



RELIGIOUS HYGIENE FOR WILD MEN
Sermonettes on Etiquette and Higher Matters

BY
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RELIGIOUS HYGIENE FOR WILD MEN¹

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Religion provides a framework for aspiration—even for wild men. But it also comes with heavy baggage of unsubstantiated claims, assumptions, imperatives, loyalty tests, and an invading army of texts, hymns, rituals, prayers, and marching orders. Most submit, but the quality of acceptance varies. John Eldredge² revisits *Genesis*, Robert Bly’s *Iron Man*, and Ezra Pound’s *Goodly Frere* to support the claim that a man’s just gotta be a man, so get over it. The nuanced presentation, replete with literary allusions, provides deniability should his work be cited in support of White Christian Militant Corpocracy (WXMC). Believers may pair up new beliefs with old ones more roughly—as when Icelanders, after the vengeful burning of *Njal*, weighed wild blood-feuds against the new teachings of charity and eternal life. Or they may simply leave explanations to the experts and condense religion into a few routines: go to church; live by the Golden Rule—at least toward your pillaging comrades. Other believers “spiritualize” the texts and teachings to rephrase them and make them less objectionable. Usually you can get away with this, given good attendance and faithful contributions. In my case, I *translated* religious teachings³ for more than sixty years until finally going on a *fast from religion*. The sermonettes to the Wild Man were written during the fast.

The Wild Man appears and asks the usual question:

“YA WANNA MAKE SUMPIN OUTUVIT, BUD?”

I rather thought I would. But not a sonnet this time. So formulaic, you know. I like your energy, though. Let’s do retain enthusiasm, but not be too Rosicrucian, please: All those predictions to back-up after the fact—and then, the regrettable culling of unbelievers. It’s exhausting and tedious. So, where do we start?

On the frontier of a new paragraph? Sorry to report, but there never was a frontier. The colonizers traveled over the plains, deer parks, vast corn fields (which they burned), and rice marshes, footpaths, highways, and transcontinental trade-routes for turquoise, tobacco, cocoa, agave, red parrot feathers, flint, and buffalo hides; along the waterways, creeks, game-management areas, weirs, irrigation canals, and deep middens of oyster shells on lakeshores and bays. And they trampled over millions of words in thousands of tongues spoken by more than a hundred million people in the Americas before any historian had ever divided time between Pre-Columbian and Civilization. Peoples upon peoples—generations of them absorbed by the land,

¹ Wild men and giants share traits. See “Runes and Tunes” in *Death On His Heels in Richmond* (2022).

² John Eldredge 2021 *Wild At Heart*, a book reprinted for a more propitious time, when the warmth of reception has risen for a defense of Christian masculinity in service of militancy against wokeness. It is obvious, he says, that only male heroes could have stopped the Wehrmacht, omitting to say that the Nazis considered themselves the heroes everyone was looking for. Perhaps since wars have been brought on by the kinds of behavior he defends, a different approach is overdue.

³ Some of my translations came out as books and music, some as rewordings of texts like the *Lord’s Prayer* and *Psalm 1*.

the waters, and the crimson clouds—the land was not property, not empty, not a frontier. Sorry, Pope Julius⁴, it was already discovered: one country, indivisible, sea to shining sea, etc. Maybe try again?

So what are doing here, friend? Do the Ayes really have it? What about those Lyin’ Eyes? We don’t want to join the tumult between Woke and Bespoke—the perennial religious squabble between the Uppity Cause and the Laws Paused for a lost cause, just cause, or just because—

“NAH—FAGEDDABOUTIT.”

So, on my way out after eight decades, I’m giving sermonettes and telling stories about the human project. You know—my version of *THE ONE WAY TO LIVE*. Giving sermonettes delays the reckoning for what I’ve done and left undone, although whether that will be a matter of sheep and goats or of Ahura-Mazda’s Mettler Balance is unclear. Anyway, preaching sermonettes gives me something to do. I say this uneasily because *having something to do* can also be an excuse for mayhem, or watching another episode of Perry Mason, or developing an addiction to Powerball and roulette. But here’s a sample sermonette.

FIGURING OUT THE TRANSFIGURATION

Peter, the impulsive disciple, witnesses the transfiguration and immediately says, *let’s build a booth!* Today he’d say, *what a branding opportunity! We could do fundraising, sell tickets, and monetize this thing. Think of what we could get out of it!*

You get the idea: Peter as Friedman. I’ve always thought about that phrase, “*What do you get out of it?*” When I say *always* I mean: from the time I was about thirteen years old. Maybe someone would say to Peter, *this is a personal experience of awakening and transformation.* Yeah, right, you say.

“BUT WHADYAGETTOWTUVIT?”

Well, religious faith is a framework for aspiration. Maybe you get that.

No?

Of course, aspiration has a problem all on its own—consider land-grabs, communes, divine plans, global markets, refugee containment-areas with nice cots, bottled water, and zip-ties for dissenters. So many aspirations—say, that’s quite a hammer-head on you. You needn’t make a face. I get the idea. Another sermonette? Maybe with *Sauvignon blanc*?

Here’s a sermonette that I call “Defaults.”

⁴ Treaty of Tordesillas, June 7, 1494

DEFAULTS

As I was saying, religions are frameworks for aspirations. At every stage of human care-giving, survival, communication, and civilization, the religions provided guides, instructions, and justifications. Say that you and a few hundred citizens of your former town are being carried off into slavery after your side has lost in one of the early Greek wars. Your future looks like an abyss, but there's an unemployed soothsayer in the crowd who sees a sunny side. Most of the town wasn't slaughtered and the concession stand at Delphi is still doing fine, he says. So, maybe it's nice to know that little things somewhere are going on as usual. It takes your mind off the abyss by giving you a default position. Nietzsche said not to look into an abyss lest it look back. Good advice. You're still where you were, but your mind has gone walking. Stoics were adept at this mental default maneuver.

“WHAT KINDDA SERMON DAT?”

Okay, okay. It's lean for a homily. Here's another:

SPIRITUAL CURIOS

Going to Mecca during Quraysh times—before the Haj was branded—was like visiting a religious theme park where all were welcome for a fee. Clean up, come in, do the sacred walk around the gods, pray to the god of your choice—and be sure to stop by the galleries and gift shops for the latest in camel-ware. Come back anytime your caravan is in town.

Islam put a stop to that. Only one god counts now—get it? But since graven images are out, how about an arabesque? Two for a drachma.

Collecting curios has been a popular practice of religion at least since statuettes of Venus of Willendorf were in vogue—long before New Year's concerts televised from the Schönbrunn Palace. Then came prayer mats & wheels, shawls, sacred books—or pages torn from them—Japanese *dogu* figurines made to be broken, mistletoe, horn talismans, skull-cups, worry beads, charm-bracelets and tooth-necklaces, crosses, ankhs, copper barrettes, decorative daggers for your turban, scrimshaw seals, and sacred ribs—relics of saints and seal-bones, not to be boxed with trophies cut from enemies. Perhaps Sargon of Akkadia had the walls of his cities pulled down to ensure that his armies could enter easily, but what really ensured imperial peace was opening the cities to trade in goods and curios. As I recall, even other Emperors, like Maximilian and Charles V, mistook some little ancient idols of you Wild Men for proof of their descent from Hercules and Noah.⁵

The unifying religions—Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Communism (with its Founder-in-a-Box motif)—made the mistake of taking these curios more seriously than

⁵ Leitch, Stephanie, "The Wild Man, Charlemagne, and the German Body," in *Art History: Association of Art Historians* (2008), pp. 283-302.

the users took them. (Luther pointed this out to the Pardoner, but Chaucer was gone by that time.) Their cyclopean endeavors focused on propping up empire-building. But religion at the curio-level is a more modest aid to aspiration than bone-crushing crusades at the institutional-level. Curios don't promise much more than comfort. Speculations, creeds, and decrees about omnipotent nobodaddies simply don't come up. The rabbit's foot, baseball card, or lucky decoder ring may even make us smile. Every-day fascinations with spiritual curios have always been unorganized, diverse, and vague religiosities. But later, when power-brokers take over, things get serious: such as when heads and Coke bottles rolled across Central America from 1930 to 1973, or Peter Damian made flagellation popular, or when dousing witches and burning heretics served to pass the time between wars. When religions became major franchises, the mom and pop curio-shops shut down. Everyone had to buy from the Firm—whichever firm existed at the time. Since most firms, like that of Augustus, claimed to be the Savior of the World, negotiating relief had become a more serious business. No more playing with rabbits' feet.

