

Experiencing the Transcendent: Personal Mystical Experiences

(Excerpted from Chapter 5 of my book, *Confessions of a Child of the Half-Light*)

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The Place of Mysticism in Religion

The sacred literature of the world's religions has recorded various mystical experiences for thousands of years. Among those who have experienced the Transcendent, we should not forget the prototypical mystical experience, i.e. the divine visitation that awakens and enlightens the soul and signals the onset of the mission of the one person who is central to the story of religion: the Divine Manifestation/Prophet.

The mystical experience is thus pertinent to the entire history of the world's revealed religions because it marks the genesis of the Prophet's mission on earth. The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith validated mysticism when He specifically referred to it as one of the nine voices by which He spoke. In identifying the *Book of Certitude*, the *Hidden Words* and the *Seven Valleys* of Bahá'u'lláh as “doctrinal,” “ethical” and “mystical” works respectively (GPB140), Shoghi Effendi has further validated the mystical category of religion.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive, mystical experiences have also occurred with agnostics and atheists, causing conversions in some and awakening curiosity in others. The well-traveled and experienced writer and European intellectual, Arthur Koestler, who may be described as a reluctant agnostic, was imprisoned in solitary confinement during the Spanish Civil War under threat of death.

At the window of his jail cell, he experienced the peaceful and detached dissolution of his ego—“the I had ceased to exist”—and his absorption in an “oceanic feeling” that he describes in detail in his autobiography *The Invisible Writing*. Because of this experience, Koestler became interested in paranormal experiences for the rest of his life. He retained a faint hope in the afterlife according to the note he left at the time of his death by his own hand.

Skeptical rationalists, like the atheistic psychologist of religion, J.H. Leuba, are prejudiced against the validity of supernatural mystical experiences; they would like to reduce them to explicable, natural psychological phenomena, or to biochemical processes in the brain. It has been suggested that a negative pun on the English word “mist” reinforces the connotation that mysticism is lacking in substance. However, the noted Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye has

remarked that the “mist” mentioned in Genesis 2:6 signifies the fountain that watered the original paradisaic Garden of Eden. (WWP 202). This meaning suggests by phonetic association a relation between mysticism and water as the source of life.

Those of a practical mindset show little or no interest in exploring such esoteric phenomena. Some may find it bizarre to explore systematically what is always described as an ineffable phenomenon. Yet according to the perennialist Frithjof Schuon, “quintessential esoterism,” that is, mysticism, lies at the heart of perennial philosophy and universal religion. (*The Transcendent Unity of Religions*). The sense of the mystical, “touching the absolute,” or attaining the Transcendent, however it may be defined, is the common core of the world’s great religions, according to this view.

Some people are not at all temperamentally interested in mysticism. Questions of taste are difficult to arbitrate. Others may find it self-indulgent to record what are very intimate, personal experiences that have meaning especially—and perhaps only—for the person who experiences them. But these mystical experiences are being shared, nonetheless, because members of the Bahá’í community will no doubt make mysticism an object of study, a study that has already begun, just as such studies have long been established in the other world religions.

The study of mysticism in the Bahá’í community cannot be done without personal testimony. It will be a matter of interest for scholars, writers, researchers and general readers to know what sort of transcendental experiences typify the spiritual life of Bahá’ís: whether they have common features; how precisely the teachings of the Faith come to be manifested in these occurrences, whether as visions in the waking or sleeping states, dreams, in prayer and meditation, contemplation, during pilgrimage, at the Nineteen Day Feast or on holy days, or by communion with any of the Three Central Figures or the Guardian.

Shoghi Effendi has written in one of his letters that genuine mystical experiences are very rare, and to paraphrase, he also says in that same letter that if a believer is going to have a mystical experience, God will grant it to him or her without the believer having to look for it. (LOG 1742). I suspect that his intent was to discourage any Bahá’í to label him/herself as a “Bahá’í mystic,” i.e. as an identifiable type or category.

The Guardian’s incisive observation describes exactly the experiences recorded in this chapter. Although I have been long interested in mysticism, and although I am by temperament inclined to contemplation, I did not aspire to have these experiences, beyond the benefits of prayer and meditation. Nor do I know why I have had more than one type of these experiences, which have manifested themselves in various ways as altered states of consciousness, whether as visions, dreams, clairvoyance, clairaudience, etc. Unlike prayer and meditation, none of them was subject to my conscious control; they occurred spontaneously. They have given me pause to reflect on the unsuspected, normally hidden capacities latent within the human soul.

Although mystical experiences are relatively rare, they are perhaps not quite as rare as we might imagine. In the history of every religion, testimony abounds validating this life-changing phenomenon. We should also remember that for the Divine Manifestation, He who controls the laws of nature and the dynamics of the spiritual realm, the occurrence of this phenomenon in the soul of any believer is easy to achieve. This is precisely the impression I have about the experiences described below. I experienced them through a Power that accomplished them easily and naturally, although to me they seemed quite extraordinary because they were categorically different from my ordinary, mundane consciousness.

It is important to note that direct experience of the phenomena of the Transcendent is not something that occurs just for its own sake. I believe it has a much deeper meaning and purpose for the individual. Something may be learned from these experiences, both by the subject who experiences them and for the benefit of others. The extraordinary grace of these experiences is not “free.” To the extent possible, the believer should attempt to translate what has been learned from them into living the Bahá’í life, to teaching the Faith, and to enriching the lives of others and being of service to the community.

Five Types of Transcendental Experiences

Five types of spiritual experiences are recorded below. Dreams are universal in all cultures, but the ones that I have selected are especially memorable. It bears repeating at the outset that Bahá’í scripture has affirmed that complete absorption in or total union with the Godhead is an impossibility and a mistaken interpretation of the mystics themselves. These descriptions of absorption or union with God are a metaphorical attempt to express the inexpressible.

Even with “Falling on my Face Before the Glory of God,” the most dramatic and powerful of them, never did I conclude that I had become one with Bahá’u’lláh. He remained in His station, transcendent, powerful and majestic. What the mystics experience, then, is not union with the Godhead, but rather union with the highest register of the soul. Even the claim of union with the Divine Manifestation, should it be advanced, is questionable for the simple but persuasive reason that to achieve union with the Prophet, one must also have the same station. Put simply, only a Manifestation of God can experience union with another Manifestation of God.

1. **Being in the Presence.** The first and easily the most powerful episode corresponds to the phrase of German theologian and comparative religionist Rudolf Otto’s phrase of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. For me this was a “one off” encounter with the Divine Manifestation. A very different but nonetheless extraordinary experience is described in “Hand of the Cause Mr. Zikrulláh Khádem Vehicles the Love of Shoghi Effendi.”

2. **Visions.** The visions described below occurred both in both the waking and sleeping state. I should explain my somewhat atypical use of the word “vision.” In “Witnessing the Sacrificial Love of the Martyrdom of the Báb,” I definitely saw something, but what I saw may not be described by the usual meaning of the word “vision.” The scene before my eyes did not disappear, to be replaced by other striking figures not normally visible. It was a perceptual vision in which a veil was removed and understanding was conferred; but the understanding took place through vision, i.e. through the eyes witnessing something.

“Seeing the Unity of Humanity in a Student Restaurant in Paris” was similar to the same process I experienced above as Bahram Katirai and I commemorated the Martyrdom of the Báb on the campus of the University of Ottawa. The scene before me in the Censier student restaurant in Paris did not change, yet the whole scenario “shifted” to a higher realm, to be transformed or overlain with a filter that revealed the blissful, future unity of mankind.

3. **Clairvoyance.** Closely resembling visions is clairvoyance. By clairvoyance I do not mean feeling something, i.e. having an intuition about someone or something that is true. Clairvoyance means seeing something unusual while I was awake, a vision that made me aware of something that I had not previously known. Two of these episodes are described below. I would be hard-pressed to distinguish between visions and clairvoyance in the waking state, except to say that the three visions that I report below were connected directly with the Faith: one with the sacrifice of the Báb, one with the Master, and the other was a visual expression of the unity of humanity. The clairvoyant experiences revealed something to me that I did not know previously. I do not propose that this distinction between visions and clairvoyance is hard and fast; I am only stating the distinction based on my own personal experience. The distinction is a subtle and difficult one.

4. **Clairaudience.** Clairaudience is the audio equivalent of clairvoyance. It refers to words heard in the waking state that provided either guidance or consolation.

5. **Dreams.** Some of the dreams that have been selected below, although they occurred in the sleeping state, seem to me to be closer to actual visions. For example, the Dream of the Lady Martyrs of Iran falls into that category, as does the paradisaal state that I found myself in as I approached the Shrine of the Báb in tears. Seeing my friend and Islamic scholar, Dr. Todd Lawson, snorkeling underwater in Cuba also falls into this category. Although it was a dream, its clarity qualifies it as a vision. He confirmed that what I saw was true, although I was not aware that he was traveling in Cuba. Often those dreams that have a high spiritual register are brightly colored.

I. BEING IN THE PRESENCE

Falling on my Face Before the Glory of God

Background: Illness and the Meaning of Healing. I recorded this remarkable incident in a file called *The Special Glory File*. I wrote at the head of the sheet of paper that records the sayings I spoke that night: “This night I have experienced repentance, thankfulness, deliverance, rebirth, dumbfoundedness, utter weakness, confusion, the majesty of God, the fear of God, the power of God, the love of God—it was all the Presence of Bahá’u’lláh.”

As the Sufis say, I “tasted” these things immediately, just as one tastes food, or touches or feels any object through the intermediary of the physical body. There was nothing abstract or esoteric about the experience: it was as real, as concrete as anything one can imagine—no, more so, because it was grounded in Reality—in that divine space that belongs to the Divine Manifestation where He interacts with the human soul, there where all things pertain to nothing but the unadulterated Divine, fulfilling the very purpose for which we have been created. The nine things that I said during my altered state were all recorded immediately following the experience.

Time has not dimmed the memory of that unforgettable evening. My former wife and close friend Brigitte Maloney Polycarpe and I were living on the main street of La Pocatière, Québec, about 80 miles/128 kms. east of Quebec City, in a two-bedroom apartment above Khazoom’s, a clothing store that is still located in that town. I had found my first teaching assignment at the *Collège* on the hill, after completing my M.A. in the History of Religions at the University of Ottawa. I was assigned to teach English as a second language to secondary students who were both day students and boarders in the school that is attached to La Pocatière’s famous agricultural college.

During this time of my life, circa 1970 CE, I had suffered what is commonly called a “nervous breakdown.” An Ottawa neurologist, Dr. Atask, the brother of Bahá’í Jim Atask, diagnosed it more specifically as an “acute anxiety neurosis” that manifested also as depression. It is important to note that I was suffering from a mood, not a cognitive disorder at the time. The condition was serious enough, but it was not accompanied by any disorder of the rational process. The revelation that followed was intended to relieve me of this affliction, or at least, to give me a perspective and a conviction that would enable me to endure and understand it.

Thankfully this condition eventually attenuated, but at that time I had been afflicted with unrelenting emotional pain, that left me feeling very much like an iceman who had been frozen with this affliction. I had not been prescribed, nor did I seek any medication at that time to relieve the intense anxiety I was feeling. I had completely succumbed to a distressing and acute

psychological condition. I was helpless to know what had caused this acute emotional pain, nor was I in any way able to relieve it. How I ended up in this condition, it took periodic sessions of psychotherapy to discover, but at the time, there was no knowing or understanding why I felt such terrible desolation. It was truly the lived experience of St. John of the Cross's "dark night of the soul."

While I was still a student at the University of Ottawa, I did receive some very helpful psychological counseling from that compassionate and insightful, now departed physician, psychiatrist Dr. Juanita Casselman. Thanks to her kindness and skillful care, I experienced some relief from my oppression, and with her benevolent care, I gained some insights into the reasons for my condition, insights that brought gradual relief. My gratitude to Dr. Casselman remains profound to this day.

Setting the Scene: The Divine Encounter. The date was March 3, 1974 during the Fast. On that snowy, winter evening, Brigitte had taken baby Mukina, who was one and a half years old, out for a walk. I was alone. The stage was now set for that transformative, rare and powerful experience that was about to take place. Seeking relief for my condition, I entered the bedroom, faced the Qiblah and began to recite my favorite prayer: "Create in me a pure heart, O my God, and renew a tranquil conscience within me, O my hope!" I had intoned only the first few lines of the prayer, when "suddenly"—that word which often signals the direct intervention of the Divine—the room began to fill up with an overpowering presence.

This experience was not visual. I saw nothing, but the overwhelming power of that Majestic Presence began to increase, just as an adjustable light—a "dimmer switch"—gradually illumines a dark room until it reaches full power. In the face of this growing, powerful, undeniable but invisible Presence, I began to repeat over and over again "O my God!" "O my God!" "O my God!" That was all I could say initially as this Majestic Force completely dominated the room. The strength of that Divine Presence continued to increase in just a matter of moments, until I was forced to my knees.

This gesture of falling on my knees occurred quite spontaneously. It was not a matter of choice. I was overwhelmed, completely overpowered by that Mighty Presence. I felt that I would fall down or faint if I did not humble myself. Once I was on my knees, my soul began a dialogue with its Lord, Bahá'u'lláh. I say "dialogue," but in reality, I did not hear anything in this conversation, except my own words. The Divine Presence evoked certain responses from a hitherto, deep, unknown sacred place at the center of my soul, responses that were voiced aloud before It.

This "conversation," although it was very intimate, did not occur in any sense as a conversation

that occurs between human beings. The words that I spoke came from such a profound depth of soul as I had never before known in the waking state. Bahá'u'lláh was not in any sense speaking to me, but He was certainly aware of the responses that His presence evoked. Although I was fully conscious, I was nonetheless in a very altered state. It was the state of a humble servant bowed down before His Lord, when no word is spoken belonging to the mundane world that we normally inhabit.

There was no such thing, as the mystics sometimes claim, as union with one's Lord. Bahá'u'lláh remained fully transcendent throughout. He was fully aware of my condition. I was entirely ignorant of anything else but His lordship. The divine encounter took place in that sacred space where the only words spoken are holy words, uttered only by His leave. I do not say "holy words" to suggest that I am in any way holy, but only to indicate that by the grace of Bahá'u'lláh, He allowed me to access my innermost heart where the Presence of God resides, in that space that Louis Massignon and later Thomas Merton called "*le point vierge*," the virginal point, that immaculate place that can never be sullied by the things of the earth, the place where the beautiful "brides of inner meaning" (KI 175) are unveiled.

Here follow the things that I said when, like the prophet Daniel on the banks of the Tigris, where Bahá'u'lláh had once walked in Baghdád during His exile, I too had fallen on my face before the Glory of the Lord.

The Soul's Conversation with its Lord: To read these words again, words that are so intimate and personal, and to expose them to public scrutiny, seems to trivialize the significance they had for me then, when I spoke them aloud before that Divine Presence:

"O my God! O my God! O my God!"

"It was Bahá'u'lláh!"

"Bahá'u'lláh loves me! He loves me! I know He loves me for He came to me!"

"It is going out, it is all going away. It is leaving me. All the sorrow, the pain and suffering, it is all being taken away!"

"I have suffered so much. Nobody knows what I have suffered these past three years."

"I am becoming new. I am being born again. I am becoming a new man, a new person!"

"It's a divine healing! It's a miracle!"

"O thank you my God! Thank you! Thank you for answering my prayer!"

“You have answered my prayer. My prayer has been answered!”

What Happened Then: What I Learned from this Experience

If the reader now supposes that I experienced a complete cure from the distressing psychological state that had assailed me, and although such a perfect healing has happened to others, this sort of cure did not occur for me. No, healing from the condition that I labored under actually took years. But this experience confirmed in the most real way what I needed to understand to bear it: that Bahá'u'lláh is the All-Seeing, the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful, the Healer, the All-Sufficing.

It taught me that although I was not immediately psychologically healed, that my innermost soul was impervious to any ills of the body or mind. It taught me that God is able to change at His bidding any painful states of mind or adverse psychological conditions. This means that all healing is ultimately subject to the Will of God. No condition exists which God is not able to heal, however acute it may be. In that blissful state, I was entirely unaware of illness of any kind, be it of body or mind. I was not actually at all aware of my physical body; I was pure spiritual consciousness.

