

PRAISE FOR EVER FLOWING ON

“This is a book that explores deeply our longing for Being, our inmost yearning for Oneness. It is a timely book written with compassion, wisdom and devotion. It provides the reader with gentle wise council of how to find our way back to the simple miracle of living, while discovering a renewed affection for our life. You will begin to feel good about the miracle of being truly who you are, instead of trying to be something you are not. This is to learn to love and belong to your life in an intimate, authentic and genuine way.”

-ROBERT A. JOHNSON
Author of *He, She, We, Inner Work,*
and *Balancing Heaven and Earth*

“Michael DeMaria is a rare, loving wisdom teacher who has befriended the human psyche and traveled to its depths. He knows how to extract the psyche’s sacred treasures that lead to our full awakening as spiritual beings in human bodies. I love this book! It is profound! It will guide you and transform you if you will follow its gentle trail to wholeness.”

-JACQUELYN SMALL
Author of *Becoming Naturally Thera-*
peutic, and Transformers

“Ever Flowing On is a wake up call to those who live at the edge longing and yearning for harmony and connectedness. Brimming with gems of wisdom it is priceless to those who are committed to living simply. This timely book is a valuable contribution to consciousness. I highly recommend it.”

-MALIDOMA PATRICE SOME', PH.D.
Author of *Of Water and Spirit,*
and *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*

This powerful book describes in detail and with great clarity the process of ‘being and becoming oneself’. Drawing from rich personal experience as well as varied cultural background ranging from Aztecs to Zen, Michael DeMaria offers a most useful map for our spiritual journey.

-PIERO FERRUCCI
Author of *What We May Be,*
and *Inevitable Grace*

Michael DeMaria's book lays our lips on the beating pulse of Being, reconciling us to our inevitable estrangements, and pointing our way back to wholeness in the most genuine and natural way. In this way our everyday life is seen for the magnificent and sacred adventure it truly is.

-STUART MILLER, PH.D.
Author *Hot Springs*,
and *Understanding Europeans*

"Michael DeMaria gives us a wonderful gift - a skillful and dazzling interweaving of psychology, philosophy and spirituality. He provides a gentle guidebook for our journey with life and shows 'how the agony of the quest blossoms into the joy of the dance.' This book will be, for many, the most useful and inspiring map of this domain."

WILLIAM F. MIKULAS, PH.D.
Author of *The Way Beyond*,
Skills in Living, and *The Complete
Counselor*.

"Ever Flowing On is a spiritual guidebook for our post modern age. In our rapidly moving world of technology, globalization and materialism, one loses the inner connection with oneself thus a loss of true intimate relationships with others. We feel isolated, depressed, driven, and lack a sense of well being. This work describes the passage back to reclaiming our core nature, the essence of one's being. This absorbing, well designed book is about becoming friends with one's soul. And it is soulfully written. I find it to be a true contribution to understanding the processes of self-development.

-NANCY QUALLS-CORBETT, PH.D.
Author of *The Sacred Prostitute*

In the tradition of Sam Keen and Robert Johnson, soul doctor Michael DeMaria has brought a fresh and discerning voice to psychological and philosophical thought. Here you will find a response to our inner yearning for a model of the self and life journey which is at once elegant and authentic. Ever Flowing On is a heart centered approach to living and being.

-BARRY ARNOLD, PH.D.
Author of *In Pursuit of Virtue*
and *Essays in American Ethics*

EVER FLOWING ON

On
Being
and
Becoming
Oneself

By
Michael DeMaria, Ph.D.

Forward
Robert A. Johnson

A Wisdom Book for The Soul's Journey

Terra Nova Publishing

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To my daughter
Danielle
And
To my grandmother
Elizabeth

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Any omissions, errors, inconsistencies, are purely my fault and I apologize for any oversights that the astute reader might find. In true organic fashion if you do find any and let me know, they will be corrected in future editions.

FOREWARD

There is an ancient parable about how *truth* came into the world. In this myth there are four wise beings who have taken turns creating all things. After the earth has been filled with every kind of animal, plant, tree and human they must decide where to hide *truth*. Since this will be the ultimate goal of existence, they do not want to place it in an easily accessible place. After pondering this question for a long time, the first wise being spoke, "I have an idea, let us hide *truth* on the highest mountain, the humans will never find it there." The second almost immediately responded, "No, no, they will easily find it there. We must make it much more difficult to discover, let us hide it in the deepest part of the ocean, they will most assuredly drown before finding it there." The third after thinking about the first two ideas, then said, "These are good ideas, but not the best. Let us hide *truth* in the farthest reaches of outer space, the humans will take forever to find it there." The first two immediately realized this could be the answer. However, the fourth wise being, who was the oldest and also most quiet of the beings sat silently with his eyes closed. He always waited until the end to speak. Finally, speaking in a serene and tranquil voice he said, "These are all good ideas, but you know human beings, constantly moving and doing, they will most assuredly search for it on the mountain, in the seas, and even on the farthest star all before they will sit still and be quiet long enough to look in the most obvious of places. Let us hide *truth* in the very last place they will look, in their own hearts." They looked at each other and smiled, yes *truth* shall be placed in the very heart of the human being. This is a poignant story for our time. The world is in desperate need to reconnect with the *truth* that is only found through a reconnecting with the heart. I can not over emphasize the peril humanity faces if we are not able to bring a feeling dimension into our world. Without it we will most certainly perish. However, with it, all things become possible. It is amazing how people work together and for the good of the whole when the heart is the place they work from. This is a book from and about the heart.