So what do you think? Better? I note the face you're making.

I have another sermonette, but not a title. Something in caps, maybe, since it's a long one:

WHAT SHOULD BE THE TITLE? HUNCHES FOR HOMILIES, HUNCHES AND HOMILIES, SECULAR SERMONS, MORONIC SERMONICS, SERMONIZING, IMPROVISING SERMONS, NOODLING WITH HOMILIES, HOLISTIC HOMILIES.

It must be hard to come up with catchy titles every week for the sign out front! I'll just begin in the hope of finding a title as I go. I have a hunch that most of the time we don't know what we're going to do until we find ourselves doing it—even though we want to spread the good news about The One Way To Live. It will come to me. After all, think of Turing or Feynman. Intuition is the ability to skip steps because you're sure-footed. Once you've seen through the problem, you know that filling in the proofs and details later on will be like copying from a book.

Oh—How about this title? I knew it would come. It's in Jesus-language—easier for me to manage than the Krishna-of-Forgiveness-language, although you may chant *Hare Krishna* if it will distract you from twirling that rock in a sling.

STAYED ON JESUS⁶

"Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we might be cleansed of our sins to serve thee with a quiet mind. Amen."

⁶ From a guest sermon on Earth Day, Sunday 4/24/2016. A recorded version is on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/The-Church-of-The-Holy-Comforter-Episcopal-115569038465619/?fref=ts>. See also the blogsite: <https://frameshifts.com/2016/04/>

This is a centering prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer*. Centering prayers quiet us in God's presence; that is, they direct us to attend to how things are, not how we want or imagine them to be.

Mary C. Richards, the artist, compared centering to making a clay pot. You work the ball of clay until it is warm and soft. You work around it and push into the top of it and as the wheel spins, a column rises between your hands. One hand shapes the outside while the other explores the inside. The outward and inward journeys are both on the same infolded surface. It's also the way an embryo develops. A single cell becomes a berry of many cells, then hollows itself, lengthens into a tube, and wraps around the environment. The outside becomes the inside. This is how things are. Humans develop in the same way as other animals. We share the ancient evolutionary inward and outward journeys of all creatures. But when the clay pot goes off the center of the wheel, it collapses. Any vase is the result of many transformations on the wheel of creation and destruction. So is any species.

In worship, we use liturgy, hymns, readings and prayers to nudge ourselves back into the quiet center of the spinning wheel of creation and destruction.

The centering prayer begins, "Lord, grant us pardon . . ." The word "grant" is peculiar. Are we asking God for a favor? It's like other words we use: "Incline thine ear," "Hear us, O Lord," "Look down upon thy servant," "Kum bay yah." These words seem to be addressed to someone who is inattentive and frequently absent, but this is not what we believe about God. We sing, "thou are giving and forgiving, ever-blessing, ever-blessed/ Well-spring of the joy of living . . ." So why would we be asking for a gift that we have already received? I think that the word "grant" is a centering word. It is we who are inattentive and frequently absent from relationships. We seek to be nudged back into the right relationship with creator and creation.

And we ask for pardon because Christ taught us to petition God. He said to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven . . ." And in those few words he provided the right orientation for us. If humans spoke differential equations to each other, Jesus would have given a different kind of prayer. But what humans know is the family. They understand family relationships. So Jesus tells us to pray as if we were infants crying for a parent. The infant does not know the meaning of the universe or of existence; it does not understand suffering or what is in the parent's mind or even know a language. What it does understand is its helplessness and dependence on the parent. And this is our centered framework of relationship with the unnamable, holy ground of being and deep integrity of all that is: We are in a family relationship with the creator and the creation; dependent on the creator and interdependent with the creation. Pope Francis said that we are not stewards of the Earth but brothers and sisters with the Earth. We are not lords and masters of creation, but elder brothers and sisters. Ray Bradbury once referred to us as "the emissaries of consciousness in the universe."

So when we ask for pardon we are centering ourselves on the pardon that has already been given, the eternal resurrection that releases all creation for abundant life. Pardon is all that frees and releases the creatures to praise God by their full existence, the "sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost," the hawk rising on a thermal, the tree spreading its crown of leaves in the sun, the cloud of marine larvae of oysters, clams, crabs and copepods riding a

wedge of ocean water into the Bay to begin their journeys to adulthood. Pardon is the release of joy we feel in creative engagement and sustained attention when we do the work we are suited to do. This is the abundant life of how things are.

"Lord grant us pardon and peace . . ." After the resurrection, the disciples went upstairs to a familiar room, shut the door, and locked themselves in. We like to lock ourselves away from fear, risk, threat, the Other, and from strange challenges. Once locked in, we pursue our personal journeys without concern for consequences, costs and externalities. In these gated communities of the heart we can believe whatever we want, but our world is off-center and collapsing because it's not how things are. It's just something we built. Our locked door hangs in the last standing wall of a demolished building. Paul said that Christ's peace forever changed the divisions of humanity. He made a new humanity, unified in his body.

Just as the members of a loving family work through problems together, reciprocate, and avoid violence, so the family of creation is sustained by reverence for life, life-fostering concern, and giving without expectation of reward. However much we trap ourselves behind negligence, violence, grudges, and greed, Christ comes through locked doors bringing peace. It's how things are.

"Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we may be cleansed of our sins. . ." Sin is separation from the creator and creation. It's not how things are because we know that the Christ who was, and is, and is to come showed us a different way. After Peter's dream of the unclean foods, he undoubtedly recalled how many lepers, foreigners, beggars, thieves, and assorted other unsavory characters Jesus had touched. "What God has called clean, do not call unclean." Peter was not separate. Neither are we. We imagine ourselves as free agents un beholden to any, but we are interdependent with all creation, sharing the inward and outward journeys of all living things and of the Earth itself. All are transformed together on the wheel of creation and destruction. We align with the center of how things are or we collapse and fly off the wheel. "Cleansing" is a centering word. It directs us to Christ's forgiveness that is always available. Repentance is turning away from delusion to forgiveness. Albert Einstein once said that humans' belief that they were separate from nature was the great "self-delusion" that religions must change. It's simply not how things are. We are not separate. What is done to the least of us--the crowds in Bangladesh, the forests of Brazil, the Great Barrier reef of Australia, or the fisheries of our continental shelves--is done to Christ.

"Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we might be cleansed of our sins to serve thee . . ." In today's gospel, Christ commands the disciples to love each other as he loved them. In the family of creation this is mutual compassion, avoiding what Albert Schweitzer called "gratuitous destruction," and it means working in cooperation and collaboration with other people and creatures. This means having different values than profit, progress, market share, convenience, comfort, and recreation. To work for the abundant life of all creation is to realize that "in pardoning we are pardoned, in consoling we are consoled, in giving we receive, in understanding we are understood, and in loving we are loved," as St. Francis said. In other words, compassion and life-fostering concern transform our experience into a "new heaven and Earth," in right relationship with how things are, by giving pardon, making peace, and helping in the work of salvation.

"Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we might be cleansed of our sins to serve thee with a quiet mind." This new heaven and earth will be quietly centered on our dependence on the creator and our interdependence with other creatures. It will not be the kind of life we have now. We live in a noisy and confusing time. I could have added to the noise by telling you about the alarming threats to the future of our planet. Rocketing population growth will fill the Earth with nine to twelve billion people within the next thirty years. These people will want more cars, fuel, grain, meat, electronics, houses, water, cities, jobs, pets, amusements, weapons, and products of all kinds. These wants will make deserts, famines, plagues, wars, shortages, extinctions, vast migrations, more injustices coming to people who are already suffering from disease and deprivation, and irreversible changes in climate, coastlands, and habitats. This is truly how things are. Pursuing our inward journeys as if they were not shared with outward journeys of all other living things is locking the door of denial. It is, in fact, a kind of violence. To open our hearts to cooperation with each other and with the natural geochemical cycles of our planet is to act as elder brothers and sisters of creation and emissaries of consciousness and conscience to the universe. In the words of the old hymn, let us "stay our minds on Jesus."

Let us pray. O God, whose love is greater than the measure of our minds and who make even our wrath and violence to serve thee, we give thanks for this island Earth, in the words of Jonathan Edwards' song: "in a starry ocean/ Poetry in motion/ this island Earth./ A beautiful oasis/ for all human races,/ the only home that we know,/ this island Earth." Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we may be cleansed of our sins to serve thee with a quiet mind, a mind stayed on Jesus. AMEN⁷

How do you like that, Esau—or was it Enkidu, or Polyphemus? I mix you all up. Anyway, notice how I put in more of a hunter-gatherer theme for you? Maybe you also noticed how I introduced Shiva's dance? To me, the sermon says that separateness is the delusion and relationship the reality. What do you think?

I'll go on while you think about it.

To understand this delusion is to be transformed. Enlightenment is living in this understanding—and compassion is the consequence of such a way of living. And another point—

Hey, wake up!

Too much god-talk, I know. But you row with the oars you're given. After a lifetime of god-talk, prayerful telepathy, guilty pleasures, squirming in pews, and blues about the good news, I was ready to move on. I even went on a fast from religion—at least, the religion I knew. But I'm at sea in the same rowboat—a framework for aspirations with a theistic twist. I must use the ancient words, but you may have noticed that they were *translated* differently. Homiletics is an adventure in translation. Unless it is analytical geometry, any text—sacred or otherwise—is

⁷ This "Island Earth" is a song by Jonathan Edwards. Other quotations: Psalm 148 (Let all creation praise thee.), Acts 11:1-18 (Peter's Vision), Rev 21:1-6 (New heavens & earth), and Jn 13: 31-35 (A new commandment), and the hymn, "Joyful, Joyful, we adore thee."

ambiguous and metaphorical. Considering Riemann, maybe it's also true of geometry. As an improviser, the preacher hunts for dark passages rich in unclear assertions, dated concepts, and unstated assumptions. The writings of Paul provide abundant possibilities for cadenzas. For Luther on his manic side they were uppers. The prayer in the sermon, from *The Book of Common Prayer*, provided the traditional chord-chart for a message neither traditional nor common. You may have noticed. Oh, yes, I remember. You fell asleep.

Well, anyway, after a lifetime of trying to arrange some kind of Daily Office for myself, I am at a loss. I have revised my manual of schedules, exhortations, and instructions—technically it's an *Enchiridion*—repeatedly for the last sixty years. Apparently, I'm not going to get it right.

Or maybe I should get out of the rowboat. Not easy. The manuals of Tom à Kempis, Brother Lawrence, Benedict, Francis, and Erasmus aimed to reform the holy orders. The unexpected consequence was the Protestant Reformation (really a revolution)—a protest that quickly spread into secular territory, swept away the princes, hierarchies of government and enlightened philosophy, and disposed of a quantity of rococo furniture. My more modest aim has been to allocate my own time for sustained attention on THINGS THAT MATTER. I suspect that we differ on what those things may be—but, frankly, I have frequently changed my mind about the TTM, which may also be TMI, and even about the whole project. Here's another sermonette.

THINGS THAT MATTER

I could start out with your eternal soul, mustard seeds, lilies of the field, or birthright, but that's been done before, and, anyway, you don't want to revisit Jacob and the potage story or how Jonah—you knew him—met that sea captain: Painful Episodes. No, let's just look at a few sales receipts, mostly from newspapers.

<i>American households with a pet</i>	87,000,000
<i>Amount spent on pets in the USA in 2000</i>	\$20,000,000,000
<i>Sports betting per year in the USA</i>	\$93,000,000,000
<i>Portion of sports bets placed on props⁸</i>	\$12,000,000,000
<i>Highway deaths in the USA in 2022</i>	42,795
<i>Spent yearly by Americans on carbonated beverages</i>	\$70,000,000,000
<i>One American soldier in Afghanistan in 2011 per year</i>	\$1,000,000
<i>Value of American health care industry in 2023 (over 18%GNP)</i>	\$800,000,000,000
<i>The Intelligence Community for 2011</i>	\$80,000,000,000
<i>Homeland Security for 2011</i>	\$44,900,000,000
<i>Cost of a heavy bomber in 1953: 30 schools. Of a fighter jet: 30,000,000,000 bushels of wheat. Of a naval destroyer: houses for 8000 people. (Source: D.D. Eisenhower)</i>	
<i>People living on \$1.00 per day in 2011 (globally):</i>	3,000,000,000
<i>And on less than \$1.00/day</i>	1,500,000,000

⁸ A prop is a propositional bet: Who will come out first from the dugout? How long will it take to make the first goal? Which player will be carried off the field with head-trauma?

<i>Americans daily washing clothes in fragranced pollutants</i>	300,000,000
<i>Obese adult Americans in 2011</i>	60,000,000
<i>(Also obese: 16-19% aged 6-19 y and 10% 2-5 y) Yearly cost</i>	\$270,000,000,000
<i>Americans with diabetes in 2011:</i>	23,000,000
<i>And prediabetes</i>	54,000,000
<i>Other ailments, 2011: asthma (25M), chronic sinus issues (35M), chronic liver issues (25M), Chronic kidney disorders (26M), heartburn (21M), gall stones (21M), peptic ulcers (15M), Yearly strokes (700K), Disabled due to strokes (4.5M), migraine (25M), chronic headaches (45M), depression (18M), children with neurological disorders (17% children), decline in sperm counts over last 50 y (50%), pregnancies resulting in baby's death or deformity (50%), sleep disorders (49%)</i>	
<i>Americans' annual spending on pharmaceuticals in 2009</i>	\$300,000,000,000
<i>Federal Budget Surplus in 2001</i>	\$236,000,000,000
<i>Federal Deficit at the end of 2001</i>	\$150,000,000,000
<i>(To this fiscal conservatism add more than a decade of a war on terror.)</i>	
<i>American workers with substance abuse problems</i>	14,000,000
<i>Food wasted per capita in USA, (PLOS, 2009): 1500kCal/ y or 105kg/ y in 2000</i>	
<i>American workers in drug-recovery</i>	23,000,000
<i>Carbon-dioxide levels from pre-industrial times (280ppm) to 2023 level:</i>	424 ppm
<i>Plastic objects in mid-Pacific, Texas-sized garbage patch by 2022</i>	35,000,000
<i>Yearly Visits to the ER because of Barbeque accidents</i>	17,000
<i>Visitors to Disney parks in America and Japan in 2022 (not a peak year)</i>	68,000,000
<i>Overdose deaths in the USA per day in 2020</i>	200
<i>New York City weighs 1.87 trillion lbs, sinks .08" per yr & sea-level rise since 1950: 9"</i>	
<i>Number shot in road rage incidents in the USA in 2022</i>	550
<i>Number of owners of at least one AR-15 in the USA</i>	16,000,000
<i>Earnings on gun sales in the USA since Sandy Hook massacre</i>	\$11,000,000,000
<i>Rate of mass killings in the USA in 2023:</i>	one every 6.53 days
<i>Infant mortality in the USA</i>	5.6 per thousand
<i>Infant mortality in the UK</i>	4.0 per thousand
<i>Infant mortality in Japan</i>	1.7 per thousand
<i>Infant mortality in Romania</i>	5.2 per thousand
<i>Infant mortality in South Africa</i>	26.4 per thousand
<i>Refugees in 2023, expressed as a fraction of the world's population:</i>	one out of 74
<i>Nightly watchers of cable news and public television news (1.4-2.2M Fox, 1.1M MSNBC, 0.5M CNN, 2.7M PBS in 2023. Since 2016, households with cable decreased from 70% to 40% as streaming replaced it.)</i>	about 6,500,000
<i>Ghost guns sold as rigs or frames at \$800-1000 each in 2022:</i>	25,785
<i>The number of disposable vapes bought in 2023</i>	12,000,000
<i>Cost to NYC of recycling one vape</i>	85 ¢
<i>Cost per year of keeping a cat or dog</i>	\$1200-1400
<i>Cost to victims of social media scams in 2021-2023, or profit to scammers:</i>	\$2.7 billion
<i>Chesapeake Oyster Catch in 1920: 50,000,000 bushels/yr and in 2000:</i>	100,000 bu/yr
<i>Income of Disney CEO in 2000:</i>	\$200,000,000/yr
<i>Mexican worker who makes Lion King T-shirts:</i>	\$0.30/hr
<i>Energy cost per dollar of product in 1972: 19,000 BTU and in 2000:</i>	11,000 BTU
<i>Spending on going to movies in 2000:</i>	\$5,000,000,000

