FAADING TOWARD

ENLIGHTENMENT

Life between the Ego and the Ethereal

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DEDICATION

Fading Toward Enlightenment is dedicated to all the Spiritual Seekers who, in their quest for Inner Peace, sacrifice some of their Normality, to recognize some of their Divinity.

You may be different – but you are not alone.

The ideal is in thyself, the impediment too is in thyself

Thomas Carlyle
These are the words of the spiritual seeker, of the dissatisfied and the distraught – these are the words that motivate the Hero to rise up and venture forth to lands distant and unknown.

Powerful words. Primal words. Words of magic and dreams and visions. Words that propel the seeker onward when the winds of the mind blow bitter and cold. Words that strengthen failing resolve when doubt overwhelms the heart and the sense of loss weighs heavily on the soul.

A pull, a longing, a vague and mysterious force draws the seeker ever onward. Spiritual trials tax their resources. Psychological dangers test their courage. And around each turn of this solitary path? Only the Specter of Loneliness.

These are the themes of the mythical stories, from *The Iliad* to *The Celestine Prophecy*. These are the words that resonate within the Hero’s chest – the driving force of unfulfilled destiny.

The path is long and arduous, but, like all epic journeys, the rewards are vast and the benefits immeasurable. What follows is the true story of my personal quest for the elusive Grail of Inner Peace – for I, like seekers the world over, was once also drawn...
There is one spectacle grander than the sea, that is the sky; there is one spectacle grander than the sky, that is the interior of the soul.

Victor Hugo
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What is it like inside the mind of an enlightened person? Imagine, upon awaking one morning, you find yourself looking out of the eyes of a Buddha, Dali Lama, Christ or Maharshi.

One of the first things you would notice is just how quiet it is in here. All the reactive thoughts and running commentary are gone. There is an inner silence, a calm stillness, and this amazing sense of expectation. It is much like listening intently to your favorite music when the power suddenly goes out – there is powerful silence, calm stillness and alert awareness. There is this moment and no other.
Because of this stillness, this silence, this lack of mental chatter, your senses are vastly heightened. You see the wonderful play of light and shadows of the morning sun on your bedroom wall; you feel the sheet caress your skin as you roll onto your side; you hear the tiny pauses in the sparrow’s song as she sings outside your window.

With a shock, and a bit of disorientation, you realize that this person is – for the lack of a better word – missing. You look into his memory and find his past, his childhood, his yesterdays, but you can’t seem to find “him.” Like a closed and locked door, you see yourself as very solid, very stable, very real. But when you look for this man, you find a clear, unobstructed doorway. You see where the door was, where the hinges were attached to the frame, but there is no door. Just an opening between the inside world and the outside world.

You experience an intense feeling of potential. This doorway, this emptiness, is very alive. Everything you see or feel comes out of this openness, floats around for awhile, then merges back into it. You see your thoughts arise from it, bounce around a little and then sink back into it. You see your bedroom wall solidify out of it; you see the morning light shine from it; you hear each note of the sparrow’s song awaken, tremble, and die back into it. Suddenly you realize a wonderful and profound truth: Nothing equals Nothing equals Everything. Zero grains of sand are equal to zero galaxies. Everything comes from this Emptiness, this great doorway. Everything – including your “self.” In a way, you see everything as yourself.

But now you must come back. Back to your solid, separate world. Back to your normal experience of life. You hear the inner noise of constant mental chatter. You feel the tension of stress in your shoulders and neck. You are pulled from the Oneness and return once again to that state of constant anticipation, the world of joy, hope and fears. You return to where everything seems so separate and all emotions feel so personal.

Often you return to that Stillness, but the reoccurring noise in your mind quickly drowns out its subtle whispers. Back and forth between the two realms you go. Back and forth between the Ethereal and the Ego. This constantly fluctuating viewpoint feels very dynamic, very liquid. You no longer feel Solid, like your friends and neighbors, but you know that you are not enlightened like the Ethereal Ones either. What would your life be like, knowing the “truth” of Enlightenment, yet still being stuck with this very ego-centric, self-centered viewpoint?

This is the true story of my journey, from a very Solid, normal person, to a very Liquid, fluid one. I am not enlightened, but I am no longer normal either. It may seem Solid and egotistical to write a book about my own spiritual growth, but this level of awareness is only discussed in complex psychological texts and deep philosophical treaties. It is my hope that by introducing this level of awareness, other spiritual seekers may find some solace knowing that their confusion and doubts are not exclusively their own. That with a little confidence, they can relax their grip on the Solid rock of the ego. Release their grasp and float carefree on the Liquid ocean – an ocean which, on the horizon, merges with the Ethereal sky.
There’s no limit to how complicated things can get, on account of one thing always leading to another.

*E. B. White*
Though I didn’t know it at the time, I heard the Siren’s song within my mother’s womb. Even before I was born, I was being drawn to my death.

All babies are empty vessels, open journals filled with blank pages. Though their stories haven’t been written, circumstances have established much of their plots.

Like other children, the values of my parents soon became my own. In ink I’d write each lesson upon a stone, placing it within the empty container of my soul.

Who decides what fills our earthen pots? Who decides our fate? Who writes our moral code? The urn is filled. Fate is sealed. Destiny is written.

The efforts which we make to escape from our destiny only serve to lead us into it.