Michael's dream of his grandmother begins the book, where she asks him a simple question, "If you died tomorrow what of value have you left your daughter?" This is a heart question. A question that is often not asked in our culture until it is too late. It is the kind of question which inevitably leads to a journey. This book literally grew out of Michael's answering of this question. Michael discovered, as we all do, that before we come to our own hearts we are destined to take endless journeys climbing mountains, swimming oceans and trying to reach the stars. In the process, we inevitably will become lost, stuck or trapped. We take hopelessly wrong turns, try to fly too close to the

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sun or drown in our own sea of projections. Then somehow, mysteriously our individual lives through the slender threads of fate return us to the source from which we come and find what turns out to be buried treasure in our own back yards, the truth that resides in our own hearts, the golden world. This is the stuff of life. The journey Dr. Jung called the process of individuation. It is a process that is given new life in Michael's able hands.

Michael takes us on this journey as a wise and competent guide of the soul. Here is a map, a spiritual guide book that charts not only the "big picture" of the life journey, but also the "intimate details" of the terrain of our never ending adventure of self-discovery. This vast perspective then unfolds into rich poetic detail, without which any conceptual discussion falsifies human truth. Reliable maps afford the discerning journeyer with details of the difficult terrain, the trails off the beaten path, the hidden springs to quench your thirst, the dangers and the treasures. Faithful maps like these are priceless. *EVER FLOWING ON: On Being and Becoming Oneself* is such a map. A book of wisdom for the soul's journey home. There is an elegant structure underlying these sections - *The Source, The Abyss, The Quest and The Dance* - which mirrors the essential movement of life itself most profoundly revealed in the analogy of child birth.

The Source can be seen as the oneness of the child in the womb, prior to the contractions that will announce life, our mythic Garden of Eden, what Michael calls amness. Once the contractions of life begin, the child is in the stage of the *Abyss*, pain but without moving. This is the mythic fall from grace, being expelled from the Garden. It is here the world is split and duality begins. The third, is the child moving down the birth canal, pain, but with movement, this is *The Quest* stage of the journey, this is pain with purpose. Finally, upon birth itself, when the infant enters a strange and wondrous new world, he is ready for *The Dance*. Michael reveals throughout the book how this process is undergone over and over again. Similar to the medicine wheel of so many indigenous cultures, we live out this mythic cycle every day, every year and in every lifetime. These are perennial, archetypal patterns that Michael makes readable and understandable. The essential points of the world's great wisdom traditions are here brought to life and expressed simply through stories culled from his 20 years of experience working with himself and others, bringing a remarkable balance of feeling and thinking, being and becoming, masculine and feminine.

The reason the balance is so important is that our world has been horribly out of balance. The verb of masculine experience is *to move*, the verb of the feminine is *to be*. It is easy to see that we have been in the grips of almost

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an entirely masculine form of experience in the last two thousand years, with its most extreme and painful consequences becoming obvious in the last century. Everything is “moving” and “doing” today. There is very little “being” in our lives, and it’s killing us. It is our Being that is in such terrible shape. When we ignore the truth of our hearts, we destroy our connection to Being. We murder the feminine daily in our culture. Every Westerner refuses Being 50-500 times a day, that is *the feminine feeling function*. In this work Michael helps redeem these lost parts of our world, being and feeling, through our reconnecting with our heart and soul. These faculties are our most simple and direct ways of whole-making, which is the sacred function of life.

When a heart connection is made the world comes alive and glows. The miracle occurs through feeling, for that is when the world begins to mean something to us. It speaks to us. This is what we long for. This is a book that explores deeply this longing for Being, our inmost yearning for oneness and it does so by braiding together being and becoming. It is a timely book written with compassion, wisdom and devotion.

It is refreshing to find a book that is not promising to help “perfect” your life, a promise that is always false and empty. Dr. Jung made it clear the goal of individuation was not to become a “perfect” person, but rather a whole one. Framed between the birth of his daughter and the death of his grandmother, Michael takes us on a journey towards self-discovery and oneness, not only within ourselves, but with the world. Michael does not promise to help you lose weight, regain your youth or find your perfect soul mate. He provides something much more precious, the gentle wise council of how to find your way back to the simple miracle of living and being, while discovering a renewed affection for your life. You will begin to feel good about the miracle of being who you are, instead of trying to be something you are not. This is to learn to love and belong to your life in an intimate, authentic and genuine way.

-ROBERT A. JOHNSON
Jungian Analyst
Author of *He, She and We*,
Owning Your Own Shadow,
and *Balancing Heaven and Earth*

Prelude

Imagine...a landscape of old growth forest: thousand year old trees, a silence deep enough to wash all thoughts away, leaving nothing in its vastness, but your beholding the present moment. The moist moss covering the ground scents the air, dawn breaks through the stand of trees, beckoning the world to wake out of its night slumber. The first rays glitter through the dewy pine branches, revealing a mist not visible moments before. The breeze dancing leaves whisper through the shafts of light filtering in from the east. Mystery is palpable. The forest is alive: breathing and inviting the day into being.

As the sun rises anew each day, so we too have the opportunity to awaken each moment of every day. Sometimes our numbness makes us blind to the stark miracle of existence rising ever around us. The blessing remains, however, that no matter how long we have slept, waking up is possible. Vastness lies perpetually around us on our never ending journeys. In every pain and joy lies the makings of our next awakening. All that we require is an open mind and a thirsty heart.