A conundrum: To scale our enthusiasms to fit our needs is to accept someone's definition of our needs and to proceed to slip into straitjackets. To fail to do so is thoughtlessly to abandon long-term control of the consequences of our actions. Perhaps the issue is to become able to foresee and act on potential consequences within manageable time periods. Difficult when your lifespan isn't measured in centuries.

So what matters to Americans—and most humans? We would like to broadcast *The One Way to Live*, but these facts about our lives *are* the message. Clearly, when we talk about our eternal souls we have in mind a model whose social links have never even been beta-tested—which is what Jesus was getting at by simply sticking to changing daily behavior. Leave the grand cosmological schemes to the best buds of Plotinus. To be stayed on Jesus is to stay with caring for and about each other. At least, that's what I think.

So maybe this sermonette is a sociological tabulation, but so what? I've been thinking that religious hygiene begins with inquiry. We may have to act in faith, but we needn't be ignorant about what may happen. We need data. And by the way, I call this religious hygiene, not spiritual hygiene. Spirits are not in my line. Everyone, on the other hand, is religious. Religiosity is the human default behavior, and religion is organized religiosity.⁹ You may not need a daily office, but you keep track of something that *signifies*—maybe with notches on the cave wall and pictures of game to show when they come into heat, or with snaky loops on a curbstone to show lunation. Religious insight is like returning from a long trip and seeing how small your village really is—or leaping into space for a few turns around the planet and being glad to see another human—*any other human*—when you land. That is as much of an *ultimate concern* as most humans can handle. Shifts in frame of reference change the way we see: Enter Religion.

Significant personal discoveries change your point of view—so we're back to religion being a framework for aspirations. Almost time for another sermonette, but first let's talk about etiquette.

The earnest compiler of *Proverbs* said that the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom: Sounds like he was talking about not bad-mouthing the boss if you know what's good for you. I tend to think that wisdom begins with asking questions, but certainly fear and apprehension can raise questions—and so can suddenly being hit with a different point of view. Quite a shock. Getting a distance from your hometown can do that; so can the ancient, massive presence of a giant tree. You tried to get that across to Gilgamesh, as I recall, but he was bent on making glorious strokes to watch the forest fall—and he insisted that you help. We know how that ended. He was a slow learner, but with you gone, he finally grasped regret and awe. Not that it stuck. He still had to build that wall around Uruk—more glorious strokes. You preferred to

⁹ See Charles H. Lippy 1994 *Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States*.

slump around leaving little evidence of what you'd been up to, and keeping beyond the perimeter of the settlement. Most of your technology was handheld and unnoticeable. The way I see it, although he was the city-boy and you were the wild-man, you were the one with etiquette about sacred forests.

Both the data about what matters to us and the question of etiquette around trees come together in another inquiry: *how do we spend our time?* What do we do with ourselves once we're grown up? Here's a sermonette I once gave to some youngsters—not that they knew what to make of it.

HOW I SPEND MY TIME

PREFACE: *THE TEN PRACTICES*

Welcome, my young friends. Welcome to my place! As we walk around the house this morning, I will show you how I live. When I was your ages, no one showed me how they lived. Of course, I watched my parents and relatives, but they didn't explain much. To explain how I live and why I live that way is like telling embarrassing secrets. But I believe that you're already thinking about how to live. Our ideas about *how* to live are more important than *where* we live and you will live in many places on Earth; so it's good to know how others live. The way I live is to follow ten practices almost daily. Each practice has its own story-line¹⁰, as you will see.

1. The first is to *be a giver*—giving care, help, service, donations, and gifts. Love is the policy of caring for and about others.
2. The second is to *make sense* of the world by making things like research projects, books, drawings, music, and stage performances. I get a lot of energy from doing this.
3. The third practice is to study. *Scholarship* is all the research, rehearsal, and preparation needed to make sense of the world before you try to make things.
4. The fourth practice is *training*. This means to have a nutritious diet, to practice good postures and movements, to pay attention to breathing, and to walk a lot. You have already learned two kinds of training—karate and music.
5. The fifth practice is to *expedite*. That means to get projects done in time. In a grocery store, the expeditor is the person who makes sure that the fruits & vegetables & meat are on the shelf before they spoil. The expeditor never says, "I'll get around to it."

¹⁰ The topic of shifting frames among different roles comes up in other works, such as the travels and adventures of Professor Hank Randall in *Frameshifts*, *Death On His Heels in Richmond*, *Forms of Resistance*, *Tales Since the Shift*, and *Only Study Lifts and Lasts*. Shifting forms and roles is also a theme of *House of a Thousand Rooms*.

6. The sixth practice is culling. That means to clean up or *clear the deck*. When I work on a project, I make a mess. If the clutter stays around after the project, it interferes with the next project. That's why I clear the deck.
7. The seventh practice is *to feed what you care about*. If you want others to be fair, or kind, or hospitable, you will find ways to nourish and support fairness, kindness, and hospitality. One of the ways to nourish what you treasure is to remind yourself about what you care about and why. I will later talk about *shrines*.
8. The eighth practice is to *manage myself*. This means telling myself what to do and then doing it, whether I want to or not. Once the manager decides what needs to be done and gives the order, I obey.
9. The ninth practice is to *be an engineer*. An engineer studies a problem and designs a solution. This goes for fixing things around the house; it also goes for changing a behavior that isn't working.
10. The tenth practice is to *communicate with others*. This includes sharing work that I have made and trying to understand the experiences of others. Sometimes, especially in performances and great projects, the sharing of experiences connects people in a special way, called *communion*. *Let's go to the first learning station*.

STATION # 1: THE DESK

I keep a globe on my desk. *Earth* is the name of our planet, the third planet from Sol, but the *World* is our idea of Earth. Earth is the place; the World is the idea. Look at Earth: It is a speck in space. Look how small it is compared to Sol—like a nickel compared to the door frame. Now look at the World: this globe is covered by lines, boundaries, and names. But if you look at Earth, there are no lines or words. In a film once, an actress had the line that every border is *just an imaginary line*. Lana Turner's character says this to Clark Gable in *Somewhere I'll Find You* (1942) about China & Vietnam. Other examples of imaginary lines are: Mason-Dixon in USA, Radcliffe Line in India, 38th Parallel in Korea, Donbas line of Ukraine, Maginot Line in France, the Line between Ireland and Northern Ireland, the Line between North and South Vietnam, and all the so-called boundaries in treaties with indigenous nations in North America.

