the wine, at first, is very bitter and very hard to swallow. Most spit the wine out while

it is on their tongue and never get any benefit from it.”

“How do *you* drink it?”

“By rejecting all other foods and wines and eating only this special food and drinking only this special wine, I have acquired a taste for it. Now I can eat or drink nothing else but this one food and this one wine. Though at first, the bitterness and indigestibility of the new food and wine left me to feel that I would surely die. Can you eat the same food I eat, Young Man? Can you drink the same wine I drink, Young Man?”

“I have eaten foods and drank wines from all over the Land. I am sure that I could eat this food and drink this wine. I have had bitter medicines that have turned my stomach inside out. I am sure that I could drink this wine. If it's money that you want, I could ... ”

“Be silent, Young Man! All you do by opening your mouth is to show me more and more the extent of your ignorance!”

The Young Man was taken aback.

“I am sorry, Young Man. I do not mean to be harsh. The secret to attaining any knowledge is silence. Do you know what an alligator is, Young Man?”

“Yes, I studied about them in school.”

“Have you ever come upon an alligator, Young Man?”

“No.”

“When an alligator opens its mouth, it reveals many sharp teeth. This sight would frighten most people to death. However, do not be afraid of the alligator when you see its mouth open. For when the alligator’s mouth is open, its eyes are forced closed. Therefore, Young Man, be afraid of the alligator only when its mouth is closed.”

“But an alligator does not lie in wait with its mouth open, Old Man. The alligator keeps its mouth closed until its prey is within striking distance. Then the alligator opens and closes its mouth very quickly to swallow its prey.”

“Be then like the wise alligator, Young Man. Keep your mouth closed so that your eyes may remain open at all times. For a person is like an alligator: when they open their mouth, they can neither see nor hear. For their mind is too busy making the tongue move to focus on what they see or hear.”

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“Explain more to me, Old Man.”

“What do you wish explained?”

“What do you mean about believing in your heart?”

“All knowledge comes from two places within you, the mind and the heart.”

“But that is not true, Old Man. The heart pumps blood throughout the body.”

“How do you know this, Young Man?”

“Because I learned this in my schooling. The Keepers of Wisdom have cut open dead bodies to investigate. They have deduced that the mind is where all thought comes from. The heart, they have found, pumps blood throughout the body.”

“You are certain of this, Young Man?”

“Of course. I know what I know. I was schooled by the Keepers of Wisdom since I was a small boy. And I continued my schooling by reading the most current books on all areas of life.”

“These Keepers of Wisdom, have they ever straightened out twisted limbs, Young Man?”

“Well ... No ... On occasion they have, but they always twist back.”

“Did you see with your own eyes the mending that came through me, Young Man?”

“Yes.”

“Then who tells the truth about the heart, the Keepers of Wisdom, or me?”

“Yes, but that’s different ... ”

“Let me ask you a question, Young Man. Suppose you have a cup of wine and you take a swallow and find that it is spoiled. You put the spoiled bottle of wine on the side and get another bottle that you believe to be good. Do you pour the new wine into the cup with the old?”

“Of course not.”

“Why not?”

“Simple. If you put the new wine in with the old, spoiled wine, you end up spoiling the new wine also. You must first spill the old, spoiled wine out, clean the cup thoroughly inside and out, then pour the new wine in.”

“So you must also do with your knowledge, Young Man. You must take all your old knowledge and spill it out from your mind. Wash your mind thoroughly, inside and out. Then you can fill your mind with the new knowledge so that it won’t mingle with the old. This is the first step you must take before you can eat my special food and be able to drink my special wine.”

“How do I unlearn all my years of schooling?”

“How does one build a great Temple, Young Man? By laying the first stone of the foundation. Are you ready to lay the first stone of the foundation, Young Man?”

“Can you help me?”

“That is why I am here, Young Man, that is why I am here,” the Old Man said as he lifted the door open to his shack.

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Chapter Seven

“In building our Temple, Young Man, we said that we must lay the first stone of the foundation. However, where should the first stone be placed when the Temple is round? There is no beginning to a circle. We may place the first stone at any point in the circle, working our way around until the foundation is complete. So it is with the Answer to your question. We choose any point in the circle as our starting point and work our way around until the circle is complete. So at first, Young Man, what I tell you may not be easily understood. Be patient, wait until we have completed the circle. Only then will all the stones appear as a foundation and not a pile of stones. Do you understand, Young Man?”

“I think ... ”

“In any case, be patient, Young Man. It is as if you were in a foreign land wishing to return back home. You go to the area where all the caravans depart, each to its own destination. You search desperately, running from caravan to caravan seeking the one to return you back home. When you find the correct caravan, you board it and rest, knowing that you are on your way home, confident that the caravan driver knows the route. Have you boarded the correct caravan, Young Man?”

“I, I think so ... ”

“I have pointed out the correct caravan to take you back home. Do you trust my judgment, Young Man?”

“I have a feeling that ... ”

“A warning, Young Man! The road back home may be long and arduous. Are you sure that you are fit for the journey?”

“Uh ... Yes, I ... ”

“Very well, Young Man. Now that we know our destination, let us start our journey. Now that we know what we are building, let us lay the first stone of the foundation.”

Young Man was bewildered. Somehow he knew that once he would take the first step on this ‘journey’, he would never turn back.

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“Please sit down, Young Man ... You were reading the story about the First Man and First Woman before you saw me in the street?”

“Yes.”

“You were not satisfied with the story, why?”

“Could you hear me shout from the street?”

“Your shout could be heard all the way up to the Good Land, Young Man.”

“What do you mean?”

“There has never been anyone in time with a curiosity such as yours who has read the Holy Book of ONE and has not asked the same question: Why does ONE allow discord to exist? To know the Answer to this question is to have a map to the gates of the Good Land.”

“Where can I find the Answer? Do you know the Answer? You must! I feel that you must know the Answer ... ”

“How do you know that I have the Answer?”

“You mended the little girl’s ... ”

The Old Man cut off the Young Man by putting his finger up, gesturing for the Young Man to wait. Old Man reached under the table and pulled out an old, ornately-covered but badly-worn book. The Old Man set the book before the Young Man.

“In this book you shall find the Answer.”

The Young Man flipped the cover open to the first page and immediately looked up at the Old Man and said, “This is the Holy Book of ONE. The version is nearly the same as mine.”

“Are you surprised that the Answer lies in the Holy Book of ONE, Young Man?”

“I have read the Holy Book of ONE probably two or three times in my life, Old Man. I have never found any explanations to satisfy my curiosity. I have found only contradictions and riddles, confusing me all the more. There are some stories in the Holy Book that are actually repulsive. Some Keepers of Wisdom say that the Holy Book is nothing but nonsense, containing no more truth than a child’s tale. Other Keepers of Wisdom, through the new study of Thought, have even said that ONE does not exist, and they have come up with some very conclusive evidence. I have heard and read about all this

for years. It gets me very confused, despondent at times. If ONE does exist, why doesn't ONE show ONE's Self plainly? If ONE doesn't exist, is our life nothing but a puff of smoke scattered by the wind every which way until it disappears? If ONE does exist, can't ONE hear us when we call to ONE? Can't ONE see the bitterness of life? How can ONE allow this to happen!?"

"I am very impressed, Young Man. You have brought with you many stones from the quarry. We shall fit and polish one stone at a time. Young Man, I will not leave you until I am sure that your Temple will be completed.

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"You read the Holy Book of ONE and do not understand, Young Man. I read the Holy Book and see the Answer as plainly as I see my hand. Why? Because you read and the words go through your eyes and are lodged in your mind where you test them, comparing

them with the rest of the knowledge in your mind. While I read and channel the words from my eyes first to my heart where I test the words. Once the words are tested in my heart, then I allow them to lodge themselves in my mind.

“You see, Young Man, the mind is like a large storage barn with five doors in it. The storage barn contains many, many storage bins. The five doors are the five ways that knowledge normally enters the storage barn. The five doors are the eyes with which you see, the ears with which you hear, the fingers with which you touch, the nose with which you smell, and the tongue with which you taste.