It was such a day that I knew I had to write this book. I had stayed the night under the forest canopy and as I began to stir a dream played in my mind. It had already awakened me once in the middle of the night. In this nighttime visitation my grandmother came and asked me this question, *"If you died tomorrow what have you of real value to leave your daughter?"* I woke in panic. I could not answer her question. I imagined over and over my daughter as a young adult trying to understand who I was through old pictures, a few academic papers, or personal belongings, but nowhere had I put down what I knew to be of real value for one to know in living a life. The only way I could get back to sleep was committing myself to write a book that in some way would be my answer to that question. It turned out to be more difficult than I ever imagined. My grandmother died half way through the writing, which only added more gravity to my need to finish it. This book is dedicated to her and to my daughter, with gratitude for the meaning they both give to my life as I try to live in the balance between the worlds they define for me.

As I wrote I became aware that I was writing what I wished someone had told me as I began my life journey. The book began to emerge as a psycho-spiritual guide book of the soul's journey. I write not as an observer, but as a fellow traveler, who has been keenly interested in what the Native Americans call our "Earthwalk". These are markings on the way for other travelers, word cairns that hopefully will help those who understand the life journey understood as a spiritual quest.

My grandmother I have realized has become more present to me

PRELUDE

through her physical absence. Since her death it has become so vividly clear how crucial it is for us to speak our truth while we are here. I have at times included personal accounts of my own journey with the hope that truly what is most deeply personal resonates with what is most universal, that is, they hopefully will serve as touchstones to your own journey, in this way serving as part of the pattern that connects all experience with the grander themes we are all touched by. The structure of this book proceeds in a spiraling fashion. Therefore, although the most useful way of reading it is front to back, there is an implicit structure that allows the reader to start virtually anyway in the text and then proceed. The themes in this way circle throughout the text. If you find yourself drawn to a particular section, *"The Source"*, *"The Abyss"*, *"The Quest"* or *"The Dance"* feel free to start there and it will no doubt lead you to the other sections in the order that is right for you.

In the end, I feel peace now with the dream. I ask the reader that if you are willing to take this journey with me you read the words written within with the eyes of your heart AND that you be willing to dance!

PART I:
THE SOURCE

"Grandmother, how do I begin?"

"Tell her a story.

The most important story for every child to hear,
the story of how she came into the world...

Tell it simply, with heart,
for within her birth is etched the very story of Creation."



CHAPTER I:
THE MYSTERY OF BEING

I am that I am...
-God

“It’s time!” The words rang out like a mantra summoning me to awaken from a thousand year sleep. Having been up for the past 36 hours I could barely keep my eyes open. “Hello? Are you listening to me? It’s time!” My wife shouted, finally shaking me out of my trance. We were in the hospital. She had gone into labor and we were on the verge of witnessing the birth of our first and, as it turned out, only child. My wife had gone into the hospital a day earlier because of high blood pressure. We both worried through the night about complications. We were filled with anxiety, and yet, already, there was something more: waiting for the birthing. We were experiencing an incredible feeling of foreboding; half exhilaration, half terror. What we knew above all else was that we had become part of something much grander than anything we had previously imagined, part of a process much vaster than ourselves. This being had been growing within Kathy for 9 months, but now, in the middle of the rushing through of our everyday lives, the grace of the present moment began to knock at our door, waking us up. The time had come.

Never having witnessed a birth before, we were being led along a path by others who had gone before us. We tried simply to trust what we had been told. It wasn’t easy. We had seen Lamaze films, and to be quite honest had been scared by them. The images on the screen of blood, sterile room, and masked strangers had seemed impersonal, even gruesome. Yet, all that earlier repugnance had faded away now in “our” room, with “our doctors” and “our baby” about to be born. With all my stress and my wife’s painful labor, we had finally begun to feel as if we were on a river that was now taking control, taking over, if we would just let it. I did my best to help my wife breathe, relax and stay focused on the little teddy bear we had chosen as her focus object. I coached her with her breathing, and paying close attention to the monitor, told her when the contractions would begin to peak. Then without fail, the little green blip on the monitor would skip and become worse for a few seconds and she would scream, “Like hell it’s peaking, what do you know, you’re not a real doctor!” Our anxiety intensified.

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Finally, over what seemed like days, they wheeled us into the delivery room. The room and the people became a blur as I focused on Kathy's breathing. Holding her hand, I watched her face contort with pain when I told her to push. Then my attention turned to the doctor, and I heard his words, "There's the head," then in a flicker of a moment, "You've got a little princess!". A girl, a baby girl, and a sudden pure joy filled the room. The room came alive with laughter, joyous tears, and a brightness I have seldom experienced, as I whispered to Kathy, "We have a little princess." As I did, her eyes filled with indescribable relief and tears welled up and proceeded to roll ever so gingerly down the sides of her cheeks.

The following hours were enchanted as this newborn filled our world with an experience that even the word awe fails to capture. Danielle. She just "was." We basked in her presence, in her just being, her pure Danielleness, an experience no words could ever capture. As the nurses and doctors carried on with their business, I felt a glow over my body. I experienced every moment as profound, almost as if everyone in the room moved in slow motion. Unlike the films we had seen, nothing seemed gruesome in the actual delivery; rather, we felt ourselves immersed in a living, breathing, ongoing process that gave this birthing freshness, grace and richness: *amness*.

I share this experience with you because it is such a stark reminder for me of the quality of what I like to call "*amness*" that is missing from most of our moments of living. Simply stated, the experience of amness is the experience of "I am" without the I. Amness has no bounds. Amness is the felt sense, the experience of oneness. Amness is everywhere, is everything, the alpha and the omega. Amness is profoundly the ground, the soil from which we emerge, our source out of which we are born and to which we return upon death.