Unlike others who have been touched by the Divine Physician, although this experience did not bring complete and immediate healing of the mood disorder I was laboring under, I understood something else: that the soul is indeed a mysterious and powerful creation of God, beyond the capacity of humans to understand fully. It occupies a sacred space that is forever immune from any disability. I understood also that only a small part of the soul's full capacity and power is normally revealed in this life.

I do not consider that this experience was in any sense a reward for anything I had done. I believe rather that it was indisputable proof of the omniscience and mercy of the omnipotent Manifestation of God who does not wish to witness the dire suffering of even the least of His believers. I believe that it was precisely because this suffering was so acute at the time that Bahá'u'lláh chose to reveal Himself in His attribute of Power, the dominating attribute of the entire experience.

The power that forced me to my knees that night was only a smidgen, “an infinitesimal glimmer,” as He has written, of the power that the Ancient Beauty could have revealed. As it was, in the aftermath of the experience, I was left dazed and bewildered for a short time, just as if I had been struck by a lightning bolt. The dose of spiritual healing that I received then was measured to the limit of my capacity. Although I had been struck by lightning and knocked to the ground, somehow I lived to tell the tale.

I wrote above that on that night, one of the dynamic elements that I experienced had been “the fear of God.” I must clarify the meaning of this sentence. As has often been discussed by the mystics and other spirituals, this was not “fear” as we usually understand that word. It was not the fear that causes us to cower, to freeze or to run to save our lives or to stand and fight. No, fear of this sort did not enter the picture, simply because I had no choice but to submit. I did not submit because of fear; I submitted because of Power.

My bowing down was rather the one and only perfectly natural disposition of the soul to humble itself before such Majesty and Power, and to speak sacred words to its Creator in its gratitude. Although I remained awe-struck throughout the entire experience, I was completely lucid in a transcendental way that I had never before known. Despite the transcendental realm of the soul I had entered, the experience transpired “naturally” in that sacred space. He chooses to do as He wishes, and it is not ours to know the whys and wherefores. In the face of such irresistible and overwhelming power, the servant simply bows and obeys His Lord.

Hand of the Cause Mr. Zikrulláh Khádem Vehicles the Love of Shoghi Effendi

*The same phenomenon described here below recurred in a less intense experience with Shamsi Sedaghat on a bus in the Soviet Union in 1990. The latter experience is found in my Russia journal, *To Russia With Love*, which is posted on my website, www.jack-mclean.com. It is also found in the last chapter of this book.

Each Hand of the Cause of God had particular qualities that made him or her distinct from all other Hands. In that sense, each Hand was the essence of individuality, notwithstanding their collective devotion to the Guardian and their service to the needs of the Divine Plan. Mr. Khádem was noted particularly for his remarkable love, dedication and personal devotion to the Guardian, whose true servant and fervent admirer he was. Affectionate, humble and courteous, a man of refined manners and finely tuned spiritual sensitivity, he was like an evanescent drop lost in the ocean of Shoghi Effendi’s love.

Unusually rare in this world, the love that Mr. Khádem transmitted that day to one who was then a Bahá’í youth, was vastly different from any form of affection that one may feel for loved ones, whether friends, family, fellow-believers or spouse. It was a type of love that was of an entirely different order of quality and magnitude.

I was about 21 years old. The youth of the Toronto community had been invited to a youth conference at York University to which the Hand of the Cause of God was scheduled to speak. It was a sunny day. I was seated somewhere near the back of the large hall. Mr. Khádem was speaking from the stage at the front of the room. I cannot recall the substance of his address now, but I do remember that he began by chanting in Persian the very beautiful passage translated in

the *Gleanings* that begins “Release yourselves, O nightingales of God, from the thorns and brambles of wretchedness and misery, and wing your flight to the rose-garden of unfading splendor.” (GL 319).

At some point during his talk, the divine visitation that I was in no way expecting began. Again, it began suddenly. I was sitting in my seat, listening to Mr. Khádem, when this irresistible wave of a most potent love came over me and sent me into another realm, where I quite lost my ordinary senses. In that moment, I became Majnun. Now the madness of the love that is written of Majnun for Layli in Middle-Eastern literature is a type of metaphor for the soul’s love for God in its highest stages, but it is not actually a madness in the ordinary psychiatric sense of the world; not a madness that requires medical intervention.

But it would require medical attention if the experience of divine love that takes command of the soul were to become a permanent state *in this world*. Were it become a permanent state in the world of *Násut*, no individual could live in this world and be functional under such a powerful, consciousness-altering state. The divine love that I experienced during that episode, which lasted for about five minutes, was a foretaste of the heavenly love that is reserved for the Abhá Kingdom.

It is reserved for the inhabitants of the Crimson Ark because in the “land of there,” as the poet Roger White called the world beyond, the soul is able to permanently sustain that sort of consciousness; in this world it cannot. It creates a kind of madness in this world, only because it is ordinarily reserved for the next. It would create a psychic disturbance if it lasted for any length of time in this world.

I can best describe that unexpected experience with a metaphor. This metaphor will better explain this spiritual experience to those who may be skeptical that such a thing could exist. Imagine a colossal magnet suspended in the air just above the stage where Mr. Khádem was speaking. Now picture yourself as a metal speck, a single iron filing lying in close proximity to that gigantic magnet. Would the metal speck be able to escape such an irresistible, powerful force?

That force transformed my entire being into an irresistible object of attraction, closely followed by an ecstasy during which, although I could still see with my physical eyes, I was really blind to anything else in my visual field. In a sense, that Magnetic Force caused the temporary suspension of my five senses, of everything except the overwhelming consciousness of love.

The proof of Its great magnitude is that it drew me literally out of my seat. If one can imagine—I then walked down the aisle, and in full view of all the assembled friends, mounted the stage, even as Mr. Khádem was speaking, and completely unembarrassed and forgetful of myself, threw my arms around him and kissed him on the cheek. This spontaneous, unusual gesture in

such a formal setting, which might have been viewed as inappropriate by some, was not even a choice of mine, any more than breathing, eating or sleeping are choices.

It was something that I was utterly compelled to do, just as I have described falling to the floor in the presence of the Glory of God in the section above. Choice did not exist in that moment, either theoretically or practically. As the Greek root of the English word ecstasy suggests, I was standing “outside myself.” I had in a sense left my physical body. Normal social conventions were obliterated as was mundane consciousness.

Mr. Khádem looked at me, this strange young man who had climbed the stage to interrupt his talk, but he seemed not at all surprised or disturbed by my unusual behavior. He looked at me and said simply “God bless you.” He could not have known, just by looking at me, anything of the transformed state I was actually in. Still oblivious to those around me, I left the stage blinded by my own tears and returned to my seat, as everyday consciousness gradually returned.

For many years after, I had been unable to identify precisely the origin of this Divine Love which drew me toward Mr. Khádem like a gigantic magnet, nor for some years did I really seek to comprehend the experience any further. But some 25 years later, after Mr. Khádem had passed from this world, I met his wife, Javidokht Khádem, at a conference in Quebec City. As she gathered with some of her children during the afternoon break, I found a brief moment to tell her about my unusual experience, although I am certain that my words did not convey to her the enormity of the experience.

She listened politely under the circumstances and responded with the simple but certain observation: “Yes, that was the love of Shoghi Effendi.” Mrs. Khádem’s insight was the master key that instantly unlocked the meaning of that rare spiritual event. Although Mrs. Khádem clearly identified the dynamic source of that divine love, it could not explain the mysterious nature of that other worldly experience. No way exists to explain that divine love, other than how love itself has been described in our sacred writings.

But what *is* very clear to me is that Mr. Khádem vehicled the love of Shoghi Effendi to me that day. Beyond that I do not know, for divine love remains now and forever the mystery of mysteries. Yet, for all its mysterious power of attraction, it remains an enigma that can be experienced by all the friends, in its various forms and faces: in everything that ranges from simple cordiality, to friendship and fellowship, to more intense joy and exaltation, even unto the bliss that makes us forget who we are, a love that can turn a callow youth into a Majnun, an ecstatic lover who, lost in the Valley of Love, forgets himself and all that is in the world, except the love that has possessed his entire being.

After His Passing: In my Father's Presence with my Mother

It was a very difficult adjustment to make for my mother Joyce after my father Allan James died suddenly on April 6, 1995. They loved one another deeply—so deeply that a mystical bond connected them, all the more so during their last years together. During that first year after my father died, my mother decided to visit us in Gatineau, Quebec from Salt Spring Island, British Columbia where my parents had retired circa 1978.

My mother was doing her best, as she always did, to live her life as courageously as possible, without having her husband by her side, but the pain of his absence lingered on despite her valiant efforts to resume life without him. It was the first time that I had seen my mother following my father's funeral on the island.

To outward appearances, she seemed to be coping well, but as I have mentioned elsewhere, she told me that the second year after my father's death was more trying for her than the first year. (I imagine that the first year of widowhood was a period of grieving and adjustment, while the second year became one of settling in to the harsh reality of life without father). We had moved from the living room into the bedroom where we continued our conversation—I was looking for a book in my library—when I suddenly felt my father's overpowering presence standing before us.

Although I could not see him, in the same way that I could not see Bahá'u'lláh in "Falling on my Face Before the Glory of the Lord," my father's presence was unmistakably strong. It was no vague impression. On the contrary, it was a clear, definite, magnetic presence. The presence was so strong that I bowed my head and said: "O Mom, Dad is here!" But on that day, I was only the messenger to my mother of my father's love and continued existence beyond the grave.

My mother remained perplexed because she could not sense what I was feeling. I was chagrined in turn because I wanted her to feel what I was feeling—that strong magnetic love emanating from my father's invisible presence right in our midst. No doubt my father also desired that my mother should feel his presence, but on that day she could not. She had to content herself with my testimony that he was with us that day, radiating his love to her. Their joyous reunion took place six years later.

Mother Keeps her Promise to Show me the Bliss of Heaven

My mother Joyce Mary Halsted McLean died on November 28, 2001 on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia. I had lived with her on the island from 1997-1999, following my early retirement from teaching, but I returned to Ottawa after my two-year stay because I found the grey, damp, drab winters on the island psychologically challenging. I preferred the cold, dry,

snowy but sometimes sunny Ottawa winter to the damp, cloudy, west coast hibernal season. During one of our conversations, I asked her that if it were possible, would she reveal the next world to me when she passed on? She responded: “Well, if I can, I will.”

After mother died, one day back in Ottawa I saw a flock of Canada geese flying overhead. Seeing Canada geese is not an unusual sight in this country, but I thought that perhaps the freedom of their flight, as they winged effortlessly through the sky, might have been the precursor sign mother promised of the happy life after death. It was an exhilarating experience to watch those geese on their flight path, but the gentle, peaceful mood that observing them evoked in no way compared to the extraordinary event that occurred one afternoon sometime later.

In November of 1999, I moved into a small but comfortable flat at 2-145 McLeod Street, just around the corner from Elgin Street, one of the main streets running north and south in Ottawa. I had already begun *A Celestial Burning* on Salt Spring Island, my selective study of the writings of Shoghi Effendi. Once I returned to Ottawa, I continued in earnest, researching and writing that book.

One afternoon, in connection with a passage I was writing, I was doing some research on the origin of the conception of paradise. I was consulting the entry under “Paradise” in an old 1959 edition of my *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The article stated the word paradise was of Persian origin, meaning “green garden.” It included a description that was based mainly on biblical passages.

The heavenly picture that emerged was based on figures of speech derived from nature: broad, flowing, rivers on whose banks trees grew which bore luscious fruits that bestowed healing to sick souls, and flowering, luxuriant gardens of exquisite beauty. I did not know it, as I began to read, but my mother’s promise was about to be realized.

As I perused the article, it began to dawn on me that the description of paradise was not based on mere verbal similes and metaphors. I was invaded by the certainty that visually the happy inmates of paradise would actually be able to see such blissful, bright, enchanting scenes in their beatific vision.

Then suddenly it happened! Imagine for a moment the ascent to a bubble that one sees above the heads of cartoon characters dialoguing in comic books. That bubble became that place which mother had promised to reveal. There for only a brief moment, I saw and felt the joy, love and light of the world to come. I saw and felt only light, love and space—no other figures were visible at that time—but the one overwhelming feeling that transformed me, the only feeling that defined my consciousness, was that of a bliss beyond joy.

Not only was it “light upon light,” as ‘Abdu’l-Baha says in our sacred writings, but it was also joy upon joy, the kind of joy of that cannot be sustained for long in this world, but which can and

will be sustained in the great world beyond. The joy I felt was registered at a much higher scale than the earthly joys that we know in this life.

The difference could best be understood this way: if you take the greatest experience of joy that you have had in this life—the birth of a child, a wedding, the freshness of a love relationship, the joy of companionship, the joy of adventure and travel, the realization of a cherished desire, or the joy of success—then multiply the intensity of that joy by a factor of say five-hundred. That comparison approximates the light and joy that I felt and saw when I ascended momentarily to that world.

And the Heavens Opened: An Experience of Cosmic Happiness

This particular episode took place, as often happens, during a major dislocation in my life that occasioned great disappointment. I was in the process of moving to Almonte, Ontario, from Carleton Place, a move of short duration, before I relocated in Ottawa on December 1, 2016, after spending a few months in Gatineau, Quebec with my eldest daughter Mukina. I was having coffee in Almonte at the Equator Coffee Roasters with my good-humored, wise, truly spiritual friend and writer Richard van Duyvendyk.

We were sitting outside on a fine, summer's day at a little circular coffee table and two chairs, the three pieces of the ensemble being painted bright red. Richard stood up and returned to the café to get a second cup. It was not a happy time of my life; I was experiencing again another situation of profound disillusionment. I looked up into the bright, cloud-filled, summer sky. As for some of the other transcendent experiences I have described, a veil was suddenly removed. Although there was no actual change in the visual landscape, my perception of the scene changed entirely. I should use rather the passive voice: it was changed. It came in the form of a revelation--with a small "r".

A cosmic happiness was revealed in that heavenly vista. I say cosmic happiness because typically it was markedly different from all the manifestations of personal happiness that we usually experience in this life. I had been praying to be relieved of the distressing condition I was in, but I know that I did not—could not—cause it to happen by sheer force of will. The happiness that I saw and felt as I looked up, was remarkably broad, free and spacious. It was without limits. Hence the descriptor "cosmic" used in the title. It was supra-personal.

Although I was the experiencing subject, the experience did not belong to me. It was not something that was in my control, nor anything that I could have determined by changing my attitude. It was God's joy, an objective joy that was above and beyond personal happiness, a joy that had been infused into the very being and fabric of the world that I saw.

When I shared this experience with my close friend of many years, Jamal Toeg, a friend who had not always had an easy life, he confided that he too had experienced the same thing, during a very trying time. He told me that what we both had seen was a foretaste, a previsioning of the life that awaits beyond death.

His understanding, I felt, was entirely correct, and I readily accepted his explanation. What we had seen corresponded to the joy described in Bahá'u'lláh's thirty-second Arabic Hidden Word: "O SON OF THE SUPREME! I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendour. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?" (HW Arabic #32) That messenger of joy brings the welcome news of an expansive, cosmic joy that is rarely obtained in this earthly life.

Resetting the Distressed Mind Through the Power of the Word of God

As the reader will have by now already realized, some of the transcendental moments described above came in the waking state during moments of emotional crisis or distress. The moment related here came as sudden healing to remedy an emotional upset caused by a misunderstanding in a personal relationship. Although this episode did involve clairvoyance and clairaudience, these faculties did not operate precisely in the same way as in the experiences described elsewhere in this chapter.

I had been too upset to sleep. As I lay in the dark, I saw in my mind's eye—not objectively or externally in the room—a quotation from the Bahá'í sacred writings. Positionally, it appeared above my head. I can no longer recall the identity of that sacred text, but my eye began slowly to follow each word from left to right. As my eye scanned the words, I heard them being recited, but with full emphasis on each word. It took only a few moments to reach the end of the quotation, when suddenly, it was as if someone pressed a "reset button" in my brain. The cycle of agitation that had previously prevented sleep was instantly broken. It was as if a circuit-breaker had been closed and opened again, fully clearing the mind.