“Now, the knowledge that enters the storage barn is like gold, Young Man. As each person during their life tries to obtain as much gold as they can, so each person should also try to obtain as much knowledge as they

can. Now, gold is rarely found shining and pure as the ring on your finger. Gold, before it is purified, looks like a common rock. This, I'm sure you know, is called gold ore. Most people take what they assume to be gold ore and try to fill their storage barn with it. Sometimes they place common, worthless rock in their storage barn, mistaking it for gold ore. In any case, having their barn filled with gold ore, they never appreciate the real beauty of gold. And if many are deceived in placing common rock in their storage barn, to what profit shall it lead? For you can only take out what you put in.

“For many years, Young Man, all your life actually, you have been deceived, placing common rock in your storage barn along with only a little gold ore. But can you tell the gold ore from the common rock? What shall you do, Young Man? Remember the cup with the spoiled wine? So you must do with the

storage barn. Close the doors of the storage barn shut, empty the barn completely, clean it inside and out, and build a refining pot before its entrance. Then take all the gold ore and common rock and first put it in the refining pot which will separate the pure gold from the spent ore and common rock. Cast the spent ore and the common rock out and place only the pure, refined gold in your storage barn.

“And what is this refining pot, Young Man? The Heart. Not the heart that pumps blood, but the sixth door of perception. You can perceive knowledge through the eyes, ears, fingers, nose and tongue. But these five can be deceived into accepting common rock. But the sixth sense of perception cannot be deceived. The sixth sense of knowledge is felt from within, thus we say it comes from the Heart. Do you understand, Young Man? It is your Heart that knows what is Good from

what is bad. It is your Heart that knows what is true from what is false. Test every bit of knowledge that comes to you first in your Heart, and you shall never be deceived into accepting worthless common rock.

“Did you ever know something by intuition, Young Man? Did you ever have a ‘feeling’ about something? Did you ever do something that you justified in your mind as Good, but could not rest because you had a feeling that what you did was not really Good? These feelings come from the sixth avenue of knowledge, and this avenue is found within, Young Man. Actually, it is the original avenue of knowledge, and later, becomes the only source of knowledge.

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“You say that the Holy Book of ONE contains contradictions and stories that are repulsive? Look outside the window, Young Man. What do you see?”

“A tree.”

“Describe it.”

“Its branches are twisted and grotesque.”

“Would you call it beautiful, Young Man?”

“Not at all, it is rather ugly.”

“Come with me, Young Man.” The Old Man led the Young Man through the forest and up a hill a very short distance. Once at the top of the hill, they could see a meadow below them and a forest in the distance. “What do you see in the distance, Young Man?”

“A forest.”

“Would you call it beautiful or repulsive, Young Man?”

“It is very green and beautiful. But it is not made up of twisted and grotesque trees.”

“But look closely, Young Man, and see if you cannot find some of those grotesque trees. You see, a beautiful forest is composed of beautiful, rich, green trees, and trees that,

in our eyes, are not so beautiful. Inside the forest are many things that you could call repulsive. But taken as a whole, the forest is a creation of beauty.”

“The forest is the Holy Book of ONE, the stories are the trees?”

“See, Young Man. The riddle was not so hard to solve. The Holy Book of ONE contains many riddles. But isn’t all of life, to the common person, a riddle? As you understand one riddle, you shall understand them all. Soon, Young Man, all the riddles will unfold and make themselves plainly known to you. For they are riddles only to those who do not know the Answer. If the Answer were to be told plainly, the common person would not understand it anyway. So the Answer is put forth in riddles and, in this way, is passed on from one generation to another. The Answer to the riddle is explained to the

curious, while it is hidden from the common.”

“But if you know the Answer, why don't you explain it to the people?”

“Because the Answer, as you will find out, Young Man, is a strange and almost frightening thing. The common person would never accept it.”

“Why not? If it is explained to them, they will certainly understand it.”

“Come, Young Man, I shall let you see for yourself.”

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Chapter Eight

As the Old Man led the Young Man through the forest, he told him this story:

“I am taking you to see a strange sight, Young Man. Maybe you have heard about it. There is a poor farmer in the country here who has a son. One day, the son had some sort of accident and was asleep for many days. The son eventually woke up and regained his strength, but was never the same as he was before. People call him the Disillusioned Man.”

“Oh, yes! I have heard about him!”

“There he is, Young Man.”

There was the Disillusioned Man up in a tree. As the Old Man and the Young Man approached, the Disillusioned Man yelled, “Get up in the tree, fools! The flood waters

are coming. Get up in the tree and save yourselves from the Great Flood.”

Young Man asked Old Man, “What is he talking about?”

Old Man answered, “Ask him.”

Young Man asked Disillusioned Man, “What are you talking about?”

Disillusioned Man answered, “Can't you see the waters rising? They are above your knees now and still rising. Climb up in the tree, you fools, save yourselves!”

Young Man said to Old Man, “There are no waters here.”

“Tell him that,” Old Man replied.

Young Man told Disillusioned Man, “You are disillusioned, there are no waters here. Come down. The ground is dry.”

Disillusioned Man answered, “Aha! You are trying to tell me that the water that I see is not there? You can't fool me. You are the Bad One of the Great Flood. I know your tricks,

Bad One. ONE told me to climb up this tree to save myself from the Great Flood. Do you think that you can tell me otherwise? Do you think that you can trick me so that I, the last survivor of the Great Flood, will also be destroyed? Get thee behind me, Bad One, you too shall be destroyed by ONE.”

Old Man said to Young Man, “Convince him that you know the truth and that what he sees is an illusion, Young Man.”

Young Man replied to Old Man, “I think it would be pointless. He believes that his illusion is real. He even thinks that I am the Bad One of the Land of the Dead.”

“What do you think we should do?” Old Man asked.

“Can't you mend him?” Young Man replied.

“I can only mend if the person comes to me and asks. For they must have a belief in their hearts that I can mend them.”

Young Man turned to the Disillusioned Man and said, “This Old Man can mend you.”

Disillusioned Man answered, “Mend me? Of what? He is twice the Bad One you are then. Drown them, O Glorious ONE, those deceivers.”

Young Man turned to Old Man and said, “I think we better just leave him alone.”

“That is the truth, Young Man, that is the truth,” Old Man replied.

They started back to the Old Man’s shack.

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Young Man then asked, “Can you explain the prophecy of the Great Flood?”

“What do *you* know about it, Young Man?”

“In the Holy Book of ONE, the Great Prophet said that someday ONE would tire of all the bad in the Land and flood the entire Land to wash it of all the bad, destroying the Bad One and all the people except for one

man and one woman who ONE shall choose. From these two, humankind shall have a fresh start in a Land that is rid of all bad.”

“When is this supposed to happen, Young Man?”

“The Great Prophet said that it would happen in Her student’s generation. But it didn’t. The Keepers of the Temple interpret that to mean that a generation in ONE’s eyes is much longer than a generation as we know it. However, the Keepers of the Temple say that they are certain that all the signs point to the Great Flood happening soon, maybe in this generation.”

“The Keepers of the Temple have been foretelling the Great Flood since my father’s father was a boy, Young Man. I am certain that they have been foretelling the Great Flood every season since the Great Prophet left. But I know, Young Man, the Great Flood will indeed happen in your lifetime.”

“It will?! Will it happen soon or will it happen when I am older? Will you be here also during the Great Flood?”

“The Great Flood has already occurred in my lifetime, Young Man.”

“What? When? Not in this Land! I have never heard ... ”

“Young Man, remember the alligator ... The Great Prophet told Her students that the Great Flood would happen in their generation. It did—to Her students. The Great Prophet said, to quote Her from the Holy Book of ONE, ‘The Great Flood will happen in this generation.’ The Great Flood happened in Her generation, in this generation, and in every generation in between. Remember the cup with the spoiled wine, Young Man? The spoiled wine must be spilled out, and the cup thoroughly washed. This cleansing of the cup is the Great Flood that destroys all bad. This is the Great Flood

that washed all the gold ore and common rock out of the storage barn so that one's mind, cleansed of all discord and disillusion, can start fresh. So you see, Young Man, there will be no Great Flood as the common person perceives it, yet there will be a Great Flood in everybody's lifetime."

"Where did you find this out, Old Man?"

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"A long time ago, when I was a boy and it was time for me to leave my parents, I went to be an apprentice for a mender. Now, my parents were poor, vermin you would call them, but they observed all the Obligations of the Temple and taught me to do so.