WHEN YOU LOOK AT EARTH, where are the lines? Everything is connected. THE SEAS, CONTINENTS, PEOPLE, AND OTHER LIVING BEINGS ARE ALL CONNECTED. EVEN MOUNTAINS CANNOT KEEP THEM APART. We are not separated from each other or from other living beings. The globe is a picture or graphic organizer. It shows one idea about Earth. Two centuries ago, many countries shown here did not exist, so the globe looked different. The idea was different. And thousands of years ago, before people made globes, the continents were in different sizes and places. They broke apart, sank, rose, and were re-assembled like puzzle pieces, opening and closing other oceans. The plates under the continents are still moving

in the Atlantic and in the Pacific Ring of Fire—a circle around the ocean made by volcanoes and earthquakes.

So, there are many kinds of ideas about Earth. Every idea is a different view, even a different World. A poet said that the world was like a stage and people were like actors. For that poet, all our ideas about Earth are like plays. The poet called his theater the Globe. The World is like a stage. Some early scientists, Japanese and Sephardic, thought of the World as a body. It's also like a house for life with many rooms, the habitats of all beings. Humans now inhabit almost all of Earth's land biomes. Eight billion people now inhabit Earth; when I was 11 years old, the population was less than 4 billion. What does a billion feel like?

REAM OF PAPER DEMONSTRATION: EARTH NOW CARRIES 8,000,000,000 HUMANS. IF EACH ONE WEIGHS ABOUT 55 KILOGRAMS (120 POUNDS), THEN THEIR MASS IS 440,000,000,000 kg (4.4×10^{11} kg). Earth also carries 20 quadrillion ants (20×10^{15} ants). An ant weighs a thousandth of a thousandth of a kilogram, so all of them would weigh 20×10^{21} kg, (or 20,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 kg, which is 44×10^{21}). But consider that Earth itself weighs about 6×10^{24} kg, and a molecule of water weighs about 3×10^{-26} kg. (That is 3 kg divided by a denominator equal to a one followed by 26 zeroes.)

How does bigness feel? This page has 3480 zeroes on each side, for a total of 6960 zeroes. A ream of paper has 500 pages in it, so if every page had 6960 zeroes on it, that would be about 3.5 million zeroes. That's 3.5×10^6 zeroes. Compare the weight of a single page (6.96×10^3 zeroes) to a ream of zeroes (3.5×10^6 zeroes). The ream weighs about 6 lb, by the way. Since a billion is 1000 million (10^9), a Human population would feel a little more than 1000 reams (3 tons) and Earth would feel a little less than 6000 reams (18 tons). A car weighs about 2 to 2 ½ tons. Think of the weight of all the other beings living on Earth. In their own ways, they also learn and live in their own *worlds* and have ideas about their habitats.

Living beings began learning about Earth 3,500,000,000 years ago (3.5 bya.) There were millions of learning stations, especially in the oceans. Life needed water, shelter, and energy. Energy is the ability to move, grow, and work. Four billion years ago, Earth was not a good habitat. It was very hot and poisonous. Even two billion years later, when ice in some places was three miles thick, it was not much better. But bacteria were able to live in the seas of Snowball Earth. Then a meteor hit Yarrabubba, Australia and caused 100 billion tons of ice to melt and a blue sky to form. By 600 million years ago, the sea was full of life. In another 50 million years, plants invaded the land. Earth had become a house for life, with millions of roomy habitats. Every habitat provided shelter, water, and energy for its inhabitants—even if they were deep-sea worms living in steamy holes of the ocean floor.

Like turtles wearing shells, we carry our world-ideas with us. Your world is what you know about Earth. You may not know about India. If so, India is not part of your world. You may not know about atoms; so, atoms are not part of your world. How do I live? *Alone and*

together. Together with all living beings. Alone with my thoughts about the world and how things are. How I live is more important than where I live. I think a lot about riding Earth through space along with 8 billion other people and billions of other beings—all of them needing habitats with for water, shelter, and energy. This thought about the *World-as-I-understand-it* changes how I live. The world is like a spaceship with trillions of passengers. As it soars between stars, it provides water, shelter, and energy for all beings in thousands of habitats. While the puzzle-plates of Earth are moving, all of Earth's beings are also on the go from the centers where they began to other places. Centers of origin for fish and amphibians are not known, but they are known for wheat, corn, chickens, horses, primates, lemurs, marsupials, and humans. Even some of their itineraries are known—such as the migrations of Paleolithic times, the travels of *Homo erectus*, the adventurous trips to Polynesia and America, and so on. Even today you can tell where the travels began. Any place that has lots of different kinds of the same body-model of a plant or animal is likely to be its center of origin. For example, Peru has many kinds of potato-like plants and Mexico has many corn-like plants. The plants moved on with the people who liked to eat them. And now it's time for us to move on.

STATION #2 THE GALLEY

Every house has a support system. You could call it the galley, after the kitchen on a ship. But the support system is more than the kitchen; my kitchen is also the laundry, electric panels, furnace, gas and water controls, shop, and storage room, where tools, extra water, first aid kits, and emergency go-bags are kept. Even though it doesn't seem to move, a house is like a ship. It creaks in the wind, settles into the ground, and is carried through space by the Earth. In the galley, food and kitchen tools are cleaned and stowed away so that they will be ready when needed. Vinegar, simple soap, borax, and hydrogen peroxide are the cleaners. Fat is saved for stir-fry. Rags are used for wiping pans before washing them; this keeps fat from going into the drain. Also, the screens catch bits that might go into drains. Meals are cooked on the stove-top. We make meals from fresh produce, so you won't find many packages or much paper or plastic in the trash and recycling. Food waste goes into the compost pile outside. Dishes are washed in a pan in the sink & dried before the next meal. Why use a dishwasher when you have two hands and a small bowl of soapy water? Eight billion people make a lot of clutter, but they can make less if they avoid most packaging, clean as they go, carefully stow their belongings, learn to share, to take only what they need, and to want what they have instead of wanting more. I can't really throw anything AWAY if I'm traveling through space on the same ship with 8 billion others. Wherever I throw trash, it will land in someone's habitat; so, the less I throw, the better for everyone. This is a way to care about others as well as yourself. Fresh food is better than food in packages, so I eat most of it and don't have much waste left over. And if you make your own applesauce, you know what you put into it. Packaged food has many things in it that are not food. We read the labels before we buy packaged foods. We also prepare fresh water from the city water by distillation. After the water is distilled, I add minerals to it. This makes cleaner water for cooking and drinking. We believe that the better our food, the better our bodies will

work—even when they are old bodies. Buying good food also signals food-makers that I vote for nutritious real foods and do not vote for junk foods. All of this seems obvious, but although humans think that they have eternal souls, their model of the soul has never had its social conscience even beta-tested for a million years.

STATION #3: BACK BEDROOM (south side)

Here is where I prepare for the day. I take a few minutes to lie still with my eyes closed to think about the last dream I had before awaking. I strike the singing bowl to remind myself about taking breaks for healing breaths. I inhale to take in resources for the day. I hold the breath to take time to think about those resources. Then I exhale and hold the emptiness in my chest to think about the fact that I am mostly space. By then, the singing bowl is quiet. Later, I write whatever has occurred to me. Sometimes my Dream-Self tells me whole stories or poems. When I get up, I quickly make my bed. Maybe I will want to use it for a chair, or table, or a display space with a quilt on it, to remind me of my great-great-grandmother, who made the quilt. Making the bed is also a reminder to prepare myself for the day, because every day is a surprise. Like sailors at sea, our lives can be calm for a long time and then suddenly very busy. If ropes—called *lines*—are on the deck in a storm, your feet can become entangled and you may be dragged overboard. I learned this when collecting oysters on a skipjack for environmental research. The deck was slippery and moving up and down as we emptied the dredge we had pulled up from the bottom of the Bay. Sailors are always saying, “Clear the deck.” Making the bed reminds me to keep the deck clear all day by keeping the clutter out of my work-space. I do the little jobs when they come up rather than saying, “I’ll get around to it.” Then, when I have to work on a big project, I am free to take time with it.