Because I was too astonished to fall asleep immediately, I began to reflect on the experience. I recalled the verses in our sacred writings that speak of the amazing powers that are latent in the Word of God, the magnificent powers of creation, for example. Although a believer does feel these creative powers moving the heart during pilgrimage or in prayer, or while listening to the sacred word during the Nineteen Day Feast, this was the first time I had experienced immediate healing from a distressing emotional condition that had occurred through the direct agency of the Word of God.

This experience enabled me to understand that the creative, healing powers latent in the Word of God cannot be reduced either to mere dramatic effect or poetic metaphor. These sacred texts are

literal truth expressed symbolically. My impression was that the healing that I experienced was a small demonstration of a much greater potential power, for the healing was effected with the greatest of ease and swiftness.

Meeting Hand of the Cause Mr. Khádem in the Rose Garden of the Spirit

While the mystical moment described here is not as dramatic and life-changing as the episodes mentioned above, it clearly falls within the mystical domain. It was only a brief meeting, but often in our brief passage through this world, the things that have the greatest impact on the soul can occur in only the briefest moment in time: in a glance, a chance meeting, a touch, a brief spoken word, or a gift.

The physical meeting—I should really call it an “encounter” because it was no ordinary meeting—with the Hand of the Cause was of the briefest duration, no more than a minute, but it was a true occurrence of the meeting of two souls in the rose garden of the spirit, where two believers are suddenly united in a moment of mutual recognition in the love of God.

It happened this way. It was about 1970 when I was attending the LouHelen Bahá’í school near Davison, Michigan, a suburb of Flint. Davison, as it was then called, looked quite different from the expanded and greatly improved facility that exists at the present time. It was during this visit to LouHelen that I met Helen Eggleston herself, the founder and donator of the facility, who was by then in her senior years. (Lou was somewhat older than Helen and he had since passed on).

Helen was living on the property at the time, and she was kind enough to invite me into her home where we chatted about the Faith and its history. As I was leaving, she gave me as a memento of the visit, a thick typewritten compilation of the Bahá’í Writings. The compilation was of European length, i.e. the paper was slightly longer than the standard letter size in North America.

One afternoon I happened to be walking between buildings, going no place in particular. At the same time, Mr. Khádem, who was also walking between buildings, suddenly appeared just across from me. From what I recall, only the two of us were in the same spot at the same time. We were only about 10 meters/11 yards from one another when our paths crossed.

I saw the Hand of the Cause before he saw me. I saw him first because he was wrapped in his devotions, as he often was, lost deeply in thought. He looked like the true image of a walking contemplative, musing on the mysteries of the Kingdom of God or on his beloved Shoghi Effendi. His head was slightly bowed and his hands were clasped behind his back.

Then he looked up and saw me. Now this encounter happened as if two old bosom pals who had not seen one another for many years were suddenly reunited. It was the archetypal experience of the kind of meeting that should take place between the friends of God that has been described in

ideal terms by ‘Abdu’l-Baha: the lovers of the East should in perfect love outstretch their hands to embrace the friends of the West, and to rejoice in that love and unity.

I did not know Mr. Khádem well, so I cannot claim to have been in any sense a close friend of the family, although I had met his son Ramin and his daughter May when I was young, and much later his older son, the architect Mozhan Khádem, when we shared a room at the Bosch Bahá’í School in Santa Cruz, California.

Forgetting himself in that magical moment that I was not Iranian—I am of Anglo-Saxon origin, tall and in those days, I still had a full head of blond hair—Mr. Khádem began to speak to me quite spontaneously in Persian, the language of his heart, as he reached out to embrace me. Although I was young and he was middle-aged, during our sudden encounter, there was no age discrepancy, no barrier of any kind between us.

All barriers, all formalities, all distinctions had been removed. We were united in the eternal presence of God’s love, when the friends of God, as the Báb has revealed, become mirrors for one another’s souls. I have never before or since had such a full, immediate spiritual encounter with one individual: a moment of instant recognition in which a unity of spirits in the love of God is spontaneously realized.

Three Dreams: The Two Bábí Shaykhs, the Ark and the Lotus

In my nocturnal travels in one of the worlds of God, I entered the humble dwelling of two Shaykhs. Their dwelling was nothing more than a hut, indicating that they lived in a state of utter poverty. They wore turbans which were really nothing more than simple cloths wound around their heads. They wore the simplest attire. Their earthly identity could have been either Persian or Arab.

They were sitting in the typical manner on the ground. It was clear to me that these two learned men were studying the Word of God; they were conferring on spiritual matters in single-minded fashion. They were serious. All that mattered to them was the Word of God and the spiritual life. They had no other interests. They seemed to me to be disciples of the Báb, perhaps two Letters of the Living or other Dawn-breakers. When I entered their hut, one of them looked up at me and said: “When you came into this room, the whole atmosphere changed.” (I think he meant in a positive rather than a negative sense.)

The second dream conveyed an atmosphere of joy and adventure, and the greatest sense of exhilaration and freedom. I found myself on the ocean in the middle of a robust storm. The waves had been whipped high by the wind and the heaving of the waters. I saw myself standing on the outside edge of a small ark that was riding the waves. I was completely unafraid as I stood

on a footing at the back of the vessel. The small craft moved speedily forward, in the midst of the storm, rising and falling with the motion of the waves. The salty spray from the water splashed over my body and face.

It was so thrilling to ride this ark in the midmost ocean, enjoying this adventure, while being not the least bit concerned for my own safety. I was completely abandoned to the joy of the experience. This dream was an indication that we should joyfully ride the ark of faith in the midst of any storm. Perhaps it was an ideal vision that we should ride the waves of the tests of life on the ark of the divine teachings.

The third dream was also aquatic, but this time it took place not *on* but rather *in* the water. It was the polar opposite of the dream of the ark which was all excitement, freedom and movement. I saw myself sitting on the sandy bottom of the ocean in the lotus position with my eyes closed. This time I was completely immobile, totally immersed in the contemplation of the Spirit, concentrated, but again completely unafraid and at peace. Underwater I could breathe.

The Blessed Night of Peace

At this writing, the most recent of these transcendental experiences happened on 23 March, 2020 when I was 74 years old. It took place during the world-wide pandemic caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19), when citizens around the world were expected to stay home and self-isolate to contain the spread of the infection. That evening I was home alone reading Frances Worthington's excellent book *Abraham: One God Three Wives and Five Religions* (2011).

The mood, or more properly, the higher stream of consciousness that came over me, was not self-generated. It came rather as a visitation from above or beyond. The paranormal experience manifested as a peaceful rapture that lasted about an hour. It came over me so gradually that I was not fully aware at first that a change was taking place, until it took entire possession of my soul.

During the time of the visitation—"visitation" being used here in the sense of an extraordinary visit—it seemed that this state of mind, although it came from a higher plane than any mundane awareness, was entirely mine, not something foreign. The "I" then experienced was fully me, but it was the "I" of the higher self. The "stream of consciousness," that felicitous expression coined by the great psychologist William James, manifested both thoughts and feelings simultaneously. Some of the thoughts I spoke aloud as I was experiencing them.

The ostensible point of departure for this transcendental experience was some of the remarkable insights contained in Frances Worthington's book. Although I had long been familiar with some of these ideas, during this experience they assumed a greater depth-dimension of significance.

Among them was a deeper realization that all the Prophets are related as one brother and that mankind is indeed genetically one family in which all the races are related. Her book fully validates God's promise to Abraham that his descendants shall cover the earth as the dust: "and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3) Her book has it that all of us—every human being on the face of the earth—share a common ancestor, not in the remotest of ancestral times, but only some 2,000-3,000 years ago.

The intellectual realization that preceded the transcendental experience was in sum a fuller understanding of the organic unity of the human race, a unity that included an even profounder unity of all the Prophets, who were both spiritually and genetically related. What astonished me especially was to discover that white Europeans had descended from Muhammad through an Arabian Amir in Muslim Spain, and that Abraham and Keturah's six sons had voyaged east and had taken Abraham's religion as far as the Indus River, where it became known as Brahmanism, a word that contains a linguistic cognate of the word Abraham. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also confirmed in *Light of the World* that the sons of Abraham had travelled as far east as Afghanistan.

A Christian missionary of the 17th century, Phillipus Baldeus, met a group of Brahmans in Sri Lanka who told him that their ancestors were descendants of Keturah. The Brahmans held the reverse theory that Abraham was not the forefather of Brahmanism, but a descendant of it. They tell that in ancient times they had been forced out of the Indus valley and had journeyed from India during a devastating famine and had arrived in Mesopotamia in Ur of the Chaldees, in what is modern day 'Iráq.

But the blessed night of peace went beyond any profound intellectual realization. It was a state of consciousness that could not really be described as "cosmic consciousness," the title of Richard Maurice Bucke's 1901 book. I had no awareness of traveling great distances or looking down from on high to visualize the world below me.

I would describe it rather as an "elevated consciousness" or "higher consciousness" that felt akin to an anointing. This higher consciousness was characterized by all of the following: a total absence of fear or anxiety, whether of death, sin or any other thing; serenity and bliss; it lauded the blessings of God in gratitude and thanksgiving.

In that state, I was conscious of some other souls who had blessed me during my life, such as my children and my parents. It seemed to me that my soul was entirely satisfied and lacked nothing nor desired anything; it knew no form of desire. It was all thankfulness and blessings for the precious gifts that I had been given in my life. The line from the 23rd Psalm of the Prophet-King David of Israel expresses it well: "My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

During this experience, all the distress of the world completely disappeared, despite the trying

conditions the human race is currently experiencing through a worldwide pandemic. I sat peacefully, reading and meditating as holy thoughts kept running slowly through my mind. I repeated aloud: “Yes, yes, I understand. Yes, it’s true. It’s all true.”

As I looked around the room, I saw the white rose, the favorite flower of Bahá’u’lláh. I saw the photo of my beloved parents side-by-side looking smilingly upward to their left, as if they had caught a glimpse of heaven. I saw the photo of my two daughters, Mukina and Leah, when they were children. I kept thinking on all these things, while I said aloud quite self-unconsciously: “Yes, I am blessed with so many blessings and all this is holy. Everything is holy.”

It was as if I were a noble wrapped in a royal robe of purple during the time that it lasted. I felt fully integrated; any sense of a divided self was obliterated. Another form of unity, unity of the self had been easily attained. Although I was conscious that I still lived in this world, I felt elevated and whole. I had entered a higher realm.

That hour was a blessed night of peace, the hour of confirmation, a special time to pause, savor and value all the blessings with which my life had been graced. And when I closed my eyes during this time, I could see little motes of lovely light dancing before me, imparting joy, and thin, moving, far-off lines that were symbols of the traces of paradise. For that blessed hour, a door to the Abhá Kingdom had been momentarily set ajar.

II. Visions

Witnessing the Sacrificial Love of the Martyrdom of the Báb

When I was studying for my Master's degree in the History of Religions at the University of Ottawa in the early 1970's, I had a close friend, a fellow-Bahá'í named Bahram Katirai, who was also studying at the same university. Bahram had lived with some of us university students in Rockland, Ontario, east of Ottawa, including my former wife and friend, the Gaspesian Quebecer, Brigitte Maloney Polycarpe.

It was while we were living in Rockland that Brigitte and I married. Our eldest daughter Mukina was born in Ottawa at the Montfort Hospital during our stay in Rockland. While we were studying at the University of Ottawa, we students of majority age formed the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Rockland in 1972. The other students on the Assembly were the married American couple Don and Catherine Gilbert, and their compatriot, Richard Heiser, Canadian Albert Ouimet, who later moved to the Netherlands, the married couple Paul and Louise Haines and the musician Pierre Tremblay and Michel Boucher.

On 9 July, although classes had been suspended for the summer, Bahram and I happened to be at the university. Even though there were only two of us, we decided that we would meet and commemorate the holy day. It was a warm, sunny day. We decided to make for the trees that stand on the campus, on the east side of the main administration building, with its pillared colonnade in the classic Greco-Roman style.

We met under a pine tree, on the spreading lawn. We scarcely chatted, being aware of the solemnity of the occasion. Now Bahram was a very faithful and deep Bahá'í, with a fine mind and a sensitive heart. I can still clearly recall, despite all these passing years, the look of reverence and humility on his face as we began the commemoration with prayer.

It was at some point during the devotions that the mystical visitation came over me. As it has been written many times about the ineffable, it was an experience well-nigh impossible to capture in words. I can only put it this way: as I was looking up into the heavens, I began to perceive the world through what may be compared to a transcendent filter. It was the filter of divine love and sanctity.

And if a filter can be conceived as a kind of "veil" that is burnt away, or a curtain that is raised to reveal a greater, heavenly reality, then it was the lifting of a veil, or paradoxically, seeing through the filter, that allowed me an insight into something extraordinary. The vision was superimposed, as it were, over the physical heaven that I was contemplating. Through that filter, or beyond that veil, I was able to see into one of the divine realities connected with the

Martyrdom of the Báb.

The Blessed Beauty alludes to “veils of glory.” This fascinating phrase requires contemplation. Normally veils are things that blind the observer to reality, but they can also be viewed as curtains that are lifted or burnt away to reveal another reality. The phrase can also mean that Bahá’u’lláh, while revealing His glory, revealed that glory only to a limited degree, i.e. that He remained still wrapped in “veils of glory.”

Here I must use that paradoxical language that is so typical of mystical literature. Although I saw no physical vision, I mean as a literal transformation of the physical heavens, I nonetheless saw, felt, and understood what the supreme sacrifice of the Blessed Báb bestowed upon creation.

I saw and understood that everything in the world existed because of the supreme divine love that infused and suffused the world with the sacrifice of the Báb’s most precious earthy life. I understood also that the sacrifice of the Báb for humanity, and His companion Anís for the Báb, was not confined to noon on that July day in 1850. Its effects continue to radiate in inexhaustible waves of sanctifying energy that will continue forever.

No hint of tragedy or sadness marked that transcendent moment on that July afternoon, although historically the Martyrdom of the Báb was indeed the greatest tragedy of a lost opportunity for the Persian nation and for all humanity. It was rather a vision of sanctification, divine love and supreme sacrifice. The sacrifice of the earthly life of that “Master Hero,” as Shoghi Effendi has so accurately described Him, no doubt an expression contrasted with the Shakespearean “tragic hero,” bestowed a gift that was the essence of life itself.

In sum, I understood that everything in the world was sustained and energized because of that sacrificial love. For it bestowed life upon creation by an infinite store of love, love as a divine energy that serves to animate and sanctify all creation.

That scene was the living representation of the many life-bestowing, creative effects of the sacrificial death of Christ, so eloquently portrayed by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Gleanings*. In witnessing the effects of the sacrificial death of the Báb, I actually understood, or rather experienced, what the Blessed Beauty had revealed about Jesus of Nazareth.

Seeing the Unity of Humanity in a Student Restaurant in Paris

Outside of my childhood experiences, through which I first acquired a consciousness of the spiritual realm, one of the first transcendental moments I experienced in adulthood occurred in a *restaurant universitaire*, during my student days at the Sorbonne (1965-1968). It was in Paris where I had my first exposure to a much wider internationalism than I had known in Toronto where I grew up.

Toronto in those days, although it had received waves of European immigrants following World War II, was still very much a city whose predominant population was of British origin. Unlike the present time, few were the immigrants then from South Asia, the Far East and Africa, although Toronto like most large cities had its “Chinatown” and “little Italy.”

In Paris, I met for the first time students from the former French colonies in Africa and *les pieds noirs*, non-Muslim French-speakers from Algeria. Although there are competing theories about the origin of the phrase, it was explained to me that “the black feet” alluded to the black boots that French soldiers wore in Algeria.

This wider exposure to the black race, as well as to whites from the various European nations who were studying at the Sorbonne was, of course, an excellent experience for one who had already embraced racial unity as one of the great tenets of his religious beliefs.

I don’t know to what extent this wider interracial exposure in Paris had to do with what happened to me one afternoon, as I was about to eat my lunch at the university restaurant. I was going through the cafeteria line in the Censier *quartier*, not far from the student center where foreign students had their transcripts assessed of their academic courses.

I had just selected my noonday meal after paying the very modest student price and picked up my tray. As I left the line, I naturally looked up to make my way to the nearest table.

