



**THE STILL SMALL VOICE,  
FEAR, AND ME**

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An Invitation to Share How  
Some of Us are Coming to  
Follow What's Inside

## **The Still Small Voice, Fear, and Me**

By Robert E. Newman  
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Perhaps those of us who find ourselves listening to the still small voice within, should listen to each other too. In this pamphlet I'm going to write from my experience and to invite others to share their accounts and reflection on how they too are moving away from outside authority. I shall write of my doing this as I am living closer and closer to what feels like my spiritual essence. As a part of this, I shall discuss coming to know and accept the fear which I find also is within - both the everyday sort, like vaguely feeling "down," and the ghostly fear that can grip one's soul.

Because we are each seeking from within our own uniqueness, we each have to do it in our own way. We come together though, I assume, at the point where we share the same desire: to understand and come to trust the still small voice within, to be open to all that is deep within. It doesn't matter whether we call this being with God, or call it relating to our deepest mystical self, or use other words and symbols. It doesn't matter that we do it by ourselves, or do it in a group, as I find that I sometimes can do within the mysticism of the Quaker silent meeting.

At this point in my seeking I see myself being a person with a universalist perspective, religiously speaking, basing my life on an ever deepening sense of knowing myself and my world, without self-deception. Along with this, I see myself appreciating the mystery of it all, that world within, where I feel close to an essence that is universal - a collective soul if-you-will to which I can open myself and which is there in the lives of others, all over our planet. I find it easy to be convinced that this living spiritual presence not only is within me, within us, but is within the planet itself, manifested in all the life, all the beauty, all the storms, all the rhythms and pulses that move us.

My hope is that some will choose to take my invitation to write about that which we agree is of the highest priority: listening to ourselves in ways which teach us to know. These ways help us to draw wisdom and direction from the awareness which comes from within, helps us take courage to be with our deepest selves and to live from our deeper reality.

On the last page of this pamphlet I offer to receive what people have written and, if the writer wishes, to circulate his or her writing among those who contribute. I hope each of us will explain what he or she has found to be true in as down-to-earth a fashion as is possible. This is writing as free as possible from obfuscating abstraction, clichés without example, and free from other ways words can be both misleading as well as can make people think they know something which they don't. In our writing I hope the reader can see where what we have found to be true springs from, in the context of our lives and experience.

Here is an illustration from my life:

It happened during two weeks in 1986, when I visited the Findhorn Community in Scotland. During this time I felt an easy relationship with something that was new for me. From the day I left New York, I sensed something seemed to be with me - not like a person, not a "big deal," just a kind of quiet assuring something. The feeling-tone, on this trip, wasn't what people might call "self-confidence" or anything like that. It was more like my being at ease with myself and at ease with something else in

myself. That something else, felt new yet felt as if I had known it all my life. It was as if the unreasoned fear I usually sensed within had been eased away from me. I still knew it was about, but it seemed checked and off to the side in a place of insignificance.

By this time I had come a long way in recognizing and feeling my basic fearfulness. I no longer tried to deny the most pervasive self-diminishing and despondent fearful feelings. One important step in that direction came five years before this trip. I spent two weeks at a Buddhist center in Rangoon. There we meditated twenty hours each day in silence. We meditated while eating, walking, sitting, and while preparing for the brief nightly sleep on a wooden slat bed. Each day I found myself living with the scariest fear which at home was masked by the diversions of daily life. During this time in Burma, I found myself able to be with the unreasoning intense fear without withdrawing from it, even though I was afraid of it. It was some six years before I could accept that fear as simply part of me.

Thus when I was on the Findhorn trip, I still was afraid of the deep fearful states such as I experienced in Rangoon. But, somehow, on the Findhorn trip, the unreasoned fear that I was afraid of, inside, was neutralized enough to allow me to reach within, to know what it was like to be near my soul.

The second night after arriving at Findhorn I had a dream which I found easy to remember and to write down the next morning. The dream write-up filled several pages. That next morning at breakfast, I found myself telling a fellow visitor about the dream. She suggested I let elements of the dream "talk." I thought that sounded like a good idea. I had been doing that, occasionally, for years.

Two days later I saw a photo-slide talk about a group of Findhorn people who were farming and taking care of the small Island of Erraid off the western coast of Scotland. The island was across the strait from the Island of Iona. I asked if there was room for me to visit. There was. Very few outsiders came during the cold raw weather of this early springtime. It all seemed to work out neatly. I had another week to fill before the

plane would take me back to North America after my planned departure from Findhorn. When I purchased my round-trip ticket in the U.S., I had spontaneously given myself an empty week "to use if something interesting turns up." A week was just right for a stay at Erraid.

A day or so after deciding to go to the island, while bouncing along in the little Findhorn community bus, the idea came to me to let elements from the dream "talk" while I was on Erraid. The idea simply presented itself in a gentle sort of way - with no doubts, no uneasiness but in a kind of way that made me feel good. I remember sitting there feeling kind of like I had a special secret - yet it all felt ordinary at the same time - no dramatic event.