ALL-THAT-IS

Where did you come from, baby dear?

Out of the everywhere into the here.

-George McDonald

There is a powerful fact that is true for each and everyone of us. We all have spent 9 months (give or take a few weeks) completely within another human being. Take pause to think on this for a moment. We were encased within the abdomen of another human being. Wholly dependent upon this other. The womb bathed us in its warmth and nurturance and we were com-

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pletely at one with this other. We grew out of another being, who in turn grew out of another being, and so on, and so on... The great parade of being marches onward in this way. Can we really ever say when we came to be? Let yourself imagine for a moment, your grandmother giving birth to your mother. Now imagine your grandmother's mother giving birth to her, and go further back to her mother, and her mother's mother. All the way back, back in time, there is a connection with life that has never ceased. From one living source to another the flame has been burning forever. We are all of the same fire. When the Native American's say the Spirit-that-moves-in-all-things they are referring to this inmost truth - People of the One Fire. Where did it start? One can never pinpoint it in time and space. It defies reason, logic and analysis. It is similar to the question of what existed before the Big Bang? Or, why is there a Universe at all, instead of nothing? ***The deepest mystery is that there is something eternal about who we are.*** The subatomic particles that make up the blood that courses through our veins have always been, and at the same time are always reborn every moment. Through every living thing runs this thread of amness that unites us and if we follow this golden strand far enough, it will bring us to the insight that all creation is related to us. We are all part and parcel of this fabric of *all-that-is* and are not only related to each other, but also to the galaxies and stars that fill the night sky. *Amness* is a return to the source of who we are and *all-that-is*. In this way, all of creation, the millions of years of plant life, animal life, and the billions of years of rock life all in some amazing way are etched into the very fabric of our cells, blood and very being.

The word *source* comes from the Latin *urgere*, meaning to rise, spring up, and surge forth. It usually is used to refer to a fountain, a stream, from which something comes into existence, develops or derives its very being. Our daily moments of amness nourish us like refreshing, crystal clear spring water rising up from the great reservoir of *amness*. Einstein spent the last half of his life searching for what he called, the Unified Field Theory, which would conceptually and mathematically describe that which underlies and interpenetrates all phenomena in the cosmos. In quantum physics we now realize that consciousness itself and all phenomena that consciousness experiences occur in one grand field of Being. We may imagine ourselves separate from this field, the source of *all-that-is*, yet the separation is illusion. Every experience of amness in a very real way is one of being at the *source*, from which *all-that-is* perpetually arises and to which it returns. To use Einstein's famous analogy, Amness is a circle whose circumference is no where and whose center is everywhere. Therefore, when we are in the grips of amness we are actually experiencing the

THE SOURCE

Unified Field. Amness is the unified field.

THE VITAL CONNECTION

This fact helps us understand further why the infant is such a powerful example of *amness*, of what we might call an *immediate livingness*. An infant, for instance, is immersed in pure be-holding. No sense of self or “I” separates the baby from whatever it senses and experiences. The infant’s eyes take in everything, holding onto nothing, no conceptualizations, no rationalizations or differentiating, just sheer be-holding. This is the condition we all started from as sentient beings upon this planet. It is what I like to call our *vital connection* to all-that-is. Unfortunately, from a tender age in our society we all too quickly become educated out of this *vital connection*. Of course, it is crucial that we learn to differentiate, categorize, and name the world around us. It is through this process that we develop an ego, that is, the social self that helps us maneuver in the world. Yet, underneath our sophisticated well developed masks of civilized competence and solidity lies that infant-like core of pure be-holding. This is our original face, our true inheritance. The core of our psyche is that softness of pure Being...*amness*, where we feel ourselves in the unbroken web of *all-that-is*. It is here in the vital connection with the present moment that we re-connect with existence and ourselves and re-member who we truly are, beyond and beneath all the differentiation of names and roles, fears and duties. Here we can rest in the here-and-now and breathe in the synergy of feeling integrated with the seamless field of *all-that-is*. Many years later I shared my experience of Danielle’s birth with a Native American Elder. He responded in a matter of fact tone of voice, “Yes, the world glows as a new soul enters the world and as an old soul leaves.” This is *amness*:

Those of you who have been present at a birth know that a numinous face fills the room - Creation and the Great Mystery overflow. No matter how messy the child may be from the birth, a radiance glows from that little being. The newborn is almost total spirit, coming awake in unknown flesh. Those wings of spirit...flutter and open, flap and stretch in a brief display, and are then quiet again.¹

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I have found it exceedingly helpful and rich to have people who in workshops or in psychotherapy spontaneously recall times they have *experienced* amness in their lives. They inevitably begin to speak of *the* most profound, moving and intimate moments of their lives. Their eyes light up, their skin glows, and something about their whole presence relaxes as they simply begin to remember these experiences. Sometimes they smile, other times they laugh, and more often than not their eyes well up as they recall the joy of the connection and the bittersweet pain of disconnection. Like Serena:

When I am dancing, I am alive. I am the dance, the music flows through me, is me! I know what you mean by "amness". I can't try to get there, I just find myself... there... all of a sudden letting go...then, some melting deep inside begins to happen, and...it's as if all my usual inhibitions, painful self-consciousness, and awkwardness fall away. "I" fall away. Then there is just dancing, or maybe being danced! No, even more subtle...dancing happens...Sometimes I wonder if I live just for those moments. How I wish I could live in those moments always.