What I saw then was not the usual scene to which I was normally accustomed. A sudden, dramatic shift in perception occurred, as if a veil of holiness had either been cast over the scene, or as if a veil had been lifted so that that I might visualize this scene in a divine perspective.

Although the word “light” has been frequently used to describe mystical visitations—so often in fact that the word can lose its meaning—the words “light” or “illumination” are used to describe them because these words correspond exactly to the nature of the vision seen. Light is also symbolic for a newly revealed form of insight or knowledge.

I saw then an intimation of the future glorious unity of humanity. The black and white races that I beheld in the cafeteria were blended, melted or merged in a vision of oneness that overcast them in a wave of love, peace, harmony and unity. The lines of the Bahá’í prayer come to mind: “that all things may be merged into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendor.” And “a single breath from the breezes of the Day of Thy Revelation is enough to adorn all mankind with a fresh attire.” What I saw was a creative vision of what the world will experience when all the races of humanity will be blended into one race, on a day when all mankind will live each day, individually and collectively, as a living expression of the Divine Will through the teachings revealed by Bahá’u’lláh.

Seeing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Clouds

Along with the spiritual awakening in childhood described earlier in chapter three, the first incident of a vision occurred a little later when I was about ten years old. The vision described here is a different type from the two others described above. In this case, I actually saw a figure in the clouds, rather than having an image superimposed on my mind’s eye.

It was a bright sunny summer’s day, when I was returning from our neighbors, the Inesons, who had a son named Billy, a boy my own age. The Inesons lived a short distance north of my parents’ two-story home on Martin Grove Road, in what was then rural Etobicoke, now a well-populated, industrial area of the city of Toronto.

I was walking home alone in the late afternoon or early evening, while the sky was still very bright, piled high and wide with enormous cumulus clouds. When I was just a short distance from home, I looked up into the sky to my left. Configured there, high in the clouds, and dominating the entire scene like a colossus, was the clear, huge image of a patriarchal man, with a long, white beard sitting in a very relaxed posture, with both forearms resting comfortably on the arms of his throne.

It was an awe-inspiring scene that evoked both fear and wonder. I was startled by the sudden vision. “Who is this?” I thought. “Is this what God looks like?” Just a few years earlier in 1952, my mother Joyce, after two years of study, had declared her faith in Bahá’u’lláh. Although the Master’s photo hung over her chair in the living-room of our next home at 6 Emery Circle, Etobicoke, I do not recall that mother had placed a photo of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in our home on Martin Grove Road. As far as I remember, the earthly image of the Master had not fully entered my consciousness at that young age, although I knew His name from the prayers that mother taught us children.

It did not occur to me then that the celestial figure who appeared in the clouds was the Servant of Glory. It was only much later, as I reflected back on that late afternoon, did I realize that the towering figure riding on the clouds was the perfect image of a smiling, benevolent ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. As the cogent literary expression has it, it was a clear case of “dramatic foreshadowing.”

My Mother’s Vision When She Was Still A Child

*The following section relates a vision during the waking state that my mother had when she was still a child herself. Although I had heard a few vague allusions to it during my adult years, it remained a mystery to me. It was not until the 52nd or 53rd year of my life that mother related her vision to me. The main reason that she kept it to herself all those years was that she had not fully understood its significance—that is, until the streams of our two lives crossed again in the

last few years of her life. It was then that the significance of her vision became apparent to her. During the two years (1997-1999) immediately following my early retirement, I moved to Salt Spring Island from Ottawa, where my mother Joyce and my older sister Mary Lou were living. My father Allan James had died suddenly two years earlier on April 6, 1995. Although my sister was living on the island, Mary Lou was still fully employed at that time. Mother welcomed my company and my assistance—her health was beginning to deteriorate following my father’s death—and I appreciated having my mother in my life again and to be able to help her through a difficult period of transition.

At her invitation, I moved into my parents’ bungalow during the summer of 1997, helping out with the housework, the gardening, assisting her when she needed my help, while I worked on my writing. The company kept loneliness at bay for us both. It was a good arrangement. During that time, mother and son became better acquainted, albeit at a much later stage in our lives. We had many good and happy hours at 131 Mt. Baker Crescent, both between ourselves and in the company of friends and family.

During our conversations, we reminisced about family life and past events. I learned much more than what I had known previously about my parents’ conjugal life, my mother’s youth, and her family life growing up with my grandparents Halsted, how my parents met, their working life, etc. It was a time of recapitulation and rediscovery, of receiving a new perspective on family history.

One afternoon while we were having a conversation in the living room, something prompted her to speak about her vision. She told me that when she was only a child—I honestly don’t know how old she was, and she did not seem to be sure of her age at the time either—mother awoke one morning to see a luminous spirit sitting at the foot of her bed. She told me that the vision came in the form of a small figure of light, an illumined little child.

It seems somehow strange to say that it was one child looking at another child. She told me that she was momentarily troubled by this strange phenomenon that she could neither explain nor understand. The child whom she was watching sat very still, quietly meditating in a deep state of contemplation. Mother had related the vision to her parents and to her siblings, but it went unexplained for many years until the moment of our conversation that afternoon.

A moment of resolution came some 70 years later when mother finally discovered the key that explained the vision. After relating the vision, as if finding sudden relief, she announced: “Now I know that the little child I saw was you!” In the end, I accepted mother’s explanation that she had found at last the key to the mystery that had for so long eluded her.

But aside from the resolution that she found to her mysterious vision, I find such a phenomenon not only strange and mysterious, but also marvelous. That my mother when she was still a child

herself, could have seen one of her children before he was born, when she was given an intimation of her child's spiritual disposition many years in advance, gives us great pause for thought. Greater minds than mine will have to explain such things, if they can. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy!" said Shakespeare's Hamlet (Act 1, scene 5).

Seeing Dr. Todd Lawson Underwater in Cuba

I alluded to this dream at the head of this chapter under "Five Types of Transcendental Experiences." The dream that I had of my old friend and Islamic studies scholar who taught at the University of Toronto, Dr. Emeritus Todd Lawson, was pictured in bright, vivid colors. (When they were both young men, my brother Steve gave the first fireside that Todd attended in Toronto at Laura Vautour's home).

In my experience, the brighter the colors in a dream, the closer it is to true spiritual reality. The vision came as a snapshot. I saw Todd underneath the water, wearing snorkeling gear, in front of an underwater cave. I had no idea that he was vacationing in Cuba at the time. I sent him an email, telling him about the unusual clarity of the dream, because I suspected that it might be accurate. He wrote back saying: "That's uncanny. That's just what I was doing in Cuba." The dream-vision shows that the friends are spiritually connected, whether near or far from one another.

The Double-Sign: The Vision of Smoke and Mist

Like the "Blessed Night of Peace," this vision was one of the more recent paranormal experiences. I remember the very day well because it was my 74th birthday, on 7 June, 2019. A group of kind friends here at the co-op at 1435 Larose Avenue in Ottawa decided to fêter my birthday by taking me out to lunch.

On a sunny June day, our small group had gathered at the front entrance of the building, while we waited to be picked up by our driver. The scene took place on the west side of the semi-circular driveway, just beyond the main steps descending to the sidewalk. On the other side of the railing, stands a pine tree that is rather more lateral in shape than vertical in height. Stretching out from the pine lies a narrow strip of lawn extending the entire length of the west wing of the co-op.

As we waited for our driver, I looked up into the air above the pine tree to my right. At that moment, I saw two successive things. I should mention that this scene took place in full sight and hearing of my friends. When I saw wisps of smoke in the air, I said aloud: "Where is that smoke

coming from? Someone is smoking over there.”

I went to take a closer look, but I could not see anyone on the lawn. I thought then that the smoke had perhaps drifted down from the balcony of the apartment above. But when I looked up at the balcony, I saw no one smoking. Again, the friends I was with said nothing. They just assumed that I had seen cigarette smoke or that I was mistaken.

When I looked again, I saw the second phenomenon: a fine mist. I saw these two things objectively in the air, not in my mind’s eye. Again, I said aloud: “Edie must be watering her lawn. I see mist in the air.” Once again, the others did not react and said nothing, although they must have felt my observation to be strange because mist was not visible to any one of them, just as the smoke had not been visible to any one of them either.

But Edie, who lives on the ground floor, had not been watering her lawn, nor had anyone on the balcony above been watering flowers or smoking. The incident ended there because our driver then arrived, as we all piled into the car and made off for the destination of our chosen restaurant.

My Christian friend Christine Crawford was sitting opposite me at the lunch table. Now Christine has experienced herself a few transcendental phenomena. She does not doubt that such things happen. When I affirmed to her again that I had actually seen both smoke and mist, Christine accepted my explanation readily, without contesting my testimony, but without questioning me further.

Later I began to reflect on the meaning of the experience. The dual phenomenon that I witnessed was visible only to myself. It occurred to me that the two divine signs I had witnessed had appeared to remind me of just one thing. It was this: that whatever we do in this life, whether it be eating, drinking, celebrating, living and loving—these necessary and albeit legitimate things of life—are all transitory. Compared with Ultimate Reality, they have no real substance. They are, in a sense, illusions, as ephemeral as the mist or smoke that appears but for a moment in the air and then disappears.

III. Clairvoyance

Seeing Roger Pereira Dressed as a Priest

This episode of clairvoyance happened in the presence of others. While Brigitte and I were living in Gatineau, West Quebec, raising our daughters Mukina and Leah, a brilliant secondary school teacher named Roger Pereira became a Bahá'í. Roger was working at the same *polyvalente* or comprehensive high school where believer M. Alain Robitaille was an administrator. Roger was originally Haitian and his congenial wife, whose name I have by now forgotten, was not a French Quebecer, but a French national.

Roger told us that he had a Bahá'í sister living in the United States who had once told him: “Oh Roger you are really a Bahá'í!” At that time, Roger knew very little about the Faith, and my impression is that he did not inquire further. In any case, shortly after he joined the Bahá'í community, Roger, his wife, Brigitte and I were sitting around their dining room table, chatting. Roger was seated directly opposite me at the other end of the table.

Suddenly I saw Roger dressed in black as a priest, with a large golden cross hanging around his neck. The sudden interposition of this vision startled me. Because it was so clear, I decided to share with the group what had just occurred. After I told them what I had seen, Roger looked at me and said: “Vous êtes un homme dangereux. J'étais prêtre pendant dix ans en Haïti.” (“You are a dangerous man. I was a priest for ten years in Haiti.”). We continued talking and determined that at no time before in our short acquaintance had Roger ever mentioned that he had been a priest.

Seeing my Father Dancing Before His Casket

When our father, Allan James McLean, died suddenly on April 6, 1995, our mother Joyce and our whole family were deeply saddened, but nonetheless grateful to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, particularly to Dr. Dan Popov, for arranging the memorial service for our dad. Dan performed this service with great sensitivity and exceptional care. Dan is the husband of Linda Kavelin Popov, author, educator and creator of the Family Virtues program and the Virtues Cards. Her father H. Borrah Kavelin was a member of the Universal House of Justice during its early days following its first election in 1963.

Mother looked very subdued, but collected during the service. She would not feel the full impact of her husband's death until later. During the service, my daughters Mukina and Leah sat on either side of me. I had my arms around their shoulders, while the song by Barbara Streisand, “Why did I Choose You?” chosen by our mother was playing. My brother Steve and I both gave

eulogies of our father; our older sister Mary Lou was too moved to speak. Dan Popov also spoke about Dad with great reverence.

Father's casket had been placed at the front of the small United Church that had been offered through the kindness of the local minister, the Rev. Barry Cooke. Steve spoke after me. By that time, I was sitting with the rest of my family at the front of the assembly, with the casket in full view, listening to my brother.

As we all stood to leave the church, I suddenly had a vision of my father as a young man dancing before his casket. I say dancing, but it was not exactly a dance. It was more of a victory or celebratory step, as he stood in place. As I watched, father lifted his left knee a short distance into the air, returned his foot to the ground, and repeated the same movement with his right knee. At the same time as he lifted each foot, he raised in turn each arm into the air to about the same height, as he raised each leg. Great joy and a sense of liberation were compressed into those deliberate, rhythmic, slow movements of his arms and legs.

He could move again! At the time of his death, father had been for some years confined to a wheelchair because of very painful "bone on bone" knee joints: the cartilage had wasted away. One hip was also so deteriorated that it would no longer support his weight. (I once heard him cry out in agony as he tried to move).

Now I was seeing him as a newly liberated youth, celebrating his newfound freedom of movement. He had been released from the prison of his pain-filled body. It was the same message that the west coast water-colorist, Carol Evans, also of Salt Spring Island, delivered to my mother after his death. According to Carol, my father insisted from the world beyond that she let mother know about his great liberation. The message was: "Tell Joyce that now I am flying with great freedom."

In the vision in the church, father appeared to be a young man, about 15 years of age. The vision confirmed the wisdom that death bestows youth. Although there is no space-time in the next world, the state of my father's soul had to appear to me in a framework that defines our mortal life here. I understood that he looked so young to my eyes because he had just started his journey in the next world. I had never before seen my father as such a young man, although I had seen some black-and-white photos of him when he was a little older.

But what I did find curious about the vision was not so much my father's youth, which was surprising enough, but the manner of his dress. Now my father loved to play golf. He appeared to me, not as an occasional "duffer"—he was in fact a prize-winning amateur golfer—but as a serious linksman, wearing a golfer's uniform, including the cap, the matching jacket and "plus fours," the baggy trousers reaching just below the knee, worn by golfers in the early decades of the 20th century. Father appeared to me as a golfer because it was on the golf course that he

found one of life's greatest pleasures and relaxations.

It was very rare for my father to voice any sort of complaint, even less his fears, unless it was a fear that his children would hurt themselves. But my father feared the wheelchair. So it was a very atypical remark when one afternoon, after I had inquired about his health, that he said suddenly with strong emotion: "If I ever end up in a wheelchair, I'll shoot myself." I was very surprised by that personal comment, in view of the fact that father almost never complained about himself.

I am quite sure that my father never had a suicidal thought in his life, but his remark showed how much he feared the loss of mobility. It was both ironic and strange that his worst fear came true. Needless to say, my father did not shoot himself. When his mobility became impossible, he accepted the wheelchair with the same magnanimity that he accepted the other challenges in his life. The vision of my father performing a little victory dance, dressed as a young golfer, was heaven-sent glad-tidings that he had begun a new and greater journey of freedom.

IV. Clairaudience

Clairaudience means hearing a message very distinctly which is perceived as coming from a source outside oneself. It is a very different phenomenon from the normal thought process which is conversation with oneself, in which questions are asked and answers received, or when random thoughts drift into the mind unconsciously. All thoughts, as distinct from feelings, intuitions or impressions are received by consciousness verbally. However, the experience of hearing a message by clairaudience is markedly different in nature by the abruptness, strength and/or urgency of the message received. The clairaudient messages that I receive come usually during a time of test, either as a consolation or warning to avoid something impending. When clairaudient messages are received as consolations, although the message is still strong, a gentler, comforting quality defines the voice of these messages rather than a foreboding or warning.

“Do not grieve over that which God has ordained for it is light upon light.”

Following divorce, I had moved from the family home in Gatineau and had relocated in the nearby town of Hull, Quebec, now amalgamated with Gatineau. Although I still had close contact with my daughters, Mukina and Leah, and the Bahá’í friends, it was a lonely and painful time of readjustment. I was feeling very saddened and bereft, when this very comforting message came early one evening. The message came by way of a strong contrast to my prevailing mood. I will not speculate on the source of the message, except to say that it came from a higher realm. It did not originate with me. I had the clear impression that the message was sent as consolation to relieve my suffering.

“You shall be weightless.”

This message came to me during the same year that Brigitte and I moved to La Pocatière, Quebec where I had obtained my first teaching job and where we celebrated Mukina’s first birthday, on 10 November, 1973. It came as consolation for the burdensome psychological condition of depression that I was laboring under. Today I take this message as having two meanings: one, in its ultimate sense, that it is only when we leave this world that we become truly weightless; the other meaning was that, relatively speaking, at this advanced time of my life, I am comparatively weightless to the burden I was carrying in those days. But the truer meaning lies in the ultimate sense.