"Now, my master demanded perfection from all the apprentices, so we all became very skilled. Somehow, I became more skilled than the others. Soon I had a reputation for being an excellent mender and was doing work for my master's most demanding clients.

“When my master died, I was free to set up my own shop, in which I was quite successful.

“Now, you know the Great Icon of ONE that is on top of your Temple? Late one evening during a great storm the head of the Icon broke off! One of the Temple Keepers noticed it and called it to the attention of the others. Can you imagine the great distress that they were in? They were frantic! What would people say if they saw the Great Icon of ONE with a missing head? People would certainly interpret it as a sign that the Most Popular Temple of ONE was a false temple. The Keepers of the Temple would certainly be ostracized.

“So they called in the Mender of the Temples, telling her that she had to mend the head of the Great Icon of ONE before dawn. Now, it was raining and windy, and I don't have to tell you how high the Temple stands.

The Mender of the Temples was fairly old and had a very difficult time even climbing to the top of the Temple with the head of the Icon. At last, she gave up, saying that she knew of only one mender skilled enough and agile enough to mend the Icon. That person was me.

“They awoke me in the middle of the night and summoned me to the Temple. When the Keepers of the Temple saw me, they were very dismayed. ‘We can't let this vermin in here, let alone have him touch the Great Icon's head. He is, even now, defiling our Temple,’ they said. Now, I was a bold and brash young man back then and what they said offended me. I looked them plainly in the eye and told them that if they wanted their Icon mended that they knew where they could find me. With that I turned to leave.

“They had no choice, Young Man, as night was half over. They told me to go ahead and

mend the Icon. I demanded a large sum of money equal to a season's wages. Then I demanded to see it all in gold before I started. I didn't know whether they would try to kill me on the spot or later. When they brought out the gold, I told them that when I was finished mending the Icon, I expected to see another pile of gold equal to the first pile to insure that I would never publish the story to anyone about the Icon's broken head. They were furious. I was certain that they would plot to kill me after I had mended the Icon's head. I was filled with excitement as I planned my escape from them.

“I climbed up to the top of the Temple. As I was mending the Icon's head, it occurred to me that my behavior was very bad. I had a very uneasy feeling while I was up there. All of a sudden this fear hit me! I had this feeling that as soon as I finished mending the Icon's head, ONE would punish me by throwing me

off the Temple roof. In that moment I felt repentance. I called to ONE and begged ONE that if I righted my bad behavior and swore never to do such a bad act again, ONE would save me from what, I was certain, was going to be my tragic ending. I finished mending the Icon's head and just sat on top of the Temple in silence. Then I called to ONE, 'I deserve to eat the fruit of the seed I have planted. Do with me what ONE must do.' Again I became silent, waiting for ONE's answer which, I was sure, was a tragic ending to my life. Instead, I felt this warmth. I opened my eyes, somewhat startled. For a few moments, I did not even realize that I was on top of the Temple. I did not even notice the wind or the cold rain. I just felt this sensation of warmth and joy. I wept, out of joy. I then knew what I had to do. Somehow I knew that ONE had caused the head of the Icon to fall off just so that I would go up to the top of

the Temple where ONE would make ONE's Self known to me. That was the day of my Great Flood, Young Man.

“I climbed down from the Temple, a new man. It was as if I was reborn. When I packed up my mending instruments and it came time for payment, I saw the two piles of gold there. I bowed my head to the Keepers of the Temple and begged them to forgive my rude behavior. I told them that it was my great pleasure to mend the Great Icon of ONE. The honor of being called to mend the Great Icon of ONE was sufficient payment for me. To their amazement, I picked up my mending instruments and walked out of the Temple leaving the gold behind.

“Later that morning, I was called before the United Council of Temple Keepers and told that the old Mender of the Temples chose not to work any more, and that I was highly recommended to be appointed the new

Mender of the Temples. To my surprise, the recommendation came from the very Temple that I had clandestinely mended the Icon for. I accepted this highly-honored position.

“Ah, forgive me, Young Man, for my long-winded tale. My boasting of myself in this one episode of my life is one of my weaknesses. In any case, I was schooled by the Council and given the status of a well-to-do person.

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“Now I come to the whole purpose of my story, Young Man. As I mended all the various Temples, I overheard many discussions and debates amongst the Temple Keepers about the stories in the Holy Book of ONE. As I said before, I had heard all the different versions of all the different stories and all the different interpretations of them until I was fairly well-versed in the Holy Book.

“One day, I decided to resign my position as Mender of the Temples and travel to experience a different land with different people. So I set off to the Land East of here as far as I could go. I had a letter of recommendation as a Master Mender of Temples. Now, our skills are more advanced than theirs are in the Land East of us, so they welcomed my mending abilities. Soon I learned their language and their customs. In their Temples I overheard discussions and debates about their Holy Book. And I learned about their ONE.

“I traveled again to a third land. The Land North of us.”

“The Land of the Dead? That is where they say the Bad One lives,” said Young Man.

“That is what the Keepers of the Temple teach here, Young Man, and so I too believed until I went to the Land East of here. There I learned many fascinating things. One of the

things I learned there was that the Land North of here was not the Land of the Dead at all.

“Now, when I went to the Land North of here, I found that they did not have any temples. People showed Obligation to ONE in any open field. I was afraid that I would find no mending work there. But they welcomed me as if I was a great ruler. You see, they said that they did not have many strangers pass through their land. Certainly, they said, I was the only one who ever came to visit from our Land, since people in our Land are afraid of the Land North, and so, are not friendly with their land. And they were very anxious to learn of the customs of our Land. So I stayed and taught them about our customs, and they taught me about their customs and, what was of great interest to me, their religion. It was there that I found the Answer. It was there that I laid the last

stones of my temple. I put my knowledge of all three teachings of ONE together. It was there that I, the Master Mender of Temples, learned to mend twisted limbs and all other various kinds of discords, realizing what they were.

“After I had perfected my knowledge of the Answer, I returned back to our Land with the idea that I would tell our entire Land the magnificent Answer that I had found about ONE and life. When I spoke to the United Council of Temple Keepers, they responded to the Answer very much like the Disillusioned Man up in the tree responded to you, Young Man: They called me a son of the Bad One and banished me from the city. That was a long time ago, and I've been here ever since, mending and teaching only people that ONE has sent me.

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“Ah, we are back to my home, Young Man. I timed my tale perfectly. How it gets dark early now. My eyes have gotten dim with my old age. Here is a candle and a stick match. Could you go inside and find the light in my home, Young Man?”

Young Man lit the candle and entered the shack looking for a lamp. After a few minutes, he called to the Old Man, “I can't seem to find it.”

“Seek diligently and you shall find it, Young Man.”

The Old Man entered the shack. “There it is in your hand, Young Man.” The Old Man chuckled. The Young Man looked sheepishly at the candle in his hand.

“Forgive me, Young Man, I do not intend to embarrass you. Do you see how the things we search for are generally as near to us as our own hand? Let me tell you an old proverb that you have probably heard before. I was

about my chores one day when I noticed a beautiful butterfly nearby. I wanted to get closer to admire the beautiful creation of ONE. However, as I tried to get closer to the butterfly, it just started flying farther and farther away. I chased it for quite a distance, determined to get a close look at it. Soon the butterfly was out of sight. So I gave up chasing after it and sat down to rest and catch my breath. Sure enough, the butterfly that I was chasing landed right in front of me, fanning its beautiful wings for me to admire.

“You see, Young Man, we search diligently at first and, at times, it seems that our butterfly is just getting farther and farther away. And when it seems like we will never reach our goal and we give up on it, it will, very often, fall right in our lap.”

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“ONE really does exist then, Old Man? Which Temple did you find ONE in? Which

Temple observed the true ONE? Certainly it is not ours since they banished you. I would also like to find ONE to know the Answer. Where do I find ONE? To which land should I travel?”

“You really wish to find ONE, Young Man?”

“Yes!”

“For what reason, Young Man?”

Young Man reflected on this question. “Just to know ONE and know the Answer. Just to see if ONE really does exist and how.”

“Ah, wonderful. For you see, Young Man, the only way ONE will reveal ONE’s Self to you is if you seek ONE for the right reason. You must seek ONE only for ONE.