One woman talked of watching thunderstorms move over the Gulf of Mexico and feeling as if the thunder rolling off the water came from "inside" of her. In those moments she "felt alive and connected to the ocean, the sky, and the rain." One young man shared how listening to a particular piece of music always brought a sense of both tears to his eyes and food to his soul. He would put on his ear phones, lie down, tie a bandanna around his eyes and literally, "lose" himself in the music. He would feel the usual boundaries of his body give way. Others spoke of out-of-body experiences. Not only did the psychological boundaries of an "I" disappear, but so did the actual bodily sense of "I." People often describe feeling as if they are "floating" or "melting." In the midst of a profound amness experience, one's usual physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual boundaries give way to an oceanic oneness. This is both its joy and, to some, its terror. I have had others describe amness experiences occurring while long-distance running, playing soccer, skiing, playing with their children and perhaps most frequently of all making love. It is this particular quality of *amness* that is *the* root experience of being alive in all of its vividness and richness. I have found working over the years with people

THE SOURCE

that helping them learn to re-connect and re-discover *amness* leads them back to an abiding immediacy with their experience of themselves and the world around them. The more we invite *amness* the more our bodies and our very beings become more fluid, relaxed and open to deeper levels of tranquility and serenity.

This form of experience does not involve a value judgment such as, “Boy, I’m enjoying this sunset. This sunset is just beautiful. I am so lucky to be looking at this sunset right this moment.” In this example, there is a distance between the sense of “I” and the sunset. The sunset is seen as an object in the world upon which the “I” is making a value judgment. Whereas, in a dynamic *amness* experience there is simply pure *be-holding* where subject and object dissolve into a unitary experience of Being. Children know this experience much more intimately than adults. They only recently left the unselfconscious, even unconscious experience of *amness*. They easily immerse themselves in the moment, particularly in play. Adults who have lost touch with their inner child often have lost touch with *amness*. It is no wonder that there has been such a powerful movement over the last decade towards reclaiming one’s inner child. Re-embracing the child that dwells within us is one way back to the *vital connection* between self and the greater life from which we come. As Jesus said, “Unless you change your life and become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.”

There is a powerful story in the *Gospel of Thomas* which gives us a deeper appreciation of the intimate relationship between the archetype of the infant, *amness*, and the Kingdom of Heaven:

*Jesus saw some infants nursing. He said to his disciples, “These infants are like those who enter the kingdom of heaven.” They said to him, “How then can we enter?” Jesus said to them, “When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, then you will enter the kingdom.”*²²

This simple story vividly draws the connection between the infant and this *vital connection* of *amness*, a wisdom we all possess, but usually only in its latent form. The infant bestows upon us the re-membering of *amness*, the wisdom of just being. This remarkable passage also gives us a deeper glance

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into the profound nature of amness. It is beyond duality. Most of our lives are lived in a black and white duality, it is the rare soul who transcends the opposites of existence, however, we all have moments of transcendence. It is in these moments that we re-member a place that in its natural state exists beyond such duality. It is the dwelling place all mystics have known exists as the precious aim of a long spiritual journey. It is the place of oneness. Life is a journey towards *amness*, a quest for reconnecting with this unitary experience of body, mind, and soul, which opens up the possibility of living most fully and loving most deeply.

Some may ask, "If amness is beyond duality, then why use the word vital connection, since connection implies duality? What is being connected to what?" This is a good question and moves us ever further into the territory of amness. The word connection comes from the Latin *connectere*, meaning to fasten or come together; to couple, to link. So the vital connection is the connection between human being and Being. In an organic sense we might imagine a tree pulled from its roots. Often today we have lost our essential rootedness in our first person experience of the world. We might imagine the vital connection as a tap root. It is this root that sinks us into the vast field of Being that is our true vital connection. It appears a duality only to the degree that there has been a severing of a previous unity.

Another useful metaphor is an electrical connection. There are two wires. One is connected to the source current. The other is dead wire, no current. When they are "connected" the current flows freely. No duality. Often a question comes up in therapy that suggests this metaphor, "Do you feel plugged in?" The person usually immediately, intuitively knows what I mean by this. If not, I will go further and say, "Do you feel plugged into creation, into Being, being alive?". Do they feel plugged into life, into the senses, feelings and texture, nuance and smell of life?

Unfortunately, most people today suffer from depersonalization and derealization, which means they feel disconnected, out of touch. It is as if they are watching their life like a movie, they are not "in" their bodies and therefore, they are not "in" their life. They have lost their vital connection.

In both analogies there is a sense that the cut off part is dead, either dead wire, or a dead tree. The images of the rootedness of a tree as well as an electromagnetic current also denote the need for a flow - in one a flow of current, in the other a flow of nutrients, minerals and water. Finally, both analogies also imply a "vitality" at the root of the connection; one electrical, one biochemical. Another way of talking about the vital connection is through

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what has been traditionally called the “connected breath.” This is a deep diaphragmatic breathing that infants and many tribal people naturally breathe. In predominately white, civilized, Western culture we breathe shallow breaths. We breathe from the chest, not the diaphragm. The connected breath refers to the out breath being connected to the in breath, but further it means that one is “connected” to the breath of all things. To breathe in this way is to realize that you and the trees are one organism. In fact, to some Native American tribes God is spoken of as the Master of The Breath, it is our most basic rootedness in Being. One of the characteristics they saw in the “white man” that scared them was they seemed to be unaware of their breath. They were not “connected” to the breath of creation in a conscious way. What do I mean by this?