“Nous vous avons donné les plus grandes joies, les plus grandes peines.” (“We have given you the greatest joys and the greatest sorrows”)

This message came to me in French, not long after I had returned from my study-stay at the Sorbonne in February, 1968, when I was 23 years old. It did not occur during any time of trial; on the contrary, when I received this message I was happy, still living at home, and doing well in my studies at the University of Toronto. In retrospect, this message came as a kind of forewarning of things to come in the future. It is also an objective description of both the joys and sorrows that I have experienced in my psycho-spiritual life.

“Verily We have chosen someone else for thee.”

Facing a necessary separation from a dear friend, and feeling grief-stricken at this prospect, my tears began to flow. I was sitting down at that moment when suddenly a loving presence that centered in my solar-plexus, moved up to flood my heart, like a warm and comforting wave. It suffused my entire being, while an angelic, sweet voice spoke these words: “Verily, We have chosen someone else for thee.”

This was not a voice that I heard outside myself, reverberating in the room objectively, but one that came from deep within my being. Yet it was clearly not a voice that I recognized as coming from me, but rather it originated in a higher, merciful, watchful Presence that wished to comfort, guide and reassure me.

“*Goftam ke nakun!*” (“I told you no!”)

One of the lessons that I had to learn in life was to trust these extraordinary paranormal, transcendent experiences, especially when the guidance they provided was contrary to my personal desires. I sometimes received it with misgivings and doubts. Although I was of a mature age and experience, my selfish desires would sometimes cause me to rationalize the clear and emphatic guidance I had received. But the mercy of God is so great and forbearing that it does not leave us to ourselves, especially when Providence foresees that in our own ignorance we are about to do something that will cause unhappiness to others and ourselves.

This time the emphatic message came in Persian. Now I do not speak Persian fluently, but I took introductory Persian at the Institute of Islamic Studies with Ms. Berengian at the University of Toronto, circa 1969. I had also learned some Persian words by listening to the Iranian friends speak to one another in their mother tongue and by picking up here and there some key Persian words from our sacred writings. But I knew enough Persian to understand the clear and emphatic message I heard that day. The fact that it came in Persian was meant to impress upon me that that

the message came from a higher source, perhaps from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi.

In spite of this explicit guidance, I continued to rationalize my situation, justifying my actions by imagining that the message I had received was coming from a fear-based voice that was being projected from the unconscious mind or being picked up from others. The great lesson that I learned from subsequent events was never to ignore such explicit guidance, especially when it comes with such clarity, emphasis and repetition.

“Is that you Jack?” Message From Maternal Grandmother Jessie Fallon Halsted

Like visions, clairaudience can also occur in dreams. Both clairaudience and visions, in my experience at least, can occur in both the sleeping and waking states. What counts is the degree of assurance and clarity of the message, not whether it occurs during sleep or wakefulness. (The current view seems to be that visions occur only in the waking state, but I find that view unnecessarily restrictive).

The message above came in the voice of my grandmother Jessie Halsted, who by that time had passed on to the Abhá Kingdom. I had become upset about damage to the door of a new automobile the family had just purchased. My reaction had been excessive. Grandmother intervened from the next world to remind me, in her typically kindly way, that I was out of character. Her voice in the dream was also strong evidence, evidence that I have also learned from other dreams, that those who have passed on to the next world are aware of everything that we do—even, I believe, what we think. Nothing is hidden from them.

“She died because she didn’t want to go on living. She just stopped breathing.”

Sometimes an awkward situation can arise when you teach the Faith to a person of the opposite sex. It must be clear from your interactions, other than being friendly and personable, that the teacher’s motivation is the Faith, not the seeker; otherwise complications can arise. The same is true for the seeker. He or she must be clear that the object is the Faith and not the teacher.

The situation became unworkable. She did become a Bahá’í, but after I moved away, she ceased having any interest in the Faith. This weighed heavily on me until I heard the words quoted above—words that were uttered in a very definite and emphatic tone. The message made it clear, as Bahá’u’lláh has revealed in the *Gleanings*: “For the faith of no man can be conditioned by anyone except himself.” (GWB 143). This assurance greatly relieved my anxiety about the situation.

V. Dreams

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian, the Universal House of Justice and Eminent Others

All these dreams were intended to teach me something. They came either as warnings, concerns or consolations. Although each dream was full of gravitas, one dream of the Master was comical, but even that dream was intended to teach me something serious.

Bahá'u'lláh's Invitation to Pray is Lost

The Blessed Beauty appeared silently and suddenly. He was dressed entirely in black, the color worn by judges and professors, symbolizing authority, knowledge and power. He did not speak but knelt down. By His gesture, I knew He was inviting me to pray with Him. I demurred by starting to mention my sins and shortcomings. The moment I did so, in a flash He disappeared. The lesson was clear. Bahá'u'lláh was entirely aware of my faults, but He did not want to hear about them. My confession was interfering with His invitation to pray. It became a lost opportunity.

Two Dreams of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Limit Speculation: A Lesson Taught By Humor

The Master and I were standing together looking at a sunset that contained a rainbow of colors. My arm was around His shoulder; His arm was around my shoulder. As we stood contemplating the beauty of the sunset, I remarked: "I wonder what the metaphysical meaning of the various colors in that sunset is?" 'Abdu'l-Bahá looked at me wearing a broad smile and said: "You know, I sometimes wonder about that too!"

Personal Taste and Observing the Laws of God

'Abdu'l-Bahá appeared, not in his usual attire, but dressed like a hippie from the 1960's. He was wearing a poncho, that South American rough, woolen garment that is pulled over the upper body by means of a slit. He was wearing sandals and trousers underneath the poncho. Instead of His usual dignified turban, he wore a bandanna around His head. Despite His strange attire, He looked at me and said gravely: "If you do not keep the laws of God, you will bring unhappiness

both to yourself and to your family.” The message was serious and clear, but it was mixed in this sense.

His unusual attire was meant to suggest that the friends are allowed leeway in their personal lifestyle. This personal lifestyle includes one’s choice of dress, vocation, domicile, friends or spouse. In short, the believer is granted wide latitude in determining all those threads that compose the particular fabric of one’s personal life. But however unconventional a believer may be regarding personal taste, the revealed laws of God must be obeyed at all times. The line is drawn there.

The Guardian

“Shoghi Effendi is Chief”: Keeping Priorities Straight

This dream of the Guardian occurred when I was composing my large theological and literary critical study of his writings, *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi* (2012). I began my book on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia in 1997 or 1998 and finished it in the years after I returned to Ottawa in the summer of 1999. In Ottawa I had become temporarily distracted by the weight of a personal problem. The emotional impact was considerable at that time, consuming much of my energy.

The dream helped me to reset my course. It took place in Haifa, near the Monument Gardens. One of the Iranian believers appeared from behind what looked like a small storage shed and announced excitedly: “The Guardian is coming!” Then Shoghi Effendi appeared, walking. He said nothing, but walked straight by me, kept going and disappeared.

What puzzled me initially was the long, elaborate, feather head dress worn by the Guardian, an adornment that is normally worn by members of the First Nations in North America. I could not immediately fathom the dream, but I knew that its symbolism concealed a message that I must uncover. As I continued to meditate for the next 24 hours on the solution, the answer came suddenly in a verbal formula: “Shoghi Effendi is chief.” Your chief priority is to continue working on the book of the Guardian’s writings, and not to allow yourself to be distracted by the wasted energy consumed by a personal problem.

The Photo of Shoghi Effendi as a Young Man: Stay Resigned and Peaceful

Bahá’u’lláh continues to pour out His loving-kindness and compassion on us, even when we are partially or fully responsible for the unhappy situations that we have ourselves created. We all

have to learn from our mistakes, and this learning is often a bitter pill to swallow, but the mercy of God is such that it never ceases.

In the aftermath of a marital separation, I had moved from Gatineau to Hull, that is today part of greater Gatineau, Quebec. I chose an apartment on rue Bédard, in the same building as my eldest daughter Mukina. Although it was a great comfort to have Mukina present during the painful separation, I experienced nonetheless much anxiety following the move, an anxiety that was undermining my quality of life.

Shoghi Effendi appeared one evening in a dream. What I saw then was one of the photos of the Guardian as a young man, sitting calmly, looking at a slight angle away from the camera. (This photo was taken before Shoghi Effendi became Guardian because after he became the head of the Faith, he was not inclined to allow himself to be photographed).

Shoghi Effendi did not speak to me during this dream; it was not necessary. The message and atmosphere that he wished to convey were transmitted through the photo itself. Be humble, be resigned, be peaceful. He seemed to be saying, do not worry about the “changes and chances of the world.” They happen to us all. Nothing is more important than your sense of inner peace and self-composure. The atmosphere in the dream reminded me of the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that my mother wrote in the first prayer book that she gave me when I was 12 years old: “Be strong, be calm, be grateful and become a lamp full of light...”

The Universal House of Justice: The Meeting on the Highest Peak in the World

When I was still a young man living at home in the borough, then township of Etobicoke in Toronto, I had a dream that was not to be fulfilled until some 40 years later when I made my first, and to date, only pilgrimage in 2007. In the dream, I found myself on a very high mountain, at such a rarefied high-point that I took it for the pinnacle of the world. The tremendous height of the mountain caused me fear and trepidation. I felt exposed and vulnerable.

Between the peak where I stood and the twin peak of the same height opposite was a gap of about 6 feet/2 meters. A thick wooden plank connected the two peaks. On a flat plain of the other peak stood a group of hooded figures, clothed entirely in white from head to toe. Their clothing looked exactly like the white sheets of the notorious racist organization in the United States, the Ku Klux Klan, but their garments had a very different spiritually symbolic meaning.

They were waiting for me to cross. Fearful of being at such a great height, I took my courage in my hands and walked across the plank into their midst, where they welcomed me warmly, although I could not see their faces. The dream ended. Although as Bahá’u’lláh affirms, the dream is mysterious, I am usually able to interpret some of my dreams at least, but this one had

me stumped. Living in the Etobicoke community then was a strong believer of English origin named Emily Roberts. Emily was very visual. She had been a spiritualist before she became a Bahá'í. She once told me that she had seen Mulla Husayn walking up and down in the room while I was giving a talk in her living room, on the eve of the Declaration of the Báb.

Emily was outspoken and blunt, a no-nonsense kind of person. Her teaching voice was very strong; she used to lay down her opinions before the friends with much emphasis and occasional bombast, but Emily was kind and loving to all the friends, as well as being a very devoted believer. Although she had little formal education, Emily was a woman of penetrating insight.

I related the dream and asked for an opinion. She had an immediate and spontaneous reply. "What you saw," Emily said with her usual conviction, "were the men of the Universal House of Justice. They were hidden because their high station is as yet unknown to the friends. Their station is a mystery." (At the time of the dream, the first Universal House of Justice had been elected only a few years before). My response, just like her answer, was immediate. I felt that Emily's interpretation was one hundred percent correct. That dream was fulfilled four decades later, when the members of the Universal House of Justice greeted the pilgrims on the concourse of the seat of the Bahá'í World Center. At that time, I spoke briefly with members Mr. Paul Lample and Dr. Peter Khan, a meeting I still clearly recall as if it were just yesterday.

Dreams of Eminent Others

A Multiple-Stage Dream of Ruḥíyyih Khánum

When I was writing *A Celestial Burning*, one night I had a dream of Rúḥíyyih Khánum. Actually, it was a series of dreams that followed one another closely, in one larger connected sequence. It is the only type of sequential dream that I have ever had, a kind of four act play. The dream unfolded in four scenes. The first scene was the preview or "announcement." First Rúḥíyyih Khánum's face appeared in the far distance. Although the image was strangely blurred, I knew that it was she.

I speculate that this blurriness corresponded to the stage of transition in which she traversed one of the spiritual worlds to appear in our common meeting-place. Three subsequent scenes followed. In one of them she said nothing; she need not have spoken because her message was clear. In the other two scenes conversation took place. One of the conversations had to do with the book that I was writing about her beloved Shoghi Effendi, but the language was both verbal and symbolic.

In the silent scene following the preview, Rúḥíyyih Khánum's face and upper body appeared

very clearly before me. As she looked into my face, I could see that she was very concerned about me, anxious about my disturbed state of mind. (Again it had to do with the same personal problem mentioned above in the two dreams of the Shoghi Effendi).

She was very elegantly dressed as an aristocrat of noble lineage, but her garment was classic in this sense: it was both modern and ancient. What Khánum wore would not have been out-of-place either in the Middle Ages or in modernity. A large but simply designed jeweled cross hung from her neck. The jewels were embedded into the frame or outline of the cross. The body of the cross was empty, unlike some of the heavier, ornate Christian crosses made by Catholics or Greek Orthodox during the “Age of Faith.” It was studded at each corner with four, precious “royal purple” gemstones that resembled amethysts. The message she was silently conveying was that the suffering that I was then experiencing was not what she desired; it was not God’s will for me. I should recover a state of inner peace.

Her anxious concern for my agitated state conveyed another lesson. As our sacred writings state, the souls in the worlds beyond are aware of our human condition. As I have affirmed above, they are even aware of our thoughts. We need to remain calm and composed, not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of those who love and watch over us from the Great Beyond.

Our mental and emotional states do affect them, but in ways that I cannot as yet fully fathom. Normally, we imagine that the souls in the worlds beyond enjoy a condition that is free from the sorrows and troubles that vex us in this life. Beatitude, bliss, and freedom from sorrow are some of the scriptural promises of the future life. And yet, as I have seen clearly in other dreams, our loved ones shed tears for us when we suffer duress in this life.

Our sacred writings are replete with dramatic references to the inhabitants of the celestial worlds who bewail the plight of the Manifestation of God for what He was made to suffer at the hands of cruel infidels. We know, moreover, that time does not exist in the next world. So I wonder: how do they experience this suffering for the Manifestation while they are supposed to be enjoying the blessings of the Abhá Kingdom? Can it be from moment to moment? But there is no time there! Are the lamentations for the sufferings of the Manifestation of God now over because His earthly sufferings are now long ended? Do they pass from their state of bliss to a state of sorrow for us, just as we can pass from state to state here? So many mysteries...

In the third scene, I was in a small room conversing with Rúhíyyih Khánum. She looked to be about 45 years old. The color purple reappeared in this scene. Although she was not dressed as elegantly as she was in the scene described above, she was wearing a purple skirt. I was quite conscious in the dream that I was speaking with Khánum, that is, with someone who occupied a high spiritual station. While speaking with her, I observed the deference due to someone of her standing. For her part, Rúhíyyih Khánum was being friendly and natural with me. I was seated while she was standing.

It was then I noticed that I was sitting on a piece of her clothing. I stood up suddenly and as I handed it to her, I said : “Oh Khánum, I didn’t notice that I have been sitting on your robe.” I am not sure of the exact meaning of this scene, except to say that her robe, which I take to mean the symbol of her spiritual authority, had in some sense touched me.

The fourth scene concerned *A Celestial Burning*, my book on the writings of the Guardian. We were standing face-to-face. Khánum was wearing a plain, beige corduroy stole around her shoulders that was attached at the front by a clasp in the center of a chain. Now the English word corduroy comes from the French, meaning “court of the king.” It was a fabric that was worn by royalty.

The stole was trimmed with what looked like light-colored animal fur, perhaps symbolizing her great love for God’s creatures in the animal kingdom, a love that she had since childhood. (I remember one older male believer at the LouHelen school in Michigan, once known as Davison, telling me years ago that she used to bring pet snakes with her to the sessions).

Rúhíyyih Khánum unclasped the stole and passed it to me, indicating that I should touch it, as she said emphatically: “I want you to make one like this!” I reached out to touch the stole. It felt magical, imbued with a remarkable, living spiritual energy, unlike any fabric I had ever felt before. It reminded me of the quranic verse that mentions the reward of the faithful who wear silks and velvets in paradise (18:31).

Although my book was by then well underway, in the dream I felt powerless to recreate the magical touch of her stole. I responded: “Oh no Khánum. I can’t make something like that.” Strangely enough, despite my negative response, I did strive to imbue every word, phrase and thought of that book with the divine spirit that ideally inspires all Bahá’í discourse.