“Young Man, you said that Keepers of Wisdom have come up with proof that ONE does not exist. They even call the very Holy Book of ONE nonsense. They have even proven, through their wisdom, that the story

of First Man and First Woman, for example, could not have been written down until many generations after it took place. They say that if the stories were passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, that the stories could have changed a little each generation until the stories did not even resemble the original ones by the time they were written down. They have even thought that the stories could have been fabricated by someone.

“So how do we even know that ONE exists, Young Man? The Keepers of Wisdom have devised all kinds of new wisdom over the years so that they have even proven that ONE cannot exist according to the Wisdom of Reason. You see, Young Man, you cannot find ONE with reason, so they conclude that ONE does not exist. You cannot see ONE, nor touch ONE, nor taste ONE, for ONE has no form. You cannot smell ONE because

ONE has no fragrance. And you cannot hear ONE because ONE makes no sound. For you see, Young Man, ONE is a feeling that can only be felt within your Heart. You can never find ONE by reason; ONE will never enter your storage barn through the five doors of perception called eyes, ears, fingers, nose and tongue. ONE can only be perceived by the sixth door of perception: the Heart, and never through reason. That is why the Keepers of Wisdom have never found ONE.

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“And what of the Holy Book of ONE, Young Man? I can agree with every Keeper of Wisdom that the stories in the Holy Book of ONE are probably not the same as what really happened. I can even agree that the stories are nothing more than fables fabricated by someone. However, you will still find the Answer there if you seek diligently. The Answer lies hidden until the reader learns

to perceive with his or her Heart. No matter how many times the Holy Book of ONE had been altered throughout the generations, the Answer is constant; it always remains hidden in the Holy Books. If you were to take the Holy Book and change it word for word, as long as people believed that the Book was of ONE, you would find the Answer hidden in the Holy Book. For ONE will always reveal ONE's Self to the Heart that can perceive.

“Which Temple is the true Answer about ONE and life taught in? All of them, Young Man. Each Temple in our Land, though they all differ, will point to the Answer. And each Temple in the Land East, though they are very strange indeed compared to ours, will also point to the Answer. As will the teaching in the Land North of us. You see, Young Man, the Answer is the same. There are many different Temples, many different Obligations, many different names for ONE,

stories about ONE, and concepts about ONE. These are all the many, many paths that lead to ONE. Each person must choose the path that is correct for them. For in our story about the foreign land and the various caravans, did not every caravan take the people back to their homes? The homes were all in different directions for the various people, so each person had to find their proper caravan. But all people were taken back home. Home is home, whether you come from our Land, or the Land East, or the Land North. All teachings of the Answer are the same. However, there is a certain teaching that is best tailored to each person seeking the Answer. My teaching may be best for you, Young Man, but it may be entirely wrong for someone else. Or it may not be understood by someone else.”

“Is that why the Temple Council banished you, Old Man, because they did not

understand your method of teaching? When you show me where ONE can be found, maybe I could explain it to them in a different way. Or are they like the Disillusioned Man up in the tree, thinking that what is false is true and what is true is false? In that case I can gather an army and tear down their Temple of deception!”

“Young Man, by toppling the stones of their Temple walls you will only be shaking up the foundation stones of your own Temple. You see, Young Man, each Holy Book of each Temple, regardless in what land you find it, carries two teachings. One teaching is plain so that the common person can easily understand it. This plain teaching tells us that we must be obligated to ONE and no other, and that we must show compassion to one another. The other teaching is secret and hidden in the Holy Books and in the Obligations of the Temple. I am not even

sure that the Keepers of the Temple know the secret teaching, the Answer. If they do know it, they keep it hidden, for I have never heard them discuss it.”

“Then they are the deceivers!”

“No!! Never say that, Young Man!! These Keepers of the Temple have given their entire lives to the service of the Temple and its followers. The Temples teach us to show Obligation to ONE and show compassion to one another. The alms paid to the Temple are, many times, distributed to those who are not as fortunate. Never call them Temples of deception because they do far too many Good works for their walls to *ever* topple.

“The greatest Good these Temples provide is to coerce people to observe the Obligations, Young Man. Thus, even if they do not know the secret meaning of the Obligations, it at least keeps the common person’s mind on ONE. Believe me, if any

Temple did not do Good works, ONE would not let that Temple stand.

“If it wasn’t for the Most Popular Temple of ONE that you once belonged to, Young Man, you would never be here right now. You see, I have deceived you, Young Man. We have not been building the foundation to your Temple. Your foundation has been built long ago by the Temple that you attended in your youth. We are just putting the walls on top of the foundation that was built long ago. Never call any Temple or its teaching bad or deceiving no matter what land it comes from. For every Temple in every land serves the people of its land in the best way it knows how. They all promote Obligation to ONE and compassion to one another. If their ways seem strange or bad or deceiving to us, it is only because we do not understand their ways.

“Our reasoning mind judges whatever is strange to us as bad. Know this Principle Young Man: Each and every Temple points out the Secret Path to ONE. ONE is ONE whether taught in our Temple, the Temples in the Land East of us, or the teachings in the Land North of us. There is only ONE.”

“I am confused, Old Man. You say my Temple points out the way to ONE. Yet I have never found ONE, I have never known ONE plainly.”

“Young Man, in the Holy Book of ONE you will read stories of people who traveled as I did, from one end of the Land to another. They climbed to the tops of the highest mountains, and they lowered themselves into the deepest, most hidden recesses of the Land searching for ONE. Only when they were about to give up the search, convinced that they had failed, did ONE reveal ONE’s Self. The Prophets found ONE in the last place

they would ever have thought to look—Within.”

“Within?”

“Yes, Young Man, ONE and the Good Land of ONE can be found Within.”

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Chapter Nine

“I don't know what you mean by ‘Within?’”

“Remember we said that ONE could only be felt by the Heart? Remember the story I told when I was on the top of the Temple mending the Icon? I had a feeling of warmth, a feeling that I knew what I had to do. It took many years and many journeys for me to realize that this feeling was ONE revealing ONE's Self to me. Though each person feels ONE differently, ONE can only be felt, only from Within. ONE will reveal ONE's Self from Within you. Your Heart is the secret Temple of ONE. ONE is the very gold that enters the sixth door of perception in our storage barn. This is the first of the great Answer.”

“How do I put ONE in my Heart, Old Man?”

“ONE is already there, Young Man. ONE has always been Within you and ONE is Within every single person that you meet. Yes, even the ones you call vermin have ONE Within their Hearts. The problem is that people have built thick stone walls around their Hearts so that they do not realize that ONE is there.”

“How do I let ONE out, Old Man?”

“These stone walls around our Heart are built with our reasoning mind, Young Man. Flood the mind clean of reason, even silence the mind for a few moments, and ONE will burst through those stone walls. Close your eyes, Young Man. Think of ONE. Ask ONE to reveal ONE’s Self. Then silence your mind. Let no thought enter. Then feel ONE welling up inside of you, Young Man, ready to burst through those stone walls around your Heart.

“But, Young Man, though ONE will reveal ONE’s Self, you may not realize it is ONE. But, more and more, you will realize ONE’s presence Within you. ONE will reveal ONE’s Self from Within your Heart, but your mind will doubt at first, until your mind becomes thoroughly cleansed.”

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“How do I make my mind believe, Old Man?”

“A step at a time, Young Man, a step at a time. Did you ever see menders working on top of a tall building such as your Temple that I was on top of? Could you climb on top of such a tall building?”

“No, it is too high. I would certainly fall.”

“Do you know why I can climb on top of a tall building and you can't? You and I have the same ability. There is no difference between walking on top of a tall building or walking on the ground. The only difference is

that I know, I believe without a doubt that I can climb on top of a tall building, while you believe that you would fall. If I carried you to the top of a tall building and set you on the roof, you would probably faint from fear and fall. Why? Because you believe you will fall. I can climb on top because I believe I can. Know this, Young Man: As you believe so it shall be done to you.

“Now, Young Man, what if I told you that you had to climb on top of your Temple, all the way to the Icon to find ONE?”