Here’s where I write. When I write for a few minutes, it gives me energy for the day. It’s like pushing energy into a spring to store the energy for later use. I open all the curtains in the bedroom and den. Later in the day, I may draw or compose music. Drawing and composing also give me energy. You know when something gives you energy because when you do it, you want to keep doing it.

STATION #4: HALL

I go across the threshold of the den into the north side of the house and go into the hall. As we sit in the hall, we can see the thresholds and door-frames of the other rooms and the window frames in the living room. If we look up at the ceiling, we can see the way that carpenters framed the hallway within the frame of the house. Halls are passages for going from one frame to another. You see things differently through a large picture frame than from a small one. Halls remind me not to stay too long in any room. Even when I am getting so much energy from drawing or writing that I want to keep doing it, I must be able to interrupt myself. I often do this with a timer. If I stay too long in one frame of mind it is like staying too long in one room or using only one size of picture frame. In other words, if I don’t shift frames, I get stuck. You

can tell when people are stuck: they repeat what they do whether or not it makes sense.

Sometimes they are stuck because they think that they have to please their friends. Whatever the reason, I know that I must be interrupted in order to get unstuck. Others also help to interrupt me. Hallways remind me to interrupt myself by shifting frames and going into different rooms. A butterfly does this as it changes from egg to caterpillars to chrysalis to winged insect. Each form has a different way of life and a different viewpoint. It is the same for human beings as we grow. We keep changing into different people, so it's good to remind ourselves that interruption is good. The mind is a house with a thousand rooms. Therefore, I welcome interruptions.

STATIONS #5: FRONT BATHROOM

Bathrooms use a lot of water. The toilet. A shower. In Arizona, California, India, Palestine, and other places, people are fighting for water. Since they became humans, most of Earth's people have not had bathrooms. In fact, most people have not had chairs.

Now I will tell you some embarrassing secrets. In the past, most humans squatted, like this. They also defecated and had babies in this position. When we sit on toilets or lie down to give birth, we change the natural position. I use a yoga-block to bring my knees closer to a squat. This makes bowel movements easier. Your great-grandfather did something I never knew about until he was 90 years old. He spat on the paper before wiping. He may have learned to do that during the Depression in the 1930s. It was a way to avoid wasting paper. In the same way, I avoid wasting water by not showering. Instead, I squat like this, back to the faucet, turn on the water, and quickly clean around the anus. I avoid wasting water by not showering. Instead, I sit like this next to the faucet in the bathtub, turn on the water & quickly clean, turn off the water, let it drain; then close the drain, and finish. Then I turn off the water, rinse in the tub, and open the drain. Usually the water level is less than two inches. In the bathroom you can also see how your body is doing. I weigh, examine skin, and look for unusual marks or bumps. You will see and feel many changes in your body over the next five years. But there is nothing to fear about the simple facts of the ways our bodies change. Everything changes. Study about these changes so that you will not be misinformed. No one in particular ever told me to do this; that's why I'm telling you.

School friends always make jokes and unkind comments about bodies because they are ignorant. When I was eleven, I was sitting in a warm bath when a white liquid came out of my penis. It was a pleasant feeling, but I didn't understand it. And I was too embarrassed to ask anyone. I was ignorant of the fact that my body had begun to make sperm. Girls also discover when their bodies begin to make eggs. All kinds of jokes, songs, and stories are made up about these simple facts. When people are ignorant, they are also fearful. Fear may even lead them to do cruel or foolish things to show that they are not afraid. But there is nothing to fear about the simple facts of the ways our bodies change. As Mr. Fred Rogers said, *if it's mentionable, it's manageable*. Expect to get bigger, to grow more body-hair, to have one part of the body grow

faster than another, to have new feelings about other people, and to notice changes in appetite and in the foods you like.

Everything changes. Study about these changes so that you will not be misinformed. No one in particular ever told me to do this; that's why I'm telling you.

STATION #6: LIVING ROOM & MUSIC ROOM

In the living room and music room I do two kinds of practice. In the music room, I practice on instruments. Currently, I'm having a conversation with Bach about one of his preludes. I'm trying to memorize it again, although neither my memory nor my fingers work as they used to do. I get what Bach is saying by swaying into the music. In the living room, I practice on my body, by doing postures and movements in order to remain flexible. In old age, your enemies are stiffness and weakness. I pay attention to the 4 parts of healing breaths as I exercise—breathe in, hold the breath, breathe out, and hold the emptiness. Using my breathing to control movements is another way to sway into a good performance. All smooth performances have a gentle sway.

STATION #7: LIVING ROOM CABINETS

The living room cabinets are displays of our previous lives. It's as if a butterfly were to show you pictures of its larval forms and chrysalis, its milkweed home, its trip flying over North America, and the great orange crowd of other butterflies it met in Mexico. Humans must leave their previous lives. Everything changes. If they get stuck in the wrong place, they may die. When humans and other animals fled from deserts, glaciers, floods, and volcanoes, they were making good moves. But humans do something that other animals do not. They recall how they once lived. They save things from their old homes and past habitats. Imagine the pictures that dinosaurs would have put into their albums. Well, some dinosaurs did not go extinct. They're called birds. Maybe a bird's album would have pictures of pterodactyls and *Archeopteryx*. But birds don't make albums. Only humans do: They tell stories and make pictures about their previous lives. They make shrines, altars, temples, signs, monuments, piles of stones (cairns), tombstones, and murals. That's what these cabinets are: reminders of past lives and past homes. I have already given you many pictures and reminders.

STATION #8: FRONT BEDROOM (north side)

Kathleen sleeps in here now because the room is more dark, quiet, and warm than the back bedroom. We switched rooms in October. We try to take care of each other and to care about each other. People who don't agree to do this cannot live together. They might be friends, but living together is more difficult than being friends. Love is more than a feeling; it is a policy¹¹. Taking care of others cannot depend only on feelings because feelings are always

¹¹ Madeline L'Engle in *Circle of Quiet*, attributed this saying to Hugh Franklin, her husband.

changing, especially when people are in pain. Taking care of others depends on their promise to do so. The promise then becomes a daily practice—a policy. That’s the policy I had with your grandmother, my sons, and now with Kathleen. We are now over eighty years old, so our lives may change suddenly because of accident or sickness. Taking care of each other may become more difficult and we may have to move to another place to make it easier. We don’t know what will happen, but we prepare for change, because everything changes.

STATION # 9: THE STUDIO

The studio is a room and a frame of mind.¹² When I’m in a studio-frame-of-mind, I may be in this room or somewhere else—like a train, where I wrote *Coming Around*. In this frame of mind, I make sense of my world. Conversations with others help me. Most of my conversations are done by reading what others have to say. Conversations with authors also interrupt me. They force me to have other thoughts. The studio is a frame of mind. Here I tell myself *Pay Attention*. Here also is information about all the kinds of living beings. I try to study the data, and to help other beings when I can. Conversations make me think of many things. Sometimes I think of being a fish, as I did in *Fisher of the James*. Sometimes I write poems or stories, like *Frameshifts* and *House of a Thousand Rooms*, *The Queen and the Crocodile*, and other books like *Shura*, *Cysni*, *Forms of Resistance*, *PushBack*, and *Death on His Heels in Richmond*, and the story about Thorstein and the giants from Einhorn. Sometimes I do a little research. Sometimes I talk to my past selves by looking at the keepsakes in my shrines. Like the albums in the living room cabinets, the special objects in these shrines remind me of experiences. You may take something to remember this experience—how about this painted rock? Sometime later on, you may want to take other things from this room or other rooms in this house. You may think about what you would want. Of course, I always wanted books. Abraham Lincoln said that his best friend was someone who would bring him a book he hadn’t read. Now we’ll go to the last learning-station. Out the back door—

STATION #10: WALKING OUTSIDE

We have been walking from station to station. Humans have a long history of walking from one learning station to another. Seventy thousand years ago, when they became better working as teams, they followed the coasts of Africa, India, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Americas and, by 25,000 years ago, they had settled every continent. Humans became a cosmopolitan species—unlike the lemurs stuck in Madagascar, the koalas stuck in Australia, or the orangutans stuck in Borneo. Humans were world-wide. And wherever they settled, they made shrines to remind them of where they had been—and who they had been. They knew that they were different than they had been.