I understood later, reflecting on the fourth scene of the dream, that Khánum was symbolically referring to my book on the writings of Shoghi Effendi. Needless to say, she was informing me that she was well aware that I was writing it. She wanted me to make the language and the effect of the book as “magical” as possible. Khánum wanted my book to be imbued with spiritual power—as far as I was capable of using the verbal power of the English language to do so—because it concerned the writings of her beloved Shoghi Effendi.

Rúhíyyih Khánum Talking With Dr. Peter Khan About *A Celestial Burning*

During one of his recorded talks while he was visiting North America, former Universal House of Justice member Dr. Peter Khan said that someone needed to write a book that would “crack the writings of Shoghi Effendi.” By that time, my book project was already well underway. His remark encouraged me; I felt that I was on the right track. I was hoping to advance what seemed

to me to be a long delay in the scholarly investigation of the Guardian's writings.

Scholars born in the post-World War II period have been occupied with learning Arabic and Persian and studying Islam to investigate the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, an entirely appropriate and necessary task to give precedence to an academic analysis of our sacred writings. Nonetheless, I felt that there had been a certain neglect of the Guardian's writings by the scholarly community, particularly because Shoghi Effendi's writings are the key to understanding the post-scriptural, modern era and worsening world conditions in light of the Bahá'í Faith. After Dr. Khan passed away, I dreamt that he was standing with Rúhíyyih Khánum observing me. Although they did not speak to me, I understood that in their conversation they were giving their approval of my book, after a fashion that seemed to translate as: "Now look what he has done."

The Suspended Pearl of Great Price

The first dream that I had about my book, *A Celestial Burning*, occurred on Salt Spring Island where I had moved in the summer of 1997 from Gatineau, West Quebec, after taking early retirement from teaching. I was casting about in my mind, attempting to discover what project I should undertake next. (My book of short essays *Under the Divine Lote Tree* was in the process of being published at George Ronald Publisher). I had considered various projects, including writing a novel for the mass market, but no clear path had yet emerged.

After prayer and reflection, I hit upon the idea of a book on the writings of the Guardian, a work that would analyze them from two viewpoints: the one, literary critical, i.e. Shoghi Effendi the writer, and the other religious and theological, the Guardian as divine interpreter. This dual-pronged approach was best suited to my university studies in literature and religious studies.

Although my literary studies had been confined mainly to French literature, and despite the remarkable variety in the conceptual framework of the various literary critical schools, I felt that I had enough of a foundation to permit me to adequately address the task. I had read more widely in English poetry than prose, but I was more than willing to expand my horizons and to do the necessary research while I was working on the book.

I was standing in the living room of my parents' home at 131 Mt. Baker Crescent, looking out of the picture window in the direction of Mt. Baker in the state of Washington, due south. (The street is called Mt. Baker Crescent because the volcanic mountain is visible from Salt Spring Island). As for my other books, the confirmation that my choice was the right one was revealed in a moment of quiet assurance, accompanied by great clarity.

Following this sense of confirmation, I began immediately, gathering books and articles, doing

Internet research, making notes and sketching out chapters in labelled files. Toward the end of my two-year stay on the island, although my book was still in its early stages, I had a dream that looking up, I saw a pearl of enormous size suspended in the air above my head. It would be difficult to estimate its great size exactly because there was nothing beside it to give perspective.

I thought immediately about the priceless pearl, Shoghi Effendi. Now that great suspended pearl was a clear symbol of confirmation that had a double-meaning: it was a symbol of the presence of the beloved Guardian, but it also suggested the book I was writing. I concluded that the pearl was actually an archetype of the book, an ideal form that existed in the imaginal world before it was brought into existence in space-time. As it turned out, the enormous size of that pearl was accurate; by the time the book was published, it came out at 606 pages.

Mr. J. Douglas Martin: “Your Martyrdom is Greater Than Mine”

Although I did not know the former Canadian National Spiritual Assembly and Universal House of Justice member in a personal way, he was, of course, well-known to the Canadian friends during his long period of exemplary service to the Faith. I first met “Doug,” as the friends called him then, when I was just a pre-teen. In those days, before I attained maturity, if I happened to hear a talk that he gave, I had no idea what Douglas Martin was talking about.

I remember one public meeting that I attended with my mother Joyce. Douglas was speaking at the front of the room from a podium, but he might as well have been speaking a foreign language, for the little that I could understand at my youthful age. Later, I would see him occasionally at a fireside, summer school, National Convention or Association for Bahá’í Studies conference where we had very short conversations.

Some years after I declared my faith when I was 16 years old, Douglas appeared in a dream with a message. As I recall, I was not preoccupied with the subject of martyrdom, but it surfaced in a very personal way. The dream was very short and consisted of only one declarative sentence. Mr. Martin said simply: “Your martyrdom is greater than mine.”

Some years later I met him while we were waiting in line to enter the hall at a national convention. It may not have been the best moment to relate the dream which conveyed such a serious message. What could he possibly say in response? Although I put him in an awkward situation, he responded in the best possible way, with a humorous response followed by a chuckle. “Oh,” he said, “that was just my natural humility.” He certainly did the right thing to lighten what could have been an awkward moment for us both.

I am convinced that in the world of dreams, the friends do meet and interact in parallel spiritual worlds of which they may not be even remotely aware in their everyday consciousness. These

parallel spiritual worlds take on a life of their own that exist entirely apart from the mundane life with which we are familiar in this four-dimensional space-time continuum. Despite his good-humored response, I felt that J. Douglas Martin was telling me something in that dream that was true.

Former Universal House of Justice Member Mr. Ian Semple Encourages me to Jump In

For about five years, first by letter and later by email, I corresponded with former Universal House of Justice member, Mr. Ian Semple, who was elected to the first Universal House of Justice at the International Convention in Haifa at Ridván 1963. I was by no means his only correspondent. Ian Semple carried on a large correspondence with friends and family, despite the fact that he was extremely busy as a member of the International House of Justice.

He was also interested in matters theological, so we shared something in common, but most of our letters did not concern serious topics. He often wrote about family matters: what his children were studying, what the family was planning to do on vacation, what his wife Louise was doing, etc. I had the impression that writing about ordinary life was a kind of relaxation for him, a momentary pause from the serious topics on the agenda he faced every day with the other members of the Universal House of Justice.

Sometimes he mentioned the passing pilgrims and Bahá'í community life as he lived it with the friends in Haifa. Occasionally we did write about more serious matters. I remember once he corrected me by saying that the Universal House of Justice does not strive for “consensus” but rather for “unanimity.” (I had used the word consensus in my question).

After Ian died—I always called him Ian and he always called me Jack—I had the following dream. I was standing beside him as we stood on a slight eminence overlooking the Arctic Ocean. The air felt very frigid. I knew that the water below us was freezing cold. It was not an inviting scenario; I had no desire to be there and I was not dressed for the climate. Neither was Mr. Semple. He was dressed formally in a black suit, black being a symbol of authority and knowledge. Suddenly he jumped off the snowy ledge right into the freezing water below, clothes and all.

When I awoke, it did not take much reflection to understand the message he was conveying through his bold action. Jump into the waters of existence, even if they are cold. Immerse yourself. Be indifferent to changing conditions, whether they be hot or cold. The message came as a remedy to a tendency I have to withdraw from certain situations, although solitary time is a necessity for reflection, research and writing. I do try to balance my “alone time” with a healthy social life because I am intensely curious about my fellow human-beings; nothing is more fascinating to me than appreciating and understanding the unique qualities of another person.

When I wrote to Mrs. Louise Semple about the dream, she told me in her reply that it was also a timely message for her stage of life, after she returned to her native Switzerland without him. Perhaps that too was part of the meaning of the dream. It may have also been intended for Louise Semple.

The Premonitory Dream: Warning About Leviathan, the Giant Sea Monster

When I was a student in Paris (1965-1968), while living at 1 Place de l'Estrapade (1968), just around the corner from the Panthéon on *la rue Soufflot*, the giant mausoleum that contains the remains of distinguished French writers and scientists, I had a dream that proved eventually to be premonitory. In the dream, I was standing *on* the surface of the water, not far from the shore. My feet were not visible because they were submerged just below the water.

When I looked down, I saw that the sea waters were receding. The water continued to drain away, until I saw that I was standing on the long, dorsal fin of a dead, giant sea monster. Now I wanted to move forward to reach the sandy beach that I could see ahead of me, but the edge of the monster's back fin was razor sharp. Every time I attempted to move my feet forward, even with the slightest motion, I felt the most excruciating pain.

Although I was dreaming, the pain was more severe than the most serious accidental injury I have ever had. But I had no choice but to keep going. I had to move forward to free myself from being trapped on the leviathan's back. It was a painful, tortuous journey. But the dream ended happily. In the last scene, I saw myself jumping off the skeletal remains of the giant fish to land on the sandy beach—free to move without pain again.

The dead sea monster symbolized the pain caused by the loss of things past. Living fully in the present, moving forward without nostalgia for yesterday's happiness became one of my greatest psychological challenges beginning in my late twenties. But the dream carried the warning of a medical condition that was to visit me much later. During the second half of the decade of my 60's, some 45 years later, I gradually developed a sensitivity in both feet that grew in intensity, producing a numbing sensation, familiarly called "pins and needles." Thankfully, my feet do not trouble me when I am at rest, but only when I am in motion.

I consulted two specialists who performed nerve conduction tests; I was diagnosed with "polyneuropathy," a nerve disorder. Although I remained physically active well into my sixties, the condition in my feet made both walking and even biking uncomfortable. Jogging was excluded because of both arthritis and neuropathy. In my early seventies, I continued to exercise at the gym, using the weight machines and the reclining bicycle or the stair-climber to do a full body workout. But at my present age of 77 years, exercise consists now of walking and swimming.

Happily, I can report that about two years ago, I found great relief from my reduced mobility when my neurologist, Dr. Jody Warman, recommended that I see Dr. Nancy Dudek at the Rehabilitation Center at the Ottawa General Hospital. Dr. Dudek prescribed some expensive German designed carbon fiber orthotics which include a sole attached to a strut/brace that fits with Velcro straps just around and below both knees. Since the orthotics are worn under the trouser legs, they are largely invisible.

Amazingly, the orthotics and the strut have almost entirely corrected my gait. I can walk normally again without a limp and my feet no longer “slap” the ground. Although the device has not reduced the pain in my feet when I walk, the pain is bearable. I am very grateful to have regained fuller mobility. The dream in my youth about the leviathan accurately predicted both a future painful medical condition and a difficult psychological challenge.

Seeing the Name of my Daughter Leah before She Was Born

When Brigitte and I were expecting our second child, after our first child Mukina had been born on November 10, 1972, I was hoping that we would have a boy. I began thinking about names that we might call the child and proposed some of these names to Brigitte. But our second and last child was to be another girl. In the dream, I saw my name MCLEAN in black letters. Then the three letters LEA emerged from my name. Above these letters, I saw a golden H coming floating down from an upper realm and join itself to the other three letters, thus spelling LEAH. I awoke and said to Brigitte: “We are going to have a girl and her name is Leah.” My interpretation of the dream was that the black letters of my name signified that her physical nature came partly from me, but the golden H signified the H of Bahá and designated her spiritual reality.

Dreams of the Departed: Family and Friends

Auntie Vi: Our Family’s Self-Effacing Maid-Servant

In the *Seven Valleys* Bahá’u’lláh gives the dream as suggestive evidence of life after death. As mentioned elsewhere, my great Aunt Violet Halsted, whom we called simply “Auntie,” was my maternal grandmother Jessie’s sister. Auntie was once married to my maternal grandfather’s brother, Stewart Halsted. (The two sisters were married to the two brothers). Auntie was truly an exemplary steadfast Bahá’í, who lived a life of humble, self-effacing service. She lived with us for about ten years in Etobicoke (Toronto), while we children were growing up, helping my parents to manage the household.

Later she moved in with her sister and brother-in-law (my maternal grandparents) on Scarlettwood Court, a street that runs off Scarlet Road and sits high on the banks of the Humber River in Etobicoke. Auntie was living there when she passed away. Auntie died not long after I visited her in the hospital during a return home from Paris. When I returned to Paris to continue my studies, Auntie was very much on my mind. I was living at 1 Place de l'Estrapade, near the Panthéon, the last place where I lived in the City of Lights before returning home to Toronto to complete my B.A. degree and continue my education.

I really did want to see her again because I was not given the opportunity of saying a proper goodbye. This desire of seeing Auntie again became a prayer. It was one of the few times that I have actually prayed to be reunited with a loved one who had passed into the Great Beyond. I said the prayer with great sincerity, just before falling asleep, petitioning God for an answer.

The prayer was answered that very night. In the dream, I saw Auntie, looking very much as she did in her latter days, high up on a stratospheric bed of clouds, tinged with purple and white. She was walking toward me on a narrow bridge of clouds, a safe-passage that traversed a great abyss falling away into the void on both sides. It seemed that she had walked a great distance to reach that point. She came ever closer, walking slowly and patiently.

When she reached the point where I was standing, she stopped and said: "Praise be to God who grants His loved ones to meet in His love." Then she turned away and walked slowly and patiently back into the great infinity from which she had come. Both her slow pace and the great distance she had travelled prompted the thought that some effort is caused to those who dwell so high, when these luminous souls descend to a point where they meet those believers still living on the earthly plane.

My Father as an Awesome Guardian-Angel

I believe the vision in a dream may be just as realistic as a vision experienced during the waking-state. So it was for this dream-vision. After my father Allan James McLean passed away suddenly, I had a number of dreams about him in the aftermath of his death. My grieving mother did not have such comforting dreams, at least not in the days immediately following his passing, although some dreams came to her later on.

Messages of comfort had to come from others, including the celebrated Salt Spring Island watercolorist Carol Evans. Carol was pressed by my father to convey to my mother the good news of the extraordinary sense of great joy and freedom he was experiencing in his newly liberated spiritual state. I discovered in my theological research that the original biblical image of the angel or angels was based on its earthly counterpart of the soldier and armies, "the heavenly host" who did battle by order of the king. This idea is reflected in one of the many translations of

the Bible that renders “Lord of hosts” as “Jehovah of armies.” Like soldiers, angels are commissioned by their heavenly King to execute certain commands.

Although he appeared in the guise of what looked to me like a Roman legionary, I understood that my father was serving as a guardian-angel. (Bahá’u’lláh has confirmed the existence of guardian-angels in one of His as yet untranslated tablets). Father presented a most awesome image. He was standing at strict, motionless attention. His legs were covered in black mesh stockings, over which he wore a short tunic whose edge fell to just above the knee. He wore a breastplate and helmet. The most redoubtable weapon stood upright in his hand: an unusually long spear about 15 feet/4½ meters high, whose sharp metal tip flared into curves further down the flat blade. The blade was configured in roughly the same shape as a flared urn with a narrow mouth.

Father stood before the closed, thick, iron doors of a sanctuary. What was inside that sanctuary, I do not know, but it was something extremely rare, sacred and private. No one would ever be allowed admittance to that sanctuary without permission. He stood on guard. The very sight of him would cause one to pause with trepidation. Any trespasser would have to contend with him if they attempted to approach without permission the sanctuary that he was so carefully protecting. My earthly father had become transformed into a sacred soldier, a being that was guarding something precious and holy.

In my post-dream-vision consciousness, I wondered if the earthly relationship I had with my father would still apply in light of the great transformation I had seen. He seemed so remote and distant that I wondered if such a sacred personage could still be my father? Although later in life, even before I began to see angels in dreams, ever since the time when I first began to reflect on such mysterious beings, I came to believe in “choirs of angels,” whose existence is affirmed in the Bahá’í writings. The vision of my father in that dream brought confirmation that the widely held belief in guardian-angels, in both ancient and modern civilizations, cultures and religions, is indeed real.

A Former Colleague Speaks From the World Beyond: “It’s true Rabbi! It’s true!”

I have mentioned above that I taught high school at Philemon Wright Secondary School for 15 years (1975-1990) in Hull, now greater Gatineau, West Quebec. We had on staff an excellent science teacher I will name just “J.” J. was fairly tall, fine-boned, sharp featured, with reddish-auburn hair and pale skin. She was kind and affectionate, but high-strung, outspoken and readily combative, both with students and sometimes with staff members.