“I could never climb to ... ”

“Do you think I was born climbing roofs, Young Man? When I became an apprentice for the Mender, I was told that we would have to climb the tallest buildings in the Land. I was certain that I would never be able to climb. One day, the Mender took me to a tall building and said that we had to mend the corner of the building from bottom to top.

Now, I thought that day would surely be the end of me, because I could not climb. But I was assigned to stay on the ground and prepare the material while the Mender would climb up the building. I was relieved; all I had to do was hand up the material. But soon, I found myself climbing one step just to reach. Later in the day I had to climb up and down two steps. The next day I would climb up and down three steps, then four and so forth. Each step higher I felt a little bit of uncertainty. But after climbing up and down the steps enough times, I grew more and more confident. Before I knew it, I was climbing half way up the building with confidence. By the time we completed the mending, I could climb on the very top, confident that I could do it. But this was done a step at a time, Young Man. Belief comes a step at a time.”

“So how do I start, Old Man?”

“You have already climbed higher than you realized, Young Man. You start, first of all, at your Temple. This is where the foundation stones are laid. And what does every Temple in every land teach in common: to show Obligation to ONE and to show compassion to one another. The last teaching is like the first. For by showing compassion for one another you are showing compassion and adoration for ONE, since ONE is Within each and every one of us; man, woman, and child, poor vermin, or mighty ruler. Reverse the statement and you will see that you cannot show Obligation to ONE *unless* you show compassion for every person.

“Yes, every single person! Not only those who belong to the same Temple as you, not only those who show Obligation to the same concept of ONE as you do, not only those who live in the same Land as you do, but

every single man, woman, and child in this Land and in all the lands. Yes, all lands! We must show compassion even to our adversaries, including those who harm us. Yes, Young Man, show compassion to those who sow discord against you, and their enmity will vanish like a puff of smoke. Even show compassion to the birds of the air and the creatures of the field, for it says on the first page of the Holy Book of ONE that everything that ONE caused to evolve is a perfect reflection of ONE.”

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“So this is why the Temples teach us to fear ONE and obey ONE’s laws, Old Man?”

“Yes, Young Man, but we must take it a step further. What did the Prophets of ONE say in the Holy Book of ONE? The First Prophet said that ‘Our ONE is a Good ONE, so we must fear ONE and be Good as ONE is Good, and our ONE will be greater

than our neighbor's ONE'. The next Prophet said, 'Our ONE, the Good ONE is the Only True ONE, we must fear ONE and be Good as ONE is Good, for all the other ONES of our neighbors are false.' The next Prophet said, 'Our ONE, the Only True ONE, is not only our ONE, but everybody's ONE. We must fear ONE and be Good as ONE is Good and teach our neighbors that our ONE is the Only True ONE.' And, finally, the Great Prophet said, 'All ONES are ONE, we must allow every person to show Obligation to ONE in their own way, and we must be Good as ONE is Good, not out of fear, but out of adoration for ONE.' For you see, Young Man, ONE does not want us to fear ONE, ONE wants us to adore ONE, to cherish ONE as ONE cherishes us. For ONE wants us to be ONE's friends, not ONE's fearful servants.

“Young Man, when you have a chore to do, you can coerce a servant to help you, or sometimes you may find a kind friend to help you. Wouldn't the chore be much more pleasant to do with a kind friend rather than a coerced servant? And wouldn't you want to do a kind deed for the friend in return, even if they didn't expect a kind deed in return? Yes, Young Man, ONE wants us to be ONE's friends, for this very purpose we are here. But if ONE is Within every single person, in all the lands, then we must be friendly to every single person in every single land, even the birds of the air, even the creatures of the field, even the very trees that give us shade.

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“And let me teach you about friendship, Young Man. I had many friends when I was a Mender of the Temples. But of all my friends the one that I remember the most was the Goldsmith. You see, all my other friends

would come over and say, ‘Hello, how are you? Say, I need some advice on mending’ or ‘May I borrow a mending instrument from you?’ or ‘Could you come to my house to assist me in mending something?’ Now every time I would see one of these friends coming I would say, ‘Oh no, here comes my friend who always asks me for something.’ At times I would want to run and hide, pretending that I was not home so that they would not find me. They would never come to see me unless they wanted something of me.

“But my one true friend, the Goldsmith, would come over and say, ‘Hello, how are you today? I came over to see how you were and to spend some time with you.’ Many times he would bring over a fine bottle of wine. Then I would bring out some food and we would have a merry time together. When I had free time, I would come over to his house and mend something for him without him even

asking. And what a pleasure it was to see him coming to me. Indeed, Young Man, it was a pleasure to have that person as a friend. But my other friends were more of a thorn in the side to me at times.

“And so, you see, is our friendship with ONE. Do we come to ONE and call to ONE asking ONE to grant us favors, to do this and that for us? Do we come to ONE only when we need something, or when we are observing the Obligations? Or do we come to ONE to spend some time with ONE? Young Man, we must go to ONE only to be with ONE and not for the things that ONE can give us that we desire. When our only desire is to know ONE, to be friends with ONE, then ONE will become our True Friend. For ONE knows what we need even before we ask ONE. And it is ONE’s pleasure to share all ONE’s Goodness with us. Whenever you go to ONE, Young Man, go with a desire only to

please ONE, to be friends with ONE, and soon, after ONE sees your sincerity, ONE will lay all ONE's Goodness in your lap.

“And when you go to ONE, Young Man, do not go with doubt, do not be suspicious of ONE, but trust ONE, put your confidence in ONE and no one else.”

“How do I go to ONE Within me, Old Man?”

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“There are many different ways, Young Man. Here is one way that worked for me. Sit down, be relaxed, close your eyes, think of ONE, only ONE, not the things of ONE; ask for nothing but to become friends with ONE. Then be silent; still your mind. Make your mind like the alligator, Young Man. Lock out the outside world, then lock out your inside world — your reasoning mind. Open your Heart, and ONE will make ONE's Self known to you. Maybe not the first time,

maybe not the second, but ONE will eventually make ONE's Self known to you. Do this as many times a day as you can, until, as you climb higher and higher up the building, you keep your mind on ONE at all times. Then you will notice ONE guiding you throughout the whole day. You will notice ONE providing for every need you have even before you have need of it. Everywhere you look you will find ONE revealing ONE's Self. ONE will reveal ONE's Self through another person, through a song, a book, the very clouds in the sky will be ONE revealing ONE's Self. Every corner you turn you will see ONE revealing ONE's Self. As your mind is stayed on ONE, you will notice all ONE's Goodness, Beauty, and Joy set before you. Then you will smile all the time as I smile, Young Man. You will want to shout out your joy from the rooftops. And as you let ONE guide you through life with no thought, no

fear, and no worry, one day ONE will guide you right to the very gates of the Good Land.”

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“Then the Good Land *does* exist, Old Man?!”

“Yes, the Good Land does exist, Young Man. The Good Land is *all* that exists.”

“In what direction can the Good Land be found, Old Man?”

“Look out the window, Young Man, what do you see?”

“I see a tree.”

“And I see the Good Land.”

“Where? Point it out!”

“Within you, Young Man. The Good Land of ONE is Within you. What you see with your eyes is only what you believe from Within. Do you believe in a Land filled with bad? Then that is what you shall see. I believe that ONE is all there is and everything is a

perfect reflection of ONE, guided and provided for by ONE in Perfect Harmony. Therefore, I see only the Good Land. You see a grotesque and ugly tree, I see a creation of ONE that can only be beautiful as ONE is beautiful. You saw a little girl with twisted limbs, I saw a little girl who is a perfect reflection of ONE. As ONE could not have any flaws, neither could the little girl, nor this Land.

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“What did you read this morning, Young Man? Do you wish for me to explain it to you? ONE created everything; everything is perfect as ONE is perfect. ONE guided and provided, maintained, sustained, and governed everything with Perfect Harmony. There is nothing other than ONE. ONE is the only Source of knowledge, providence, and guidance. ONE is the only power, there

is nothing that isn't as perfect as ONE is perfect.

“One day, First Man thought that there was something other than ONE. First Woman cautioned him that this was not so. Deep Within the hidden recesses of First Man's mind, he knew that since the things of ONE are Perfect Harmony, anything that he would find that was not of ONE would have to be less than Perfect Harmony. Still, First Man believed in something other than ONE. As he believed, so it was done to him. First Man believed in something other than ONE and knew that what he found could only be less than Perfect Harmony. So First Man found a discordant land.