Our garden gate is like a Japanese TORII. The purpose of shrines and markers like the torii is to say, *pay attention!* The shrine marks the spot of a special place to remember. There are

¹² Professor Hank Randall has more to say about studios in the second volume of *Frameshifts*.

other shrine-reminders here—the colored rocks, and the stone like Kokopelli, the Flute-Player of the ancient Diné tribe—the Navajos who have been in America for 20,000 years. The torii gate says, *pay attention, this is a special place!* You will discover other marker-shrines everywhere-- cairns, cromelechs, standing stones, the giant stone heads of South America and Easter Island, Ebenezer stones, the stone circle at Stonehenge, Celtic crosses, Indian Stupas, and mandalas.

Sometimes people go on walks to visit shrine-stations. These walks are called pilgrimages. The pilgrims go on long walks because they hope to learn more about their worlds and about themselves. Often, the shrines contain the remains, ashes, or belongings of famous people known for their good works. Famous pilgrimages are those to Canterbury in England, to Jerusalem in Israel (*Next year, in Jerusalem!* they say.), to Saint Iago (James) in Spain, to Mecca in Arabia, to the many Pithas (Peethas) in India (the remains of Shakti, who came apart unexpectedly), to Delphi in Greece, and to the ancient sites of Osiris's remains in Egypt. Pilgrims gain energy from such long walks and the things they learn.

Here is the neighborhood Church, a local shrine, and the end of our pilgrimage. Inside, you see on the wall the reminder of the Ten Commandments given to Moses. He saw a bush in flames, but the bush was not burnt by the fire. A voice from the bush said to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. In other words: Special place, pay attention! Then Moses led the Jewish people on a long walk that lasted for 40 years, as the story goes, until they could settle in Canaan, once the home of Phoenicians. You remember the beginning of that walk? It begins with the question, "How is this night different from every other night?"

The church is filled with shrines. The long path down the middle is a nave—like the word *navy*. *Nave* refers to a ship's deck. Look at the ceiling. It's like the hull of a ship. Some say that the first roof was a ship turned upside down—like the houses in a town in Brittany. The nave and ceiling remind people that the church is like a ship moving through the centuries for 2000 years. It carries passengers and their memories. We can also think of the Spaceship Earth¹³. Around the perimeter of the church is a mini-pilgrimage with ten learning-stations, called the Stations of the Cross. Those who take this walk will stop at each picture to think of Jesus, an innocent man, being unfairly taken to his death on a cross. Various people helped him on his last walk.

I used to take this walk, but now I only walk outside. I have my own stations to visit. So, we're on our way again. Maybe we will go west to the giant mulberry tree.

END

When I gave this sermonette, I added a word to the parents:

Habits of learning, ethics, and health are physiological and religious because they result in internalized cognitive guidance. Saints Anthony and Simon Stylites started monachism on

¹³ And Buckminster Fuller has much more to say about boats, roofs, and triangles.

such principles. Personally, I'd avoid trying to make the point by sitting on a pole, but clearly, the internalization of such habits begins with external guidance during childhood: pack in as much procedural memory as possible while the mind is not occupied with paying bills and pleasing bosses. Religion translates to aspiration, intention, frame of reference, and love. This is the basis for traditions, philosophy, reform, language, culture, social and communal links, and the relationship to the nested habitats we inhabit. Our first habitat is the family.

FAMILY MATTERS

Upon our privacies
depend all legacies.
Through intimate release
our grudges wear to peace.
A candle lights our room
to rankle demon gloom.
By minute degrees
we shape the world—with ease.

You and I convey
whatever stars may say.
Whatever snowfall seems,
whatever a seed dreams
we in our family confirm: we, privately¹⁴

In other words, we have work to do on ourselves, even if we don't find The One Way to Live. I watch people doing all sorts of things—blowing leaves from the edging around lawns that are precision-cut to three inches; calculating their handicaps for the next day on the links; playing slots, watching the Superbowl, waxing their Lamborghini or antique Lincoln. Whatever absorbs most of our time and occupies large tracts of cerebral real estate is an *ultimate concern*. This is why religion is unavoidable. So is transformation.

* * *

So, what do you think? Notice how I included a promotion for my books? While I have you, here's a follow-up sermonette:

ULTIMIZE, DON'T SIMONIZE

I could say *transform*, but the phony word *ultimize* points to ultimate concerns. A guy who spends Sunday afternoon simonizing his car doesn't care what *ultimize* means. Whatever it means, it is closer to the mark than DIY or *self improvement*. Mostly, the message is to be kind to yourself and other beings—*Let all things be well and happy*, as the Lokah Samastah saying

¹⁴ From *Frameshifts* and *House of a Thousand Rooms*

goes. Other theological twists, like *life-fostering concern*¹⁵, *ultimate concern*, and *reverence for life* are confusing to wild men. That's why I like *caring for and about each other and keeping the conversation going*. Perhaps this simple message is difficult to accept. Perhaps this is the origin of the many stories, prayers and religious explanations of different cultures. Frankly, I don't know.

But storytellers make their living not by the originality of their plots but by their ability to reach audiences. We seem to need many different stories and sermons before we can begin to understand. And we need reminders if we are to strengthen and maintain a new behavior. The most reliable reminders are found by shifting frames to another culture *and then returning to our own culture*. Remember, I called this *religious insight*. We can get a similar effect by immersing ourselves in a play, poem, composition, or work of visual art. Such a re-examination—seeing with new eyes—reveals distortions in the human project. The entire species is engaged in this project, but it can only be appreciated through the culture one has learned. World culture may be an aspiration, like Esperanto, but thousands of years of cultural evolution cannot be undone by fiat.

I therefore stay within my own culture to seek *ultimization* because I don't know enough about other cultures. As Louis Menand observed,¹⁶ describing the work of early cultural anthropologists, we do well to seek change and transformation within our own cultural system rather than simply maligning its truths because they are true only relative to the system. That is, we must

unlearn one way of living in order to learn a way that is better by our own standards.

I kept that one short—say, that's quite a hand-axe you've been pounding into shape. I have another sermonette in this booklet, but let's have a cup of coffee first.

A CUP OF COFFEE WITH A MENTAL TUNE-UP

First, I am not an expert—as you know by now. My advice on mental management is not sought by professional psychologists any more than my advice about turbo-boosting is sought by Formula One drivers during Carb Day in Indianapolis. Think of me as the guy you sometimes meet on mornings at the coffee shop: not a ranting authority, but someone with a special perspective. So, lay aside the axe and have some coffee; bear with me for the few minutes it will take to read this little booklet to you. Oh, and take this pencil. You'll need it.

It's curious that the same people who always take their car for inspections do not have an all-points check-up for the Personal System who drives the car. They may have annual physicals—but what

¹⁵ Elwyn Tilden, *Understanding Jesus*. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, Albert Schweitzer.

¹⁶ In a review of Charles King's *Gods of the Upper Air* in *The New Yorker* ("The Looking Glass," August 26, 2019)

about regular check-ups on their judgment? After all, any driver makes dozens of decisions even on a trip to the convenience store: *Turn left or right? Have a drink? Yield or go on? Speed up or slow down? Crank up the sound to show off? Check the phone? Watch that walker or ignore him?* Given more than forty thousand annual deaths and many injuries, don't you agree that a driver's judgment is an issue?

Jot down your answer on this pad. (This is where you need the pencil. Try to say more than "yes" or "no" so that I will have a chance to drink my coffee before I go on.)

So, it would be good for drivers to work on themselves a bit by personally checking their judgment—and that would make roads safer for others. Right? How would you do this self-check? Well, you might notice how many *near misses* you've had lately. *What led to them? Was it speed, inattention, an impairment in vision or hearing—or did they always occur at a particular corner or time of day? What about impatience and irritation with other drivers?* This is a simple judgment-check, not an *all points* inventory. But it could prevent the next near miss from becoming an accident.