J. was divorced and spoke on occasion with some bitterness in the staffroom about her ex-husband who had once injured her. As is often the case, behind J.’s combative nature lay much

emotional pain, and, I suspect, a disturbed childhood. She was not a woman at peace, but it was above all acceptance based on love and peace that she so desperately sought.

Although I was repelled by her attacks on others and even though I had borne the brunt of them myself on a couple of occasions, I admired J. for her dedication to teaching, her basically affectionate nature, sincerity, and truthfulness. She once told me that she had been favorably impressed by what she knew about the Bahá'í Faith, but she did not seem interested in following up her interest any further.

While shopping in the northern American town of Massena, New York, just across the border from the province of Ontario, J.'s car was struck at an intersection by another vehicle; she died almost instantly. Teachers from Philemon Wright paid their respects by driving to the visitation at a funeral home which was located a good distance from Ottawa, closer to the American border.

We all filed past the open casket, each of us taking a quick look at her remains. I remember that a former female colleague stood ahead of me in line. As if to steel herself to face the challenge of looking at J.'s embalmed corpse, she placed both hands on her hips and peered boldly, almost irreverently at the corpse, as if to say: "Well now, let's take a look at you!" J.'s dark, reddish-brown hair framed her face in death just as it had in life.

After her death, the dream that I had of J. was as clear as it was dramatic and telling. As with my series of dreams about Rúhíyyih Khánum related above, there was a forewarning of the message that was about to come. The connection was made from a realm above by a narrow, silver cord that manifested itself as a "sparkler" used in fireworks displays. The cord that connected the two realms sparkled brilliantly, as if it were a live wick set on fire.

I did not see J. but I heard her voice speaking to me in an emphatic, short message. Her astonished tone declared: "It's true Rabbi! It's true!" The use of the Aramaic/Hebrew word "Rabbi" (teacher), with its strong religious connotations and double-meaning of "teacher," was meant for me. It left no doubt in my mind about her identity and that it was a true spiritual communication.

J.'s remark meant two things: the first was that the existence of life after death is real and that the promises of the hereafter are also true; the second was that the Bahá'í Faith itself is true. J. was letting me know that the peace and security that had escaped her during her earthly existence, and whose lack had caused her so much suffering, had been found in the Great Beyond. As a science teacher, J. had been interested in discovering the truth about the mysteries of nature while she lived. In the ongoing, eternal journey of the soul, J. was able in the hereafter to discover a fuller measure of spiritual truth.

My German Neighbors in Toronto Dr. Oskar Petersen and His Son Ralf-Jörn Accept the Faith in the World Beyond

Circa 1958 with the money they had received from the sale of their then rural property on Martin Grove Road in Etobicoke (Toronto), my parents were able to buy a new, split-level, three-bedroom home overlooking a ravine—today a park—at 6 Emery Circle in Etobicoke. Despite its name, and the original intentions of the developers, Emery Circle was neither a crescent nor a circle, but a slightly curved line. This address proved to be the highlight of our family life when Mary Lou, Steve and I were growing into young adulthood.

After working hard to raise themselves from humble beginnings, my parents had attained a certain prosperity with the sale of their two and a half acre/one hectare country property. But the best of our good fortune was that we enjoyed the great blessings of being able to host Friday night firesides at 6 Emery Circle, firesides that led to the acceptance of the Faith by a good number of the fellow-students, friends and neighbors of my brother Steve and myself.

To the great joy of my mother, my father Allan James, after some 16 years of observation, also became a Bahá'í during this heyday of our youth. Our firesides were vibrant and well-attended. An enthusiastic spirit of teaching the Faith sustained them all. We could barely wait until the next fireside to learn what the upcoming fireside speaker would teach us and to see whether or not we would share in the joy of welcoming a new declarant.

The lively spirit of teaching the Faith at our house was caught especially by the youth, but the adults in the community had also caught the spirit and fully supported us in our efforts, especially our parents. We youth were fully conscious that we had discovered something precious—a life-transforming, community-creating, world-uniting Faith. It was not uncommon for our family living room to be filled with between 30-40 people each Friday evening. Youth declarations followed one after the other during those magical days.

Down the street at 17 Emery Circle lived a German family from Hamburg, the Petersens. Their family name was written with the Danish spelling because Mr. Petersen's ancestors had lived in the northern province of Schleswig-Holstein on the Jutland peninsula, which even today has ethnic Danish minorities. Helga and Oskar Petersen had three children: Heike, the eldest, Ralf Jörn (Jörn is north German for Georg, but we called him simply Ralf), and Anke the youngest. Dr. Petersen was an agronomist with a Ph.D. in agricultural engineering.

Before arriving in Toronto, the Petersens had lived in Egypt, where they had acquired pieces of exotic furnishings and *objets d'art* that I had never seen before in my Anglo-Canadian milieu. Among them were camel saddles, brass ornaments, pointed slippers, an Ottoman handcrafted leather footrest with a geometric design on its upper surface; multi-colored, rough-spun, thick cotton blankets; small tea glasses; and curiously, a semi-abstract painting in their living-room of

buildings in Cairo, whose bright, modernist style did not fit my preconceived idea of the Muslim world of the Middle-East.

Ralf and I were about 16 years old when they moved into 17 Emery Circle. I befriended Ralf, who was thoroughly German both in dress and outlook. I helped him through his culture shock, which had not been made easy, because even in the early 1960's prejudices against Germans still lingered following World War Two. He enrolled at the same school that I attended, Kipling Collegiate Institute. Mornings we used to ride to the high school, driven by my next-door neighbor, Roger Pesce, who was one of those rare students who actually owned his own car, an older, but very well-conditioned, light-blue 1952 Chevrolet, with a gearbox on the steering column.

Another blessing of our stay at 6 Emery Circle was that Ralf's younger sister Anke also came to Paris to study French, while I was attending the Sorbonne. Anke, whom I had first met when she was 11 years old, was accompanied by a Mormon friend, Louise. Neither Anke nor Ralf had ever come to our firesides at home. So a wonderful surprise was in store one evening when Anke, after attending a few meetings at the Bahá'í Centre at 11 rue de la Pompe, Paris 16ème, suddenly declared her faith in Bahá'u'lláh!

I asked Anke what had caused her rather rapid entry into the Faith. During the tearful recital of her declaration, she told me that her heart had been first moved by a remark of our mother Joyce, who had spoken to her at our home about the injustice of racial prejudice. Her heart was moved again at the Paris Center that evening by one of the Arabic-speaking believers who also spoke to her on the same theme. Whatever he said removed from her heart any further obstacle that stood in Anke's way to declaring her faith.

While visiting the Bahá'í Center in Paris, Anke met and eventually married another Bahá'í who was part of our Paris youth group, a medical student named Kambyse Samii. Kambyse eventually became a specialist of internal medicine. Kambyse and Anke settled in Brussels, Belgium, where they raised a family of daughters. Right into their senior years, they remained in Brussels, but I was distressed to learn a few months ago that Anke passed away with cancer at about 70 years of age. It was shocking news that I was not expecting. Although Anke and I did not keep in close touch over the years, such old friendships remain solid and precious.

Anke and Kambyse were married in Toronto circa 1970, while I happened to be the young chairperson of the incorporated Local Spiritual Assembly of Etobicoke. Since my family had introduced Anke to the Faith, the coincidence seemed fitting that I was designated to represent the LSA to fulfill the legal requirements for their marriage. Madame Samii, Kambyse's mother, wore a gorgeous, pearl and shell-encrusted long, white gown and chanted a prayer in Persian. Mrs. Petersen read the first *Hidden Word* in German. I gave a brief talk in which I said that the marriage of Anke and Kambyse represented the unity of the East and the West through the

overcoming of prejudice.

Although his English was not totally fluent at that time, Kambyse gave a very warm, prepared talk in which he mentioned that he felt honored to be joining the Petersen family. Wanda Presley, the younger sister of Ralf's future wife Darla, who was about twelve years old, was also present. Wanda eventually joined the Faith. She told me only recently at the Lindsay, Ontario Summer School that the wedding was the first time she had heard the word "Bahá'í."

I was happy that both the Petersens and the Samiis were pleased with the marriage ceremony. Ralf and I lost contact during the post-university phase of our lives. We both married and moved to other locations. Ralf's parents, Oskar and Helga Petersen, moved to Port Hope, Ontario. Ralf and I had occasional contact over the ensuing years, usually when he came to Ottawa on business. After Ralf married Darla, they settled in Ajax, Ontario, where they raised two twin boys, Kevin and Steven. When our girls Mukina and Leah were children, Brigitte and I visited Ralf and Darla in Ajax when their twin boys were still babies.

While I was living on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia (1997-1999), Ralf contracted terminal lung cancer. We renewed contact by email during this time. Among other things, he wanted my advice on how he should break the news to his boys that he was going to die. Within the next few years, I was able to visit Ajax again. During that Ajax visit, Ralf and I had a memorable last walk together.

Ralf knew of course that his sister Anke had become a Bahá'í. He felt attracted to the Faith, but he was not moved to join. He had never seriously studied the teachings, but his overall general impression was positive. Ralf and I had a relaxed, solid, enjoyable friendship; our conversation was often punctuated with humor and laughter. We shared a love of modern jazz. Most of our social visits took place at 17 Emery Circle.

With a twinkle in his eye or a smile on his face, he used to tell me not to give up hope that he would one day become a Bahá'í. He used to joke that if he ever became a Bahá'í, he wanted a "low membership number." (This was an oblique and humorous reference to the Nazi party in Germany prior to World War Two because low membership numbers were prized). His father Oskar had survived the terrible eastern campaign on the Russian front.

When Ralf died, I had a number of vivid dreams about him and his father who had predeceased him. (Helga Petersen courageously faced the death of both her husband and only son until her own passing). These dreams assured me that both father and son had accepted the Bahá'í Faith in the world beyond, thus confirming 'Abdu'l-Baha's statement that souls can accept the Bahá'í Revelation after departing this life, even if they were not believers while they were in the world.

In the first dream, Ralf was standing on a country road and challenged me to a race. He was full of the spirit of life and said: "Come on Jack. Let's go!" I was reluctant but Ralf did not wait for

me; he took off in a spirited sprint, racing ahead down the long road. This first dream came as a sign that Ralf was free of sickness and spiritually well, but he was also giving me a message. It was the same message that I received in the dream about Ian Semple when he jumped into the frigid Arctic Ocean fully clothed: be active; jump in; run the race of life, full speed ahead.

In the second dream, Ralf used a German word. This German word ensured me that the dream was no illusion. He said: "I am a *Rechtsanwalt* now." (Rechtsanwalt means lawyer). I was initially puzzled, thinking to myself that there are no law courts and lawyers in the world beyond. But as I reflected further on the dream, I realized that Ralf was telling me that he was studying divine law. In the third dream, I saw Ralf in a state of ecstasy. He was present at a Bahá'í meeting during which an appointed member of the Faith was giving what I felt was a very boring talk.

Although Ralf was present at that meeting, he was in a completely altered transcendent state. He was beyond needing to know anything about the Faith, for he had already accepted the new Revelation. He was ecstatically reciting some poetic verses in German; he was filled with the Spirit of God. Since his death, his former passionate nature had been subsumed and transformed by the ecstasy that ravishes the soul with things divine.

The two contrasting dreams I had about Ralf's father, Oskar, were just as vivid and clear that the father, like the son, had accepted the Bahá'í Revelation. Dr. Petersen, having been pleased with the Bahá'í wedding ceremony of his daughter Anke, had exacted a promise from me that I would officiate at a Bahá'í funeral when he passed away. He had already been diagnosed with melanoma at that time. "The countdown has begun," he said, while standing beside his daughter Anke. I naturally agreed, but it turned out that the Bahá'í memorial service did not take place, for reasons beyond my control.

In the first dream after he died, Dr. Petersen did not look happy. He was standing in front of the large book cabinet that had once dominated the living-room at 17 Emery Circle. He had been a very active man during his lifetime; like many Germans, he was an action and project-oriented man and a great planner. He had not counted on being taken from life at a relatively early age; he still had things to do. I prayed sincerely that Oskar's soul would be moved to accept with serenity the new state in which he had found himself.

Time passed. Then the second dream occurred. Oskar Petersen lay recovering in a bed in what resembled a spacious hospital ward. He was the only patient I could see. Large glass windows formed the wall behind him at the head of the bed. Outside, through the glass, I could see large, green, tropical plants, thriving in their natural state.

I approached him. Because I was taking German courses at the Goethe Institute in Ottawa at the time, I thought I would practice my German with him. Oskar Petersen was not at all interested in

speaking German with me. He said nothing. As I stood beside his bed, he raised his clenched hand and opened up his palm. “Much to my wondering eyes,” I saw in the middle of his palm a Bahá’í ring stone! Did I need any further proof of his acceptance of the Faith in the world beyond?

The Dance of the Ten Lady Martyrs of Shíráz (1983)

On June 18, 1983, one of the most shocking and unjust crimes in modern Iran took place in Shíráz. Ten Bahá’í women from the ages of 17 to 57 were hanged after a mock trial in which they were offered freedom if they would say just one word: “No”. The judge offered them life and freedom with a quick denial: “Just say you are not a Bahá’í and I’ll see that you are released.”

The Iranian authorities did their best to intimidate the women into denying their Faith by hanging the older women first, in the hope that the younger women would yield through fear, but none would barter away her life at the cost of denying her most precious possession. The youngest was Muná, 17 year old Muná Maḥmúdnizhád, who requested to be hanged last so that she could pray for her sisters. She kissed the hands of her executioner and the rope before putting it around her own neck. The names of the other nine women are: Zarrin Muqímí-Abyáníh (28), Ru’yá Ishráqí (23), Sháhin Dálvand (25), Izzat Jánamí Ishráqí (57), Maḥshid Nirúmand (28), Símín Şábírí (28), Táhirih Arjumandi Siyávushí (30), Akhtár Thabit (25), Nuşrat Ghufrání Yaldá’í (47). The friends all around the world were greatly disturbed by the murder of these women.

Not long after their executions, I had a dream of the ten lady martyrs. I was enabled to envision the scene by a link that transported me from the lower realm that I occupied to the higher realm that they inhabited. I ascended on what appeared to be an ethereal cord or beam that connected the lower and higher worlds. I was both observer and participant as I ascended; I saw myself ascending quickly. In passing, I note in passing that the dream/vision state defies the laws of physics. Normally one can watch another ascend or ascend oneself. One cannot ascend and observe oneself ascending at the same time.

There before me I saw the ten lady martyrs. They were all dressed in hooded, purple, royal robes. A number of exalted attributes is suggested by the wearing of the “royal purple,” including dignity, grandeur, independence, wealth, and wisdom. I could not see their faces, indicating no doubt that their great stations had to remain hidden from me, and/or that I was not worthy to look upon them.

It was reported that these women went to their deaths chanting and singing as they were being transported to the prison. I saw them still together in the world beyond, most closely united. They were moving as one body, swirling slowly round and round, circumambulating, dancing in

a state of grace to heavenly music. They were all in a state of ecstasy, totally consumed by the beauty and bliss that had become their one and only mode of being in that heavenly world we call Paradise.

Three Indigenous Things

In the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá promised a leading spiritual role for the original inhabitants of the Americas, once they come under the educative guidance offered by the sacred writings of the Bahá’í Revelation. Whenever I witnessed the consultations at those Canadian National Conventions that I attended or spoke with the native friends in Canada, I was struck by the spiritual perception that the indigenous friends brought to the consultation.

It was different in quality and tone from the approach of those friends who belonged to non-indigenous ethnic groups. For one thing, it was simpler; but I hasten to qualify, not more simple-minded. It relied less on the analytical intellect that is so prone to make distinctions between this and that; instead, it relied more on the effusions of the heart and the clear spiritual perceptions that come from a strong sense of vision. We should remember that the vision-quest was/is an integral part of native spirituality. The First Nations have, then, a long tradition of seeing clearly, i.e. to find the truth in what they see. Truth for them is found in vision.