“ONE created everything, everything ONE created was perfect as ONE is perfect. It was First Man who created something other than ONE, something less than Perfect Harmony, and called it bad. First Man created

all the discord in the Land! Good and bad did not exist in ONE's Land. Only when First Man separated himself from ONE was ONE's Land called Good, and the land that First Man believed in, called bad. Soon First Man believed in a lack of provision, a fear of the unknown, death, and the inability to communicate or get back to ONE.

“You see, Young Man, First Man knew that it was not right to separate from ONE. He was cautioned by First Woman. First Man knew that the land he would find could never be better than ONE's Land. It was First Man's curiosity that led him away from ONE. Then, First Man and First Woman believed that ONE punished them, that everything in the land not of ONE would be bad and spoil. First Man and First Woman then believed that they would die, and they taught their children these false beliefs. What every Holy Book shows is that First Man and First

Woman, or early man and woman, were perfect, were one with ONE. Somewhere along the line they separated themselves from ONE, believed in something other than ONE—which could only be inferior to ONE—and taught their children these same false beliefs. The remainder of the Holy Book is humankind's attempt to get back to ONE, to get back to where we were in the first place: one with ONE.

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“Don't you see, Young Man? First Man and First Woman were disillusioned by their false beliefs. They are just like the Disillusioned Man up in the tree saving himself from the flood waters. The Disillusioned Man believes that there are flood waters, and as he believes, so it is done to him. If you could look through his eyes you would see flood waters too, for they exist in his mind. First Man and First Woman

believed in a land apart from ONE. They had this seed of doubt, this feeling Within that anything they would find had to be imperfect. They felt that separating themselves from ONE would be wrong, so they found a Land that was wrong. And they felt that they were punished by ONE for leaving ONE. So they felt hunger, they felt fear, they saw a dead creature—all these were real to them, but ONE knew it was all an illusion. ONE knew that these things existed for First Man and First Woman because of their fear that what they were doing displeased ONE. First Man and First Woman could have turned back to ONE at any time, but they believed that as punishment they would never find ONE again. Still, ONE had compassion on them as for a lost and hungry child.

“And so it is with your beliefs, Young Man. You believe in a bad Land filled with hungry, bitter people. You feel despondent as to how

ONE allows all this to exist. But this is what *you* see through *your* eyes, Young Man. ONE does not see your illusion. Just as you did not see the Disillusioned Man's flood waters, ONE does not see the hungry, bitter people. These hungry, bitter people exist only in your mind! When you call out to ONE to mend a twisted limb, ONE answers you as you answered the Disillusioned Man, 'There is no twisted limb; you are mistaken.' You see, Young Man, the only reason that there is any discord is because you have been taught all your life that the discord you see is real. But such discord is, in reality, like the flood waters of the Disillusioned Man.

“All your life, Young Man, you have been taught that ONE punishes us. ONE has too much compassion for ONE to punish us! ONE's compassion is much greater than we, as common people, can even comprehend! Clean the spoiled wine from the cup, Young

Man, and see the Good Land right before your very eyes! Open your eyes, Young Man, you have been in the Good Land of ONE all the time!! The only problem is that there is a heavy fog so that you can't see it. I have cleared the fog away from my mind, so I can see the Good Land.”

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“How do I clear this fog away, Old Man? How do I see the Good Land?”

“What did the First Man do wrong, Young Man? He thought that he could provide for himself and he thought that he could guide himself. You can, of your own self, do nothing. ONE does all the Good in your life. ONE *is* all the Good in your life. ONE provides for you; you could never provide for yourself. You cannot guide yourself; ONE guides you. There is nothing that you can do that is Good. All your Goodness comes from ONE. All your Goodness *is* ONE. Never

take credit for anything Good that you do—give the glory to ONE. Never take anything and think that you deserve it or that you worked hard for it—it is all a gift from ONE. Thank ONE for it. And when you call to ONE, there is only one thing that you can say to ONE, ‘Not my will, but ONE’s be done.’ Read the Holy Book, Young Man; this is the way the Great Prophet called out to ONE throughout her sojourn in this Land. You must sacrifice your self-centered will, Young Man, and do the Will of ONE. And what is the Will of ONE: to show compassion to every man, woman, and child in every land, as ONE shows compassion to every man, woman, and child in every land. Thank ONE for all the Goodness in everybody’s life. And give ONE the glory for any Good deed that ONE does through you. Soon you will be filled with peace, Young Man. And the peace Within you will flow out

through your eyes until all you see around you will be filled with peace. Then you will see the Land through ONE's eyes—all illusions of discord will disappear as an early morning fog.”

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“Can this be so, Old Man? It is so hard to believe!”

“Did I not tell you, Young Man, that my food would be hard to digest and my wine would be bitter to swallow? Are you swallowing the wine? Or are you spitting it out, Young Man? But you hunger for more of my food, don't you, Young Man? I can tell. Do you know how I can tell? I see, for the first time, a spark of compassion in your eyes. You were tentative, at first, of the caravan driver's ability to take you home. But you have passed by a familiar place and now you know you are on the way back home and are

anxious to get there. A step at a time, Young Man, a step at a time.”

“I do feel a joy inside of me, Old Man. I feel as if a heavy burden has been taken off my shoulders. But tell me more, Old Man. Tell me what sights I shall see on the road back home.”

“I am an Old Man. We have built the walls together, and we are nearly finished. But you must polish the stones and complete the Temple yourself.”

“We must remain together forever; I as your student and you as my teacher. We must build my Temple together, and finish it together, Old Man.”

“No, Young Man. I am just the one who pointed out the correct caravan to you. I am just a map to the Good Land of ONE; the journey you must make yourself. And when you get near the gates of the Good Land, you will need the map no longer. Discard the

map, Young Man, for the gates to the Good Land are before you. You have no need of me any more.”

“But I have so many questions, Old Man.”

“Young Man, all your answers to all your questions shall be answered from Within. For ONE Within you is the only true Source of knowledge. ... I am weary, it is late, and you must be on your way home. I shall tell you one last riddle or so before I leave you. But these last riddles you shall let ONE Within explain to you.

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“The Holy Book of ONE is the history of humankind. It is also *your* history, Young Man. The Holy Book of ONE was written for you. I am here for you. Know this Young Man: There is no one out there to mend but yourself, there is no one out there to teach but yourself. For what you see before you is your self turned inside out. What you think

on the inside is made manifest before you, coming back to you through your five senses. What you perceive through your five senses are only your own thoughts from inside of you. Do you want joy, Young Man? Then give joy from Within and it will return to you. Make all your thoughts one with ONE and you shall find yourself in the Good Land.

“In the Land North they have this version of the story of creation: ONE created the entire universe for ONE’s pleasure. The universe was as a Wife to ONE. ONE saw ONE’s Wife, the universe, and concluded that She was Perfect and Beautiful, a true Joy to behold. Then ONE rested. As ONE rested, ONE fell asleep. Soon ONE had a strange dream that ONE’s Wife separated from ONE. Towards the end of the dream, ONE realized that ONE was just dreaming. As ONE awoke, ONE did not know whether ONE was still asleep or awake. After a few

moments, ONE awoke fully and saw ONE's Wife in all Her Beauty just as She was before ONE fell asleep. Soon ONE forgot ONE's dream.

“You see, Young Man, ONE's dream is your life. Wake up, Young Man, wake up!”

“I ... I think I understand. Tomorrow I shall write all this in a book and teach it to everyone so that they know the Answer and feel the same joy that I feel!”

“No, no, no! You do not understand, Young Man!”

“I will understand more, but I can teach what I know now!”

“Young Man, if a person walks up to you and says that they are hungry, what shall you do?”

“I shall feed them. For ONE has sent them to me to be fed.”

“But at this point what you have to feed the person with are only seeds and not fruit,

Young Man. If you give a hungry person seeds, they will cast them back at you in disgust, for a hungry person cannot eat seeds and cannot wait for the seeds to grow and bear fruit. Keep the seeds for yourself so that one day they can bear fruit for you to give to all in the Land. Don't you understand?"

"I understand the joy that I feel now and shall teach every person that I meet about my joy from Within and how I received it."