In helping my daughter with the “Carbon-Dioxide - Oxygen Cycle,” I was reminded how clearly this amazing cycle display’s a quality of amness and the vital connection. For those not familiar with this cycle, it simply refers to the fact that in photosynthesis plants and trees take in sunlight, water and carbon dioxide and then give off oxygen and food (in the form of hydrogen, sugar, such as in roots or fruit); then in respiration, animals/humans take in oxygen and food and give off carbon dioxide, water and fertilizer for the plants. There is a profound reciprocity here. It is no accident that trees produce oxygen and food for us and we produce carbon dioxide, water and fertilizer for them. Of course not, it is a fact that most of us completely ignore. Otherwise, whenever we looked at trees we would see part of own lungs. Is it just me or is there something incredibly awesome about that? Science had simply led us back to the vital connection with everything around us...amness. Now the challenge is to experience this as a tangible, palpable reality, not just as idea, but as a living breathing actuality, we and the plants are connected in this grand web of Being. Now we are invoking amness.

THE MIRACLE

There are two ways to look at the world, one that almost nothing is a miracle, or two, that everything is a miracle.

- Einstein

Why is there something instead of nothing? This has been an ancient riddle since the beginning of recorded time. We can love life or hate it, but the fact that it exists at all continues to be a miracle. The awareness of this miracle

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reaches into the core of each and every one of us, of everything we touch, love and wish for. It also has to do with everything we cannot see, that which dreams are made of, the stuff of reality, the stuff of fantasy, where ideas come from, how anything happens, appears, is contemplated, witnessed or simply is. Until we can stand back enough to let “what is” dazzle us in a blaze of glory, meeting us in a resounding, joyous chorus that chants, “I am you, you are me, we are all one,” we will feel cut off. For Being is our mother and our father, our sister and our brother, BEING is *All-That-Is*.

BEING...Let yourself say the word out loud. Being with a big “B”. B-E-I-N-G. I never tire of saying Being, as long as I allow myself the delicious miracle of this word. In this way, it is more than a word, it is an incantation to *all-that-is*. Therefore, allow yourself to close your eyes, breathe deeply and fully, and as you exhale simply say BEING. Let yourself resonate with everything around you as you utter this deeply felt, deeply sacred word. For “it” denotes *all-that-is*.

When we fully grasp the statement, “It’s a miracle anything is at all,” we are led to a greater appreciation of all facets of our world. For one, we begin to realize that it is a miracle anything gets *done* at all. So often we spend our time regretting what we have not done or anticipating what we need to do. Even when we think about what we have done, we incessantly judge it according to impossible standards. Imagine how freeing it could be to really be amazed each time you accomplish anything. Even waking up in the morning, going to the bathroom, drinking a glass of water takes on mythic proportions.

Children are immersed in this reality. If I ask my daughter to go brush her teeth, this seemingly mundane affair takes on all the drama of an adventurous journey. In the middle of finding her toothbrush, she turns on the water and begins running her hands through it. She notices the feel of the water, giggles just at the sheer fact of the miracle of running water, how it feels and how it flows. She finds my shaving cream and plays with the texture of it then notices the funny designs she can make with it on the sink. Then she takes small drops of water and slowly dissolves the intricate designs she made the moment before. Next thing I know she’s been “brushing her teeth” for the last 20 minutes but still has no toothpaste on her toothbrush. Frustrating from a parent’s perspective trying to simply “get the job done”. But this simple story illustrates that most adults have learned how to “get the job done” at the expense of feeling vitally connected to our experience the way my daughter is connected to the moment as she plays in the water in the sink. From this perspective it truly is a miracle anything ever gets done!

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Going further into this understanding we confront perhaps the inmost level of the miracle, that is, “it is a miracle I am at all.” To *truly* view our own individual and unique life as a miracle in its moment to moment unfolding, is to see consciousness as a form of grace. In this way life becomes a practice of gratefulness. It is when we are able to profoundly appreciate the sheer fact of existence that the mystery and depth of Being can truly move us and even redeem us if we allow it. As soon as we are lulled back to sleep and forget the miracle, the incessant complaints and blaming begin about why this is this way, or so and so isn’t more thoughtful, kind and appreciative. Here is the birth place of conflict, dissatisfaction and thus, suffering. Yet, even if we follow suffering and pain to their logical conclusion - death, they too will forever put the miracle of existence back into perspective. All of a sudden, upon the death of a loved one, we see the miracle that they “were” at all and now will never “be” again.

It is so important to be gentle and merciful with ourselves. No matter how “bad” things become, well below the surface, in the silent recesses of ourselves are the seeds of our becoming are growing and germinating. Our awareness can blossom then into witnessing the unfolding panorama of Being. The silence and darkness are our mother and father. They are the deepest mystery of Being. Remember, Being is a verb, pointing to the process itself, which includes the unseen, the unheard and the unknown.

As we deepen our ability to live in the awareness that, “it is a miracle that anything is at all,” the more we nurture our “vital connection,” the more we can appreciate this one, particular, unique, never to be repeated instant in creation, the more we experience the nourishing waters of *amness*. For many this is the experience of the spiritual, of the Creator, for some it is Love. Whatever different people and cultures have “named” it, these various signs are always and forever pointing towards the *élan vital*, the vital impulse of life itself, which vibrates and pulsates with the blood of Being, animating all Creation. We are born of *all-that-is*, which is forever a mystery, yet we catch glimpses of the source of all we are in our moments of amness.