_Ralph Waldo Emerson_
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Youth — The child’s body develops and grows like an acorn to its inevitable fate. The mental lessons of his parents, peers and teachers, effortlessly blend with his own. In his youth, his values, ideals and even his destiny are written in permanent ink on the parchment of his soul. In later years he will try to scratch them out — but ultimately his story is too solid, and the writings resist being erased.

Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.

James Baldwin
From a still and lonely lake, in a wood few people ever go, from the mist a Siren sings a haunting song, “To me. To me. Please come back to me.”

Drawn to adventure, to danger, to prove myself a man, I enlisted as a soldier. Upon some of the larger stones inside my urn were the words “Honor” and “Duty” and “Sacrifice.”

Muscles grew on bones made strong. “Right” and “Wrong” became crystal clear. “Uphold the American Way” was pounded in my head. “Serve God and Country” was programmed on my Soul.

Under the weight of so many stones, the earthen pot crumbled to dust. What remained was one large and solid rock. On the face, a single character: The capital letter I.

Our virtues are most frequently but vices disguised.

Francois de la Rochefoucauld
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Young men lust for many things: For women, for honor, for conquest. He is no different, and he is drawn to adventure like the bee to the flower. The lessons he learns become him. With each passing day, his story grows more solid, his life becomes more defined. No longer is he one with the world, no longer is he carefree. His environment has shaped and formed him. He is a product of his past, a creature of reaction. He is quite simply — a thinking machine.

The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.

*Samuel Johnson*
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In every life, Fate turns a card, but when, we cannot know. In the barracks one day, she held up a mirror reflecting a darkness deep in my heart.

The mirror hid nothing. The image was clear. The truth undeniable. What I wanted, what I desired, what I lusted to do, was to kill and to maim and to rape.

I guess most people, when their dark side is seen, close their eyes and try to deny it. But the reflection was clear. The facts proven true. Simply put, I was everything I hated.

We often think of our country’s enemies as being brainwashed pawns of the State. I looked in my heart and realized the truth: That I was a pawn of the State.

I am always with myself, and it is I who am my tormentor.

Leo Tolstoy
At some point in every young life, innocence is lost — sometimes painfully and brutally. Seeing the darkness within his own soul, causes him to doubt authority. For it is authority that has shaped and formed him. What he held to be true is questioned, and his value system teeters on the edge of a precipice. Suddenly he is alone in a world which seems cold and cruel and heartless. Youth is lost — adulthood begins, and the painful questioning commences.

Every great advance in natural knowledge has involved the absolute rejection of authority.

*Thomas Huxley*
Who does the hating when you hate yourself? Who is to blame for your actions? The flames of condemnation soon burn out with the waters of deep introspection.

Lost in the woods on a dark moonless night. My compass was broken. My supplies—spoiled. In the shadows, the eyes of the wolves glowed hungrily. Drifting on the wind— the Siren’s song.

Beaten and humbled, Death and Truth were my only companions. The trap had been sprung. The battle was lost. All my questions were answered with silence.

Where does one stand when the ground disappears? Where do you turn in the fog? What do you believe in, when you no longer have faith? On the stone, a tiny crack formed.

Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism.

Jean-Paul Sartre
What he was told to be true — was not. What he felt was solid — was unreal. What he believed in — was ultimately proven false. With his first defeat his confidence is shattered. Trauma often precedes change, and a hopeless battle was waged. But a war fought with yourself can never be won. A truce must be called, treaties signed. No one wins, but an uncomfortable peace allows him some rest…

If a house be divided against itself, the house cannot stand.

Mark 3:25
Selfish and motivated, I worked hard at my career. People were used and discarded. A normal, solid life I lived. And the stone of my soul remained solid.

For years I ran the treadmill life. For years I ran and ran and ran. What was bought was broken and bought again. From nagging questions I ran.

I dated many women, but only for a month or two. I made a lot of money, and blew it all away. “I want, I want, I want” — the mantra of the Stone. The mantra of my peers.

Standing alone on a cold, misty morning, I gazed at the freshly turned earth. The flowers were rotting, the clay turned to mud, and at my grandfather’s grave, I wept.

Awakening begins when a man realizes that he is going nowhere and does not know where to go.

Georges Gurdjieff
He tries to live a “normal” life, but Life cannot be lived futilely for long. Her nature is to grow, to thrive, to flourish. Once she is awoken, she will not be forgotten again. Here is where he either closes his eyes and turns his back — or he faces the Darkness fully. Past this point, if he is foolish enough to continue forward, he will soon find himself helpless, friendless and alone.

I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term natural selection.

*Charles Darwin*
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Long ago I questioned authority, now I questioned God. What is the Purpose? Why am I here? In the crack on the stone, a crystal of ice formed.

The rational side of my cynical soul, said the questions were not valid. They made assumptions based on beliefs. And beliefs were the hope of the foolish.

From my grandfather’s grave, my eyes came to rest on a lone branch filled with new cherry blossoms. Time suddenly ceased. The quiet – profound, and for the first time, I sensed a greater intelligence.

Regardless of what the mind had determined, I could deny the meaning no longer. The ice in the stone shattered the rock into dust. The rain fell and mud formed.

A single event can awaken within us a stranger totally unknown to us.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery
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Fresh turned earth with his grandfather deep below; Rotting flowers on the clay; A cherry tree, celebrating Life. The images were burned forever in his mind. He had been wasting his time, filling his life with temporary pleasures, living the unspoken illusion that if he kept busy enough, he would live forever. He had been happily living a lie. A lie he could live no longer.

Death twitches my ear, “Live,” he says, “I am coming.”

Virgil
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