"They won't listen, Young Man, they just won't listen. You must let every person seek out their own Answer from Within. All this that I have told you, you think is the Answer. But the answer is not the Answer. You see, Young Man, you will find out for yourself that one person's Answer is another person's illusion."

"In any case, Old Man, it is late, and I must be going. Thank you, Old Man. Thank

you for the map that showed me the way back home. I shall share this map with all I meet.”

“They won't listen. They just won't listen.”

~~

Young Man gave the Old Man a hug and left the Old Man's shack to go home. As he walked home, he pondered all the things that the Old Man had told him. Young Man could hardly contain his joy as he walked through the city gate. He entered his house and quietly crawled into bed so as not to awaken Young Woman. *How beautiful the Young Woman looked, thought Young Man, more beautiful than she ever looked before!*

## Chapter Eleven

“Wake up, it's morning, wake up!”

“Morning ... Yes ... I'm awake ... I must tell you something, Woman. Don't ever

believe that something other than ONE exists. ONE is all there is!”

“Of course, Man. That is what I told you last night.”

“Because if you believe in something other than ONE, you will create all kinds of bad things for yourself, Woman.”

“Bad? What is this strange sound that you make—bad? Are you still sleeping, Man? Come,” Woman shook Man teasingly, her face smiling, her eyes beaming, “let us experience the joy of this beautiful new day that ONE has made.”

Man stared blankly into the Woman. Then he remembered something from his sleep: *They won't listen, they just won't listen.*

Man smiled. “Yes, Woman. Come. Let us experience the joy of this beautiful new day that ONE has made.”

## The (unfinished) Story of Ru, Su and Tu

Ru, Su and Tu were companions living in the land of Harmony. Once upon a time they had this interesting trialogue:

Ru: We are perfect beings living in a realm of perfect harmony. I wonder if there is anything other than perfect harmony?

Su: It would seem that if there was, it would have to be something less than perfect harmony.

Tu: Maybe we could create a simulation of a land that would be identical to ours, but would have random elements that are less than perfect harmony.

Ru: Then we could observe this simulation and see how things unfold.

Su: That would be an interesting experience where we could learn something new.

Tu: That certainly seems like a very Good idea.

And so they got to work and created a simulation and ran it and observed it a few times. Afterwards they had this trialogue:

Ru: It is interesting to observe this simulation of an imperfect world with imperfect beings. But I wonder what it would be like to actually be one of those imperfect beings, rather than just observing them?

Su: Maybe we could immerse ourselves in our simulation and become one of those imperfect beings to fully experience what it is like.

Tu: To actually be an imperfect being we would have to be unaware that we are in a simulation.

Ru: And we would have to be unaware that we are actually perfect beings who created the simulation.

Su: If we were unaware that we are the creators of the simulation and thought that we were only imperfect beings, I wonder if there is a danger that we could be trapped in the simulation with no way to return Home.

Tu: Maybe one of us should stay behind to observe and act as a lifeline to ensure that the other two return Home safely.

Ru: Maybe only one of us should immerse ourselves, the other two could stay behind as

observers, guides and protectors. I would volunteer to be the one to be immersed in the simulation.

Su: Ru, that is quite a sacrifice for you to make, giving up your life of perfect harmony. Tu and I will watch over you constantly.

Tu: And we will give you subtle clues as to your real identity as a perfect being who is experiencing only a simulation of an imperfect world that we all co-created.

Su: And if you are in danger you can always call on us and we will bring you out of the simulation, safely back Home.

Ru: That sounds like a very Good idea.

And so Ru was immersed in the simulation, while Su and Tu stayed behind to observe, all

the while leaving subtle clues, eventually guiding Ru safely back Home.

Once Ru returned Home, they had this trialogue:

Su: Ru, welcome Home! Tell us about your experience, what was it like?

Ru: I cannot believe how real the simulation seemed! Even when I picked up on your clues, I still had doubts, because it all seemed so real while I was there.

Su: Please tell us what it was like to be immersed in the simulation compared to just observing it.

Ru: I am so exhausted ...

Tu: We have many questions for you. But take your rest now.

And so Su and Tu carried the exhausted Ru to the sleeping room.

~~ gohere

The next morning Ru woke up to find that Su and Tu were already up, preparing breakfast. They had the following trialogue:

Su: Good morning Ru!

Tu: Are you refreshed after your night's sleep?

Ru: I feel refreshed, thank-you. But, for a few moments after I awoke, I thought that I was still in the simulation.

Su: Did you have any dreams as you slept that you can recall?

Tu: Any dreams of the simulation?

Ru: No dreams that I can, as yet, recall. It was such a relief when I found that I was not still in the simulation, but at Home, here with both of you.

Then Ru got up and embraced Su and Tu.

Ru: Oh my, I just realized that I was so exhausted last night that I forgot to express gratitude for the day's events before I went to sleep. But how to express gratitude for such an unusual day?

Su: Your experience seems to have had quite an effect on you.

Tu: Do you think that the experience will have a lasting effect that might change you in any way?

Ru: I am certainly exceedingly grateful for being here in the land of Harmony with both of you! But, tell me, how was your experience of observing the simulation?

Su: It was much more intense for us observing the simulation with you immersed in it, than when the three of us simply observed a random simulation.

Tu: There were so many challenging things happening to you that we did not understand. We felt the deepest compassion for what you were going through.

Ru: Were you observing the simulation every single day of my life in it?

Su: What do you mean when you say "every single day"?

Tu: Your simulation only lasted the one day, yesterday.

Ru: What?! To me it seemed like many, many, many days long!

Su: No, we only did the simulation for one day.

Tu: What you must have experienced were the memories of all the past days of the imperfect being that you fully immersed yourself into, making it seem like an entire lifetime of many, many, many days.

Ru: I am surprised, to say the least! I cannot believe how real it all seemed!

Su: Give yourself some time to reflect on this and absorb it.

Tu: For now, let us experience the joy of this beautiful new day that ONE has made.

Ru: Yes, Su and Tu. Come. Let us experience the joy of this beautiful new day that ONE has made.

~ ~

And so, having set their positive intention for the day, Ru, Su and Tu ate their breakfast. While they ate they shared their dreams from the night before, as was their custom to do each morning. And so they had this trialogue:

Su: Tu, did you have any dreams last night while you slept that you would like to share with us?

Tu: Yes, I had a dream that our neighbor Mu created some new music. And that we all gathered at Mu's home to learn how to play it so that we could perform it together. Su, any dreams that you would like to share with us?

Su: Yes, I did have a dream about yesterday's simulation. Ru, would it be okay if I told the dream or would you still like more time to absorb on your simulation experience before you hear more about it?

Ru: No, of course, please share your dream with us. Maybe it would help me to recall some of my dreams.

Su: Thank-you, Ru. In my dream I was observing the simulation with you fully immersed in it. I felt compassion for some of the challenges that you were going through, yet felt helpless to reach out to help you, even though that was my purpose in the simulation.

Tu: Yes, I was thinking about that earlier. How could we as observers have reached out to Ru to be of more help to Ru?

Ru: Oh! Now I recall something from my dream and it was about the simulation! It was about the religion that I belonged to.

Su: Religion?

Tu: Please tell us more about this religion.

Just then there was a knock on the door.

~ ~

After they heard the knock on the door, Tu went to see that Lu had come to visit. They had this quadralogue:

Lu: Good morning Tu.

Tu: Good morning Lu.

Su: How nice to see you. It must be a good day for being outside.

Ru: Would you like to join us for breakfast?

They all embraced each other, then continued their quadralogue:

Lu: I've already had breakfast. But your breakfast smells wonderful! Maybe I'll try some just for a taste if you have enough.

Tu: Of course, there is plenty for all of us. We'll make room for you at the table.

Su: What brings you to come visit us today?

Lu: Three things. One, I had a dream that during the days when it was perfect to stay inside our homes, the three of you had a rather unique daydream. Is that true?

Ru: Yes, though we're still trying to absorb the experience to fully understand it.

Su: What are the other reasons that you are visiting?

Lu: During the past few days, Mu created some new music. Mu is at home finishing notating it now.

Tu: Yes, I had a dream that Mu created some new music!

Ru: I am quite eager to hear it.