The world of dreams is a world of small “r” revelation, but it is also a world of wonderment and mystery, just as Bahá’u’lláh asserts in the Valley of Wonderment in the *Seven Valleys*. Two of the dreams related here are of aboriginal Canadians, one of whom is a mix of indigenous, French Canadian and Irish extraction, my former wife and friend, Brigitte Maloney Polycarpe of Gatineau, Quebec, whose grandmother was indigenous, probably from the Mi’kmaq people in the Gaspé peninsula.

I have seen a photo of Brigitte’s grandmother; her native traits were quite pronounced: a flat rather than round forehead, high, angular cheekbones, black hair and copper-colored skin. The second dream concerned storyteller, textile artist and cultural educator, Louise Profeit-Leblanc, currently of Wakefield, Quebec, north of Ottawa. Louise belongs to the Nacho Nyak Dun First Nation in the northeast Yukon territory of Mayo. The dreams of both women concerned their spiritual identity.

In her dream, Brigitte stood before me dressed entirely in light buckskin leather, complete with moccasins. She wore a band around her forehead from which protruded upward a large, single, white feather at the back of her head. Behind her stood a native chief, someone of impressive spiritual stature. Great strength emanated from his person.

My immediate impression was that the chief standing behind Brigitte was none other than the

“Heavenly Messenger,” Deganawidah from the Bay of Quinte in Ontario, who was born on or near what is now the Deseronto reservation. Deganawidah was “the great peacemaker” who was assisted by his disciple Hiawatha (Ayenwatha). Hiawatha was the main character, along with his tragic lover, Minnehaha, in Longfellow’s epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855). Hiawatha’s once reprehensible character and conduct was completely transformed by his spiritual guide. Together they established the “Great League of Peace,” the Iroquois Six Nations Confederacy.

This confederacy was the first historically known tribal democracy in North America, governed by Iroquois matriarchs in consultation with elders and all other tribal members. Deganawidah stood in a strong, protective stance behind Brigitte. I concluded from the dream that Brigitte’s native name is “white feather,” a symbol of the purity of her soul.

The dream about Louise Profeit-Leblanc occurred while I was staying overnight in Wakefield, Quebec with Louise and her husband Bob Leblanc, an affectionate, gentle and kindly man who is always at the service of the friends. In the dream, I observed that morning had just broken, but there were still several stars visible in the sky. When I awoke, I understood that the dream, just like the one I had had of Brigitte, was one about naming a spiritual identity.

At breakfast, I told Bob and Louise about the dream. “If you will accept it from a non-indigenous person,” I said half-jokingly, “your name is Louise Morningstar.” Well, Louise did accept the name that I gave her, in addition to the aboriginal name that was already hers, Tse Duna, (Beaver Woman). But she changed the name Louise to Louisa—“Louisa Morning Star,” a name which has a decidedly more pleasant euphonic ring.

The third dream concerned the future of Canada, a dream that caused me wonderment in its revelation of beauty, breadth and clarity. I saw the map of Canada spread out before my eyes from coast to coast to coast. The color of the map was a warm, bright red. In fine detail, every lake and river were clearly visible, but to my amazed eyes every single body of water, every river and stream had been renamed with indigenous names, although I could not understand any of their meanings.

This dream signifies that one day in the far future, Canada will be restored to its original pristine purity through the aegis of the Bahá’í Revelation. The dream also alludes to the great spiritual station of the original inhabitants of this country, a station that all Canadians in the fullness of time will readily acknowledge and honor.

A Series of Dreams of the Departed

Carlo Giuliani Recognizes Me. Carlo was a good-humored, family man, a non-Bahá’í teaching colleague who taught math during my last seven years in the profession, when I transferred from

secondary to middle school. He retired about 1995, two years before I did. The last time I saw Carlo at Starbucks café in Carleton Place circa 2015, he told me that he had had an operation for stomach cancer, but that he had recovered. A few years later, the cancer returned, and I learned from another teaching colleague, Ross Mercer, that Carlo had died. To pay my respects, I attended the overflowing reception for his family, friends and colleagues at his home in Ottawa on Sunnyside Avenue.

As his name indicated, Carlo was of Italian ethnicity. He was a Catholic, a kind-hearted man of short stature who enjoyed a witty conversation that he punctuated with good humor and a few bars of the occasional song. He had once lived and worked in Jamaica. One of the short lines that he used to sing out of the blue, with some pretense to a Jamaican accent, was “And the famous grandy scratch scratch,” from the Harry Belafonte tune “Man Piaba”.

Carlo knew I was a Bahá’í, but he never asked me about the Faith. After he died, I dreamt that Carlo took hold of me in a giant “bear hug,” but he would just not let go. He held onto me for a long time with a smile on his face, as he radiated to my soul the feeling of a warm, affectionate love. I was not at all uncomfortable that Carlo held on to me for so long, because it was such a pleasant experience to feel the warmth of the love that radiated from him.

Although the dream was non-verbal, I felt that Carlo was nonetheless conveying a message. He seemed to be saying: “Now I know better who you are and what you stood for. I know something more of the Faith that you lived by and I am happy to have discovered it.” If my interpretation of the dream is correct, it is surely proof that a soul can make spiritual progress and gain more knowledge of God’s latest Revelation after death, even if he or she ignored it during life on the earthly plane.

Bahá’u’lláh has asserted in the *Gleanings* that “Certain fruits, indeed, attain their fullest development only after being severed from the tree.” (GL 155) This statement is both scientifically and spiritually true, for it applies not only to things organic, but also to the development of the soul after death.

How My Grandparents Halsted Departed This World

My grandparents, Will and Jessie Halsted, had very different attitudes to death. Grandma who lived to be 92, used to say: “Well, dear, I don’t know why the Lord has keep me alive for so long.” Grandpa would get annoyed when she talked like that. He would respond emphatically with: “What do you want to be talking about death for?”

Both grandparents were persons of great faith, but these remarks clearly reflect their attitudes to our final act on earth: Grandma was looking forward to her final end. Grandfather, who was a

few years younger than grandmother, just wanted to go on living. Even when he was at death's door at age 88, he said to my father Allan James, who was visiting him in the hospital: "Allan, you are going to get me out of here aren't you?"

Two dreams I had after they died were clear indications of how they had both entered the next world. In the dream of grandmother, I saw her standing all alone and unafraid on top of a very high cliff, overlooking a vast ocean. Suddenly, she dove off the cliff, and plummeting down with fierce intent at a terrific speed, plunged straight into the water, the water that symbolized the depths of the ocean of reality.

In the other dream, grandfather was also standing on top of a cliff overlooking the water, but it was not the summit of a great mountain on which grandmother stood, but much lower. It looked more like a cliff overlooking a lake, rather than an ocean, reminiscent of Haliburton in "cottage country" north of Toronto. Suddenly grandfather jumped, but he did not head straight down like an arrow as grandmother had. He dropped through the air, head over heels, not at all in control of his flight and crashed into the water.

I was watching the scene from above, standing on the same cliff behind grandfather. A few moments passed, when grandfather Halsted reappeared on a path behind me that led to the edge of the cliff. Dripping wet, and in his usual casual but frank manner, he said: "Boy oh boy!"—one of his favorite expressions—"Am I ever glad that I landed feet first!"

Three Dreams about my Mother Joyce: Tears, Warnings, Encouragement, New Powers

The first dream about my mother was premonitory; its meaning did not become clear until after the fact. I dreamt that mother was shedding copious tears for me. She cried so profusely that her tears collected in a large puddle on the floor. Strangely enough, unlike the incident it was anticipating, I was not suffering at all in the dream. I was more concerned about my mother's sorrowing state of mind. I approached and tried to comfort her and to stop her from crying. The emotional pain, however, that arose from the incident she was lamenting, and that she had seen in advance, was real enough when the time came.

The second dream was connected to the first, but the mood of it was very different. In the first dream, she was sorrowing over me; in the second she was very sober but reassuring. She said simply in a firm, rather serious, matter-of-fact like voice: "We always get through the tests of life. It says so in scripture." Unlike the first dream, there seemed to be little sympathy for me in the second one.

This dream also proved to be accurately premonitory. Although I did not understand it at the time, mother was warning me before-the-fact that I would recover more quickly than I thought I

would from the incident it was foretelling. I have no doubt that my recovery was in large part due to the aid and succor that she was able mysteriously to send me.

In the third dream, I experienced for the first time communication through mental telepathy, i.e. understanding my mother's thoughts without seeing her lips move. I dreamt in bright colors that mother was creating a painting in the style of abstract art that consisted mainly of intersecting, curved lines. During her junior years in school, I know that mother had sketched certain drawings that my sister Mary Lou came across in the family archives after mother had passed away. In the dream, mother held up a piece of abstract art that she had been painting. Without saying anything, the thought that she transmitted was: "See what I can do now!" I was reading her mind.

Dreams of the Shrine of the Báb, the Mother Temple of the West, and the Universal House of Justice

The dreams of the Sacred Shrine of the Báb and the Mother Temple of the West always appeared as symbols conveying strength, happiness and spiritual power. I was a young man, perhaps 19 years old, when I had the first dream of the Shrine of the Báb. In that dream, I found myself truly in paradise. It was the only dream that I have had in which I felt that I entered a state that is called paradise. Enraptured by that point of adoration, I walked toward the Queen of Carmel with upraised hands, as the tears streamed down my face.

In another dream of the Shrine, much later in life, I was walking barefooted on a sunny day along the shores of the sandy beach of Haifa Bay. The beach was adorned with the occasional palm tree. I passed by with a contented heart, walking slowly along, as the water of the Mediterranean lapped at my feet. I looked up to the Shrine on Mount Carmel as I passed. The atmosphere in the dream was one of ease, contentment and safety.

Although in the dream the Shrine had been fully completed, nothing else existed on the mountain but the Throne of the Lord. Neither were there any buildings below the Shrine, around it or along the shore. It was the only thing that was worth the sight of a spiritual pilgrim. Nothing else of value existed on the sacred mount or its surroundings but the Shrine.

In other dreams of the Shrine or the North American House of Worship, I would simply approach the walls of the sacred house to gaze on the symbol of Greatest Name, or with the Wilmette Temple, to examine the filigreed design that adorned the walls. Sometimes I would touch the walls with the palms of my hands. Just approaching these sacred buildings and gazing at the Greatest Name infused me with strength and spiritual power.

Once in another dream, I was looking from a great distance at the seat of the Universal House of

Justice, when the men of the House of Justice were in session. From its elevated station, flags were flying all around and above the seat, as spiritual power emanated in invisible but nonetheless perceptible waves from that World Center of divine guidance. In these dreams, I sensed immediately and directly, more than I ever did when I actually visited them as a pilgrim, the spiritual power and strength that radiated from their walls and from the symbol of the Greatest Name.

Four Selected Dreams: Pope John-Paul II, Princess Diana, the Queen Mother, John Lennon

I have sometimes wondered whether or not authentic communications with the persons who appear in these dreams really take place, or if these dreams are solipsistically created by one's own conscience. In other words, is one having a dialogue with one's own soul, or is the dreamer actually communicating with the person seen in the dream? My question still remains unanswered, but my intuitive sense is that these dreams are authentic communications.

Regarding dreams of departed loved ones, such as my mother or former Universal House of Justice member, Mr. Ian Semple, I have no doubt that two-way communication took place in these dreams. The following dreams concern those who occupied an elevated social or spiritual status while they were in this world. The acclaim, fame or popularity that comes with an elevated social status in this life no longer applies, once a soul quits the earthly plane and arrives in the spiritual world. There an entirely different divine dynamic rules, one to which the souls inhabiting that world have no choice but to conform.

Pope John-Paul II. After Pope John-Paul II contracted Parkinson's disease, he continued to exercise his papal functions, but only with the greatest difficulty. I used to think it was deplorable that the Roman Catholic church did not have a transition procedure by which an ailing Pope could be replaced because he was laboring under such a serious illness. I used to think it was degrading both to him and to faithful Catholics, and to any other others who watched him struggle to perform his papal functions, when he could not move or even speak with ease.

When the Pope died in 2005, I dreamt that he was sitting in the center of a small circle, surrounded by a standing group of his compatriots, noble-looking Polish clerics. The Pope wore a trim, smart-looking white vestment—only the Pope is allowed to wear white—and white skull cap or zucchetto. A golden cross hung from his neck. The priests surrounding him wore black with red trim. The Pope was laughing; the loyal clerics who surrounded him were smiling broadly. There was no verbal communication, but I understood immediately that the Pope was laughing heartily at his former appearance, as he struggled to exercise his functions.

Diana Princess of Wales. The whole world was shocked by the tragic, accidental death of the much-loved Princess Diana of Wales on August 31, 1997 in Paris. From the time that she married Prince Charles, the heir apparent to the throne, she had been hounded by the press and the paparazzi. Until the time of her death, she fought an ongoing battle against the invasion of her privacy, as her boys Princes Harry and William were growing up. When she died, I heard her say in a dream: “I am alone with my God.” She had found at last the peace that she so eagerly sought while she lived in the world.

The Queen Mother. During what must have been a trying time for her majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the Queen Mother passed away at age 101 in 2002, just seven weeks after the queen’s younger sister, Princess Margaret of Snowdon. The German dictator, Adolf Hitler, once called the Queen Mother “the most dangerous woman in Europe” because of the active role that she played in cheerfully and steadfastly raising the morale of the British people during World War II. She enjoyed consistent popularity over the years, even when the respect for some other members of the royal family declined.

When the Queen Mother died, I had a one-scene short dream that she stood beside ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who had His arm around her right shoulder. The scene was consistent with the response of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself to one of the American women pilgrims, when He commented that her deceased brother had led her to Him. The pilgrim made the doubtful observation that He could not have known what her brother was doing in the next world because ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had never met the brother. His simple, direct response was: “‘Abdu’l-Bahá is manifest in all the worlds.” The pilgrim had not yet experienced nor understood the extent of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s powers. The Center of the Covenant goes anywhere and everywhere He wishes to go.

John Lennon of the Beatles. Being an enthusiastic Beatles fan in my youth, I was greatly saddened by the murder in 1980 of John Lennon, when he was just 40 years old. I watched with growing delight as the Beatles evolved from a wildly popular British rock ‘n roll band to a sophisticated, orchestrated musical ensemble under the brilliant direction of Sir George Martin.

The Beatles articulated in some of their songs the more worthwhile aspirations of the youth of our day. Included in these aspirations were the religious sentiments expressed in *Let it Be* (1970), with “Mother Mary speaking words of wisdom,” and bringing together “all the lonely people” in *Eleanor Rigby* (1966), and John Lennon’s celebrated chant “All we are saying is give peace a chance” (1969).

After John Lennon was murdered outside his New York home, I dreamt he was sitting at his concert piano in his Dakota apartment playing a tune. He looked resigned to his situation, more resigned than content, I would say. Suddenly he looked up at me and said emphatically: “World peace is more important than your personal problem!” It would appear that what matters most to spiritual souls in this world continues to matter to them in the next.

An Experience Outside the Five Categories Above

Finding Fluency of Speech in the Classroom

This particular experience was not typical of the five categories given at the head of this chapter. I will describe it as the sudden acquisition of a new capacity. Throughout my 23 years of professional life, I had been a teacher of secondary and middle school students. Although I had been a little shy during childhood, a shyness that was sometimes mistaken for aloofness later in life, I learned, as I grew up, to become more social because I am, as the current catch-phrase has it, a “people person.”

In addition to possessing the ability to explain the impact of ideas clearly, teachers of the humanities should possess fluent speech, which naturally enables them to be more effective communicators. Fluent speech was certainly necessary for the subjects I taught: Moral and Religious Education, Man in Society—a name that would be considered politically incorrect these days—English, French, French Immersion and History. Teaching helped me to overcome completely any still latent shyness that remained in adulthood.

I do not recall having difficulty expressing myself in the classroom, but what I do recall very clearly, is how this capacity for fluent speech suddenly increased. One day I was standing before the class in front of the blackboard explaining a particular point. I must have been groping somewhat to find the explanation I was seeking, when my capacity to explain in words suddenly markedly increased.

The difference in the moments of “before and after” is best explained by recalling the ancient Athenian Greek Demosthenes. The once stammering orator and statesman trained his oratorical powers by placing pebbles in his mouth. I refer to the use of pebbles by “the perfect orator” only to compare the sudden release that I felt at that moment. It was as if someone had suddenly removed any pebbles of hesitation I had while explaining a point.