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THE MYSTERY OF BEING

*The mystical is not how the world is, but that
it is.*

- Wittgenstein

To better understand how we have become separated from the ground of being we must dig deeper into the soil of our cultural heritage. We can trace part of our “vital roots” back to Aristotle. Until his time (400 B.C.) the question “what is?” or “what is reality?” was not asked. Reality just “was” -- a miracle, supernatural. Aristotle decided the question “what is?” could never be answered, at least not logically; therefore, it became more important to begin to describe how things were. This approach led inevitably to the quest for knowledge and certainty being more to do with counting how many things there were, describing how they function, taking them apart and putting them back together. As a result, the elaborate march of “progress” became caught up in classifying, dividing, analyzing what is, into “it’s”: how “it” is, how many “its” there are, what “it” is made of, how “it” all goes together, what “it” can do, when “it” happens, why “it” happens, when “it” started, when will “it” end, etc. etc. etc. This move into analysis was a new playground for the “mind” (another “it”).

“It” (“all-that-is” or Being) came to be seen as a noun, a thing. Even today most of us live as though Being is a noun. When we try to talk about Being or grab hold of “it,” we are treating “it” as a thing, and when we do, we lose “it.” (One can see we are limited by our language, because here I am having to refer to reality as an “it” while trying to evoke the deeper truth of Being as the grand process of all-that-is). In actuality, there is no “it” to get hold of. Being is the proliferation and never ending unfolding of reality “itself.” Being is...

Being is with us, is us every moment. There is no other word used more than “is.” For those who have ever learned a foreign language you know that when you begin to study the verb “to be” you are in for a fun time, or frustrating one, depending how you like chaos. The verb “to be” winds itself in and out of every utterance. Every time we speak, or write, “it” is there. We cannot avoid “it.” However, we have lost the joy in the sheer fact of being. Being Is!

Children reveal to us the innate curiosity we all share concerning Being, as they drive us crazy with such juicy questions as; “What is God made of? Why are we here? What is this world? What happens when we die? What is anything really?” No amount of scientific or pat religious answers quench the

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thirst with which these questions are asked. Unfortunately, as a result, we hide or even worse, deny our thirst as we grow up, telling ourselves there is no water that could ever quench such thirst. Whenever I read philosophers or spiritual teachers ancient or modern, or for that matter clients or friends who admit that their thirst remains, I am always moved. That level of honesty profoundly touches me, as it continues to when I meet people on their own search and they have come to the very real place of not knowing and have the courage to say so.

More akin to the consciousness of children, most indigenous peoples do not have a word for “it.” The impersonal pronoun that makes everything that is alive, into something inert, dead, inanimate is no where to be found for example, in the root language of the Lakota Sioux. They knew, as we did as children, that everything is alive!

It is something of another miracle itself that science, in the findings of quantum physics, has actually helped all of us re-discover this childlike awareness of the miracle - “what is.” It is almost as if, in trying to count and describe the “its” we see, hear and feel, we have come face to face with the enormous wonder at existence our ancestors knew. For example, every breath you take contains 10 to the 30th atoms. The equation $E=MC^2$ describes the energy each and every one of these atoms. Energy is equal to mass multiplied by the square of the speed of light. Simply put, this means that even a very minute amount of matter contains a vast amount of energy. Say, for instance, if you broke off a small piece of this page you are reading, perhaps the size of a dime; now multiply the weight of that piece of paper, times the speed of light (186,000 miles per second), now square that number. You get an incredibly large number. Now imagine that in every cell of your body there are literally millions of atoms, and there are millions of cells in your body. You are one powerful being. You are on fire! You breathe fire! The world is made of this fire-light-energy! We *are* that energy. These discoveries re-ignite our curiosity concerning truly “what are we?” and “what is this phenomenon called reality?”

Unfortunately, we are usually taught in school not to have too much enthusiasm. We are taught cold, hard facts. Not that we are on fire! Over time, the mystery, wonder, and miracle of being alive are relegated to the scrap heap. We become machine-like, going through the motions, taking our cues of who we are, what to do, how to think from others to the point that we become separated from our childlike wonder of “wow, being alive is so totally awesome!” Instead we become bored to tears.

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PARADISE, AMNESS AND NATURE

All cultures have their myths of Paradise. The Garden of Eden in the West, Nirvana in the East - no matter the name, they all point to Amness. Paradise is whenever we are in a state of *amness*. We drink of the infinite elixir of just pure Being; no place to go, nothing to have to be - no regret, no anticipation, just be-holding the moment, the precious present. Ahhh! that is paradise.

The main theme in all mythic Paradise stories is human beings living in an unselfconscious harmony with Nature. So it is no wonder that the natural world provides endless opportunities for amness for children and adults alike. In the left front corner of our yard when I was a child, there grew a maple tree I loved dearly. Our house sat a top a hill, so I could roll and tumble down the hill until I came near my good friend, my sacred maple tree. This maple had smooth bark that even in winter felt warm to my touch. I always referred to the tree as "her." As most children, I intuitively understood the meaning of "Mother Nature." I knew she was a living being who helped me feel real and substantial, safe and secure. When the impinging adult world became too much, when parents were arguing, brothers were fighting, or friends left, I would go to her. In Native American culture she would be considered a "medicine place," to our Celtic ancestors she would have been a "guardian spirit": a place in nature where one goes to heal and become centered within oneself. I can still picture those moments and the excitement I would feel just thinking about being with her. I would begin by rolling down the hill, almost bumping into her, then jump up and climb into her branches. As I did, I could feel the comfort of her branches wrapping around me. She just was. She was a being, and is a being. A pal of mine from my childhood days in Connecticut recently sent me a picture of our house and I felt a glowing over me as I recognized my friend, the maple, peeking out at me from the corner of the picture.