What do you think about doing this kind of self-check? For example, do unrelated matters like a family argument impair driving? What would be on your self-check?

Jot it down on the pad. Don't rush this time.

Consider BRAKES. Brakes can—

Oh, I see you've balled up the pad and thrown it into the gorge. I was going to apply self-checking to other metaphoric situations—shocks, carburetion, power train. Never mind. Such a good analogy too--it's a shame.

Well, we've been looking over this precipice for a half-hour, so maybe I should get on to the sermonette about The One Way to Live.

THE ONE WAY TO LIVE

Some time ago—even before you and Gilgamesh started to pack for your trip; before Esau was bringing the herd from the back forty; before even dogs began following the family because of the scraps from the kids, some humans began to have free time on their hands—not much, but enough time to wonder about themselves. Obviously, compared to the hyenas and baboons, they had something going for them. Scavenging was now passé. Things were working out well for the troupe. They weren't running scared from day to day anymore; they had found a Way to Live and even had time for theatre, although staging could be lethal for visitors.

Not that everyone agreed that things were going well or even agreed on The Way to Live: people seldom agreed for very long about anything. Still, the idea stuck: life is not only to be supported and endured but *practiced*. And everyone had ideas about it—the neighbors, the priests, and, of course, the Chief. He was always telling you The Way to Live or Else. You know about that. From the servant quarters, you've always had a close-up on the Elite.

If you've managed to avoid being an Enemy of the State, Heretic, Son of Satan, or a Colonial, you've made it through History 101. You're free now to think for yourself, so have a go at writing down your idea of THE ONE WAY TO LIVE. No one will denounce you or force you into a hair-shirt. Oh

yes—you threw the paper and pencil into the gorge. I forgot. Well, let's say that you *did* come up with something and wrote it down.

It would be your own special Practice. *Oremus!* Maybe it's a daily prayer schedule. Maybe it's pushups every other day. It's your Practice—your way of working on yourself to live as you aspire to live. Your take on THE WAY TO LIVE. It's a framework for aspirations. A religion.

Or not.

As I mentioned, I mix you up. Being a Natural Man is not as simple as it used to be. Certainly it wasn't for Abel. He may have been gifted with goats, but he hadn't figured out much. And Cain, being the elder, a bumpkin farmer, and, of course, spiteful toward Daddy's Little Boy, he would have wanted to tell the story—even if he couldn't write it down. After all, he was the survivor. You do well not to write, by the way. Writers can be mistaken for several thousand pages at a time. No knock on your narrative knack, but now we do our telling by e-books and text-search—and you can even outsource the thinking. Who wants to read everything anyway? You do well to keep out of it. Stick with visualizations.

Say, it's gotten hot and sticky as we've been sitting here. I can imagine how the humidity tugs on that beard and bushy head of yours. Let's go into the museum to cool off.

A diorama of Catal-Huyuk. You stopped there, I believe, in the last years after erosion had split the settlement with trenches. That's a nice likeness of you coming into the town on a chariot followed by a line of goats. Certainly a better snapshot than the one taken by Jean-Jacques, or the engravings De Mandeville sent back of the Chest-Head Man, with eyes for nipples, mouth for belly-button, and gut for brains. Given what we now know about the enteric nerve net, he may have been onto something, but it didn't show you at your best. It was more along the lines of THE ARTIST IN HIS HUNGRY-GHOST PERIOD—the struggling, the garret life, the righteous cause, that sort of thing. As I say, when we try to understand you, we get things mixed up.

Oh, here's the barnacle goose from Merian's *Bestiary* of 1650. John Hill demolished the idea a century later, but before that, several bishops made grave pronouncements about the Evidence of Immaculate Conception and a few rabbis differed about whether the barnacle meat was kosher, given that the barnacles which hatched into geese came from a Bernakes tree. Meanwhile, the lambs from the nearby cotton tree ate the barnacles without such scruples. Once the presses began to roll, printers got the word out and let the truth catch up when it could. Being mistaken never hinders us from imagining wonders or making a buck on them.

Let's skip the Medievals and go on to the looms and minuets. It's just a short hop from there to ALL YOU CAN EAT at the Romantic Bar & Grill. You'll like that. On our way, I'll tell you another story. What? *How was that?*

Oh. THAT LOOK—That look means me no good. I guess we're out of here. Too much history gives you a cramp—at least, you look like you have a cramp. You remind me of Dellinger in his Fedora, Trump in his mug shot, or Genghis staring down from his mount. How about this—Here's the set-up: You stare; I'll keep talking, but **HERE ENDETH THE READING**. Or at least, it's as close to an ending as I can get. Just keep walking as if nothing has happened. I'm so old that all I can do is talk. And what else are you going to do? Ever since you lost your liquidity you've been paling in lividity. Not funny, I know. Just keep walking and I'll keep talking until nightfall. You can pretend you're Haran al Rashid—

THE END

Almost.

Except for this postscript:

THE ONE ISSUE OF TRUE RELIGION

A Last walk around the Human Project

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us 'universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish the delusion but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.

—Albert Einstein, physicist

Statements are often falsely attributed to Einstein. I have come across several versions of the one in this epigraph, such as those by Grace Boggs and John Kabat-Zinn, but this version seems reliable and has also been used by the *On Being* site and corroborated by the relatives of Robert S. Marcus, former Political Director of the World Jewish Conference, who on February 12, 1954 received it from Einstein in a typed letter of condolence on the death of his son from polio, and addressed to him at the WJC in New York City.

Self-delusion and indulgence are at the root of any composition or memoir, such as my previous walk around the human project, *Marking Time*¹⁷. But composition and performance are also invitations to escape from self-delusion in the company of other escapees, the fellowship of those who attend to their being in the world. To share a last lap around the human project is a constitutional good for both of us, because self-delusion is not easily escaped without some kind of religion—but a religion innocent of demands.

¹⁷ The memoir entitled *Marking Time* was a poetry chapbook which was included in the anthology *HOUSE OF A THOUSAND ROOMS* (2022).

In the idleness of old age I move slowly and observe a thinning of emotions. I now notice what I customarily missed. I disallow what I previously favored. Under examination, the sense of reward becomes an object of attention even as it still strives to be a driver. The consequences of actions, now known too well, loom over every pending decision. To observe the effects, I often withdraw from following an impulse or belief. Past aspirations, and the righteous causes they propelled, are flattened silhouettes of their former selves.

The thin cloth of neocortex is woven of countless neural ensembles which test sensations, fire and wire, predict and correct predictions, and link to each other in horizontal and vertical associations through a hierarchy of continually agitated mental patterns. Even now, it permits me to assemble cognitive objects and mental workers; to calibrate my cognitive tools the best I can, and to do research for this final assessment—even if the workers are less like a research team than like bookies or brokers making bets on the fly. What am I in the midst of this effort? A peculiar assemblage in the last stage of development? A sum of relationships between transactions? Not revealed. Maybe I am more like a shiny film over the deeper human project.

Floating like a thin sheen of countless dancing patterns atop the water standing in a deep well, I flicker over the deep mass of axonic cables of the ancient cerebral, proprioceptive, interoceptive, and enteric networks. Living together with these ancients for eighty years has put me on a first-name basis, but like all ancient beings, they also have many other archetypal names that I do not know. Slowly though I now move, I can still fly quickly among the patterns in my dance, live briefly in different roles, chase questions, and avoid lingering with any favorite idea. I call these maneuvers *frameshifts*. Others may call this practice frivolity, a resistance to sticking to one thing at a time, a refusal to grow up and be serious—all true.

Some names for the patterns are: cognitive objects, values, modules, frames of reference, brackets, story-lines, memes, roles, orientations, predictions, realms of meaning, structures of reality, beliefs, archetypes, myths, cultural constructs, flows, rooms, strips, schemes, and schemata. Good places to visit on another walk.