Su: Are there parts for all of us to play?

Lu: I believe so. Mu was quite excited about it.

Tu: What is your third reason for visiting us?

Su: Do you have any ideas what we can all do today since it is a good day for being outside?

Ru: It will be nice to spend time outside since it seems like it has stopped raining.

Lu: Originally I was eager to see if my dream was true and, if so, to hear about your unique daydream. But Nu thought that it would be a good day to play a game of marble.

Tu: So many things that we can do.

Su: Yes, we can talk about the simulation, we can learn about Mu's new music, or we can play a nice game of marble.

Ru: Oh yes! There's nothing like a good game of marble after being inside for a few days.

Tu: I agree!

Su: Shall we check to see if our neighbors Bu, Cu and Du would like to join us?

Lu: Let's go!

So they finished breakfast and went to discuss with their neighbors the options of how to spend their day. They all decided to start the day with a good game of marble. Afterwards they would have a picnic where Ru, Su and Tu could share their experience of the innovative daydream that they referred to as a simulation. And maybe after dinner they could play the new music that Mu created.

~~

And so they started out their day by playing a good game of marble. They especially enjoyed playing marble after it rained when the grass was slippery and there were mud puddles. By the end of the game, they were all covered with mud. So they went and submerged themselves in a nearby pond to rinse themselves clean. Afterwards they dried

themselves in the warm sun while they had a picnic. During this time they were all chatting away, catching up on what everyone was doing during the rainy days -- perfect weather to be indoors.

Soon Lu got everyone's attention: Can I have everyone's attention, please?

When they all quieted down, Lu continued: When I came to Ru, Su and Tu's house this morning to see what they were up to, I told them that I had a dream about them doing some sort of new type of daydream. I was going to ask them about it now. Would anyone else be interested in hearing about it?

Nu replied: Yes, I recall that you told us about your dream this morning.

Mu: Did the dream come true?

Tu: Yes, we call the new type of daydream a simulation.

Cu: Whaaat?! A simulation?

Bu: How exciting, please tell us about it!

Su: Ru, are you up to talking about it?

Ru: Sure, there's nothing like a good game of marble to clear one's mind and feel refreshed. But where do I begin?

Tu: Just before Lu knocked on our door this morning, you told us that you recalled that you had a dream about the simulation.

Su: Maybe you could share your dream with all of us?

Ru: It was such a strange dream, I'm not sure that everyone would understand it.

Du: We always enjoy hearing something new!

Mu: Yes Ru, please share your dream with us!

Ru: It was about the religion that I belonged to and how we worshipped God.

Bu: Whaaat? Religion?

Nu: God?

Lu: Hush everyone, let Ru tell his story.

And so they all quieted down while Ru told this monologue: The dream was about the religion that I belonged to in the simulation called the Eighth Day Adventists. We believed that God created the world in six days and

that everything that God created was very Good. On the seventh day God rested. As God rested, He fell asleep. As God slept, His entire creation went to hell. On the Eighth day God woke up from His sleep, took a look at His creation gone to hell, and exclaimed, "*What the heck!?!*" Then God fixed everything back up again. We were Eighth Day Adventists; we were waiting for the Eighth Day.

After Ru finished, they all looked at each, stunned into silence by what they'd heard.

~~

Finally, Su broke the silence: Does anyone have any questions or comments?

Nu: I have twenty-seven questions!

Cu: Me too, what are all these things that you are talking about?

Mu: Religion, God?

Du: Hell, he?

Lu: This is from a night dream about a daydream?

Bu: All this makes my head spin.

Tu: Where should we begin?

Cu: Ru, where would you like to being?

To which Ru responded with this monologue:

First off, you must understand that this is from a rather unusual sort of daydream that we call a simulation. So much of it, unless you

actually experience it, will sound very strange as the world in this simulation is quite strange.

Maybe I'll start with the first question: What is religion? In this strange world where it seems that everything is out of control, many of the beings, who are called 'human beings' or 'people', try to make sense out of this strangeness. One of the things that they came up with is religion. A religion is a group of people that have the same beliefs about the strange world. They try to answer the question of how God, who created the world to be very Good, could let the world get so bad. And they have certain practices that they do. The Eight Day Adventists is one such group that I used to belong to when I was young.

God, is their word for ONE. Here, in our land, we understand ONE. There, God is

very difficult to understand. Many of the people there view God as a supreme being, like one of the human beings, but with super powers. Then the question is, how does this super being allow bad to exist.

And so, in the religion of the Eight Day Adventists, they tell the story of how this God fell asleep, and while He slept, His world went to hell. One of the practices that we used to do was to wake up early each morning before the sun came up and shout out to God, "Wake up! It's the Eighth Day! Wake up and fix everything back up again!" After doing this for many, many days, it seemed a little foolish after a while. Besides, our neighbors who did not belong to this religion, complained that we were waking them up each morning with all our shouting.

How do I explain hell? If you take our Land where everything is in perfect harmony and make the opposite of it, where everything is in complete chaos -- that would be hell. But that world was not pure hell, it was a mix of good things and bad things.

The words 'he' and 'his' refer to one of the two types of human beings. There are males, referred to as 'he' and 'his', and females, referred to as 'she' and 'her'. Most people viewed God to be a male, so they referred to God as 'He' and 'Him'.

After Ru completed the monologue, once again, everyone was stunned into silence.

Finally Cu said: My head is also spinning from this.

Nu: We wanted to invite everyone over to our house for dinner tonight.

Lu: Mu created some new music.

Su: Maybe we could hear it after dinner?

Du: Are there any parts for us to play?

Ru: Sounds like an enjoyable way to spend the evening as my head is also spinning from talking about my dream.

Tu: Maybe we can continue to answer more questions after dinner and music, if anyone is interested?

~~

And so they all agreed to get together at Lu, Mu and Nu's home where Nu prepared a

sumptuous dinner, which was followed by an enjoyable evening learning and playing Mu's new music. Afterwards, Nu suggested having a sleepover, which they unanimously agreed would be the perfect way to top off an enjoyable day.

During the sleepover, as they discussed the plays of their game of marble, Cu commented: Du, you seem distracted, as if something was on your mind.

Du: Yes, I cannot help thinking about Ru's dream.

Bu: Ru, would you mind talking about your dream some more?

Lu: I certainly would like to hear more about it, if Ru does not mind.

Ru: Not at all. Tu, Su how do you feel about it?

Su: As long as you are up to it Ru, and no one else has any objections, I'd be happy to hear more about it.

Tu: Yes, this was such an unusual experience for the three of us, that it's difficult for me to get it out of my mind as well.

Ru: Du, share with us what's on your mind. I'll be happy to answer any questions that I can.

And so they had this polylogue:

Du: I keep thinking about what you said, that you practiced the Eighth Day Adventists' religion when you were young. Since the

simulation only lasted a day, what do you mean by, 'when you were young'?

Su: That is one of the strangest things about the simulation. For Tu and I it only lasted a day, and we only observed one day of Ru's experience.

Ru: But for me it was like many, many, many days.

Lu: Whaaat? How can that be?

Tu: When we created the simulation, the being whose role Ru submersed Ru's self in had the memory of a complete life of many, many, many days.

Ru: And so, while I was in the simulation, it seemed like just another day out of many, many, many days.

Nu: But when the simulation ended that evening, you were back here like normal?

Su: When the simulation was over, Ru was so tired and sleepy that Tu and I carried Ru to our sleeping room.

Tu: And Ru slept soundly until late in the morning as we let Ru sleep in.

Mu: Oh my!

Du: So, going back to the dream, did the Eighth Day ever come?

Cu: Or was there something special about that morning that gave you the idea that it could be the Eighth Day?

Ru: No. Each morning we awoke with the joyful anticipation that it would be the Eighth Day and that God would fix everything back up again. But as the day wore on we could see that the world was still a mess, and that God was still sleeping. And so every evening we went to sleep hopeful that the next day would be the Eighth Day. But it never was. After a while we started losing hope that the Eighth Day would ever come.

Du: But Ru, when you woke up this morning, wasn't it like the Eighth Day?

Ru: Whaaat?

Su: Du, what a novel idea!

Tu: We never thought about it like that!

Lu: Ru, what do you think?

To be continued, maybe...