Trees can communicate a profound sense of the reality, the being or amness of their place to us. They live out their lives moving downward towards the molten core of the earth, upward towards the vast sky, and outward just enough to radiate from the core of their own being. If we could only learn that lesson: *for every inch upward and outward, we must dig our roots in an equal distance downward and inward*. I recall experiencing vividly as a child, the sense of place my friend the maple had. Her joyous experience of simple AMNESS! She filled me with the mystery, the bliss, of pure being.

It didn't matter what time of the year, spring, summer, fall or winter.

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With each season she changed her mood. In winter I would climb her after dark and as the snow fell gently to the ground find that “just right” feeling between her two largest branches that felt like two arms holding me. There was a light from our house that would cast shadows through the branches. The darkness and silence became a slice of eternity. As the snow fell, in those silent nights, there was a contentment and something more, completeness. No place to go. Nothing to do. No anticipation. No regret. So, too, we can imagine that during the aboriginal times when the tree provided the central metaphor for Being, human culture was in its childhood, and our sense of place was keen as a bright morning.

My sacred maple’s sheer presence communicated that abiding truth, “I am that I am.” Is it any coincidence that God spoke these words to Moses in the form of a “burning bush?” Everyone of us from our early years is in search of this experience. This deep affirmation of Being. I remember when I began to examine my own life’s journey more intently, someone asked, “What did you want to be as a child?” I felt strange when I heard those words. I tried asking the little boy within me. As I sat with the question, that little boy inside began showing me old images of wanting to be a film maker, a doctor, a surgeon, a forest ranger, an actor, an artist, a drummer. The images came faster and faster and I found myself recalling earlier and earlier experiences until that little boy showed me the most lucid clear image I could recall. An image of moments where I was completely present, when I was a beholder, a witness. I was simply be-holding the world around me, entranced with the sight of trees, grass, and clouds moving above me, the wind caressing my hair, and the sun playing chase with the moon. Being and beholding. That’s what I wanted to be, the sun, moon and stars. No, it would be more accurate to say, that is who I felt myself to be. I came to realize this truth I had instinctively known and desperately, now, needed to re-member.

Re-membering became the beginning of much healing for me. The more I reconnected with those vivid moments of gazing out onto the world and beholding the unfolding of nature, the more I felt myself able to do the same in my present life. I recalled hours of beholding, just beholding; whether out the school bus window or laying on the grass watching clouds appear and disappear. I remember simply reclining into the moment, witnessing *all-that-is* and truly feeling connected to all things. When it rained, it was as a miracle, the landscape changed and I soaked up the changes like the changing colors of a kaleidoscope.

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AMNESS AND BEHOLDING VISUALIZATION:

Beholding is a melting into amness, flowing with the river. Holding is grasping at the water, trying to trap the waves. Cultures have many different terms for beholding and for the experience of amness. In some cultures it is considered a particular place that only a privileged few ever have the opportunity of entering - variously called “nirvana”, “enlightenment”, “samadhi”, or “the pure land.” My experience tells me differently. All of us have had spontaneous experiences with amness, though we do better when we learn how to make such awareness part of the fabric of our everyday living. Because most people I work with do not have such a practice I find the following visualization very helpful. My openness to re-experiencing my daughter’s birth and recalling my sacred maple tree *both came from my practicing such an exercise.* Now, this is an opportunity for you to explore this terrain yourself.

Take a moment now before reading on to close your eyes and begin by taking a few very deep breaths. Imagine that these are the first real conscious breaths of your life. As you breathe in imagine that you are stoking a fire inside with each breath, that you are re-connecting with the air around you, the space around you, and ultimately with all being. Now let yourself visualize a time or a place in your childhood where you felt a deep sense of “Amness.” No where to go. Nothing to do. Nothing to *have* to be. Nothing to buy. Nothing to sell. Just pure being. When you have the image, allow yourself to dwell with it. Notice the feeling in your body as you allow yourself to journey to that time, that place where you were able to just be.

Try to allow somewhere between 10 and 15 minutes to explore this experience in as much detail as possible. If you have difficulty, do not push yourself but simply let the idea of imagining a time when you felt a deep sense of Amness incubate within you for a few days or even weeks. You may find your time in a dream, or have it in a sudden unexpected image or in a memory. It will come when you are ready. After you have your image write it down, providing as much detail as you can. Pay particular attention to describing what the experience was like for you. As you write keep the following questions in mind:

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What circumstances led up to the experience?

How did you feel in your body?

Who else was there?

How did the experience change you?

How often do you remember this moment in time?

How can bringing this memory back into your present life help you?

Secondly, try to symbolically bring the experience into your present existence. This may take the form of writing a poem, drawing a picture or creating something else that reminds you of the experience. For the more daring, you may draw a picture using children's crayons and paper, drawing it the way you would have as a child. One way to foster this is to use your non-dominant hand to do the drawing and coloring. Finally, ask yourself, "*How might I nurture this experience in my life?*" In this way you will begin to "seed" the lawn of your life and slowly but surely amness will germinate and grow. You will find yourself having more and more amness experiences. Of course this is a life long process that cannot be rushed. The key is patience. It is, in essence, the most natural process. A monk once described the movement of the soul towards God as analogous to one dropping a ball. We desire and naturally move towards *amness* if given the chance. Whether we try or not the gravity of the whole fabric of Being is drawing us ever closer to amness our whole life-long until at death we merge perfectly, imperceptibly back into the source from which we came.