As I look back on all this, what happened seems to fit the notion that perhaps I was being led with gentle sensitivity toward trusting the spiritual after a lifetime of being repelled by organized religion. Always, when I had ventured toward the spiritual, I had been put off by what others told me I had to believe, how I had to do it in their ways, how I should join their groups. But despite how churches and those in their flocks seemed controlled by authority and bent on control of others, I found myself persisting. I was coming to feel that there was more to a meaningful life than the rational, the psychological, more even than my home-grown kind of meditation which I had found so special each morning for the last fifteen years. And there was a deeper aspect to it all: I was coming to sense a spiritual presence that I could embrace without becoming a "follower," a being-with-the-spiritual that didn't mean I had to stop thinking for myself, surrender to a group's creed or "holy way." My experience on the Findhorn trip seemed to show me that what I had been seeking, for years, was with me right now.

Perhaps if I describe in the present tense how it was for me as I revisited my dream on the small island of Erraid, I can give the reader more of a feeling-grasp of what seemed to be happening on that trip:

The day is bleak. As dawn breaks, Erraid is shrouded in a thin Atlantic fog which moves in the light morning breeze. In a stone building near the sea, I am sitting at a two-by-three-

foot table. The fire behind me to my right is now flaming a bit with the new peat blocks I had put on about a half-hour before. It warms the small room. My coffee cup is warm too, still half full resting on the table's white painted surface. The candle, burning to my right, illuminates my quiet time book and a pen which lay in front of me. My eyes follow the patches of first morning light as they appear out the window in front of me.

This is the third morning during which I am returning to the dream I had the week before at Findhorn. The dream is full of images which I have been letting talk for the last two mornings here on the island. I have now come to the image in the dream write-up where I am in the driver's seat of a car outside Angeles Temple, in my boyhood home of Los Angeles. One of my daughters is with me, vaguely, sitting on the passenger's side. (Angeles Temple was the spiritual center for evangelist Aimee Semple MacPherson. She was a beautiful woman who, in the 1930's was seen by her followers as a charismatic healing angel from God, all dressed in white. For many others she was a publicity-seeking charlatan cruelly exploiting the needy who trusted her.)

So, here I am, sitting, feeling the scene both in the dream and in this room. As I hold the dream image in my mind, more and more detail reveals itself. I let my pen begin to write. What comes on the page doesn't feel as if it comes from my head. The words seem to come through my fingers, directed from somewhere below the levels of my consciousness. My pen writes the following picture that unfolds for me:

A service door to Angeles Temple opens. Out comes a man with graying hair, wearing a worn boiler suit. He has the general appearance of someone who is a bit weary but accepting of it all. Perhaps he's the building maintenance man? He crosses in front of the car, to my side. I feel a kind of relaxed trust and kinship toward him as I roll down my window. A slight smile warms his face as his eyes meet mine.

He says, "Bob, don't let any preacher, holy book, priest - none of that sort of thing - get between you and God." In the slight pause that follows, we continue to look into each others' eyes; we both seem to be one.

My pen stops; the image begins to diminish in intensity. Then it disappears.

"...don't let any preacher, holy book, priest - none of that sort of thing - get between you and God." Those words, the dream image and the memory of that morning on Erraid go together. They present a picture of so much that I felt was with me on that trip.

That morning on Erraid, I felt in my heart what it meant to trust one's God. I felt deeply significant; yet I knew that I was but a tiny element in the vast universal scene, perhaps like a grain of sand on the shore of a great ocean like the one outside my room. I didn't want the feeling of closeness to a spiritual presence to end; but I knew, somehow, that these mystical-feeling moments would recede in immediacy like the incoming ocean's waves recede.

That experience on Erraid seemed to be the capstone of my life's seeking to that point. I left the island feeling that I knew what it was to be with the presence of God inside, with what was the deeply spiritual, perhaps with what some people call my soul.

But it was more complicated than that. When I revisited Findhorn, some months later, the assured knowing I had experienced on the first visit was missing for me. I found myself only having glimpses, so-to-speak, of the peak experience I had had during my first trip to Findhorn and during my time on Erraid. I felt restless and open to change.

While at the little Quaker meeting which met on alternate Sundays at Findhorn, I heard about Woodbrooke, the Quaker centre at Birmingham, England. There, when I went for a week to try it out, I again felt that the deeply fearful was seemingly set aside a bit. As I look back on it now,



that "something" which I had felt on the first Findhorn trip, was back - that "something" which seemed to guide me, which seemed to help me be with the deeply spiritual, which helped me take my next step in being open to all there seemed to be, within. I began the next phase of my seeking at Woodbrooke - to be with both the spiritual, as experienced at Findhorn and the fearful as I experienced so vividly in Burma.

The awareness that perhaps one must and could be with both fear and the spiritual within, had been growing slowly for years. Bit-by-bit, usually right at the borderline between the conscious and the unconscious, I began to be aware of the fear which I carried. This feeling often was a kind of vague uneasiness.

I wondered, every now and then, if fear were the key reason why so many people who appeared to want so much to listen to the still small voice, didn't. This question never seemed to leave me then or now. I suspect I was asking that question about myself, as much as about others. Let me recount here two instances when particularly, I found myself reflecting on that question.\*

The first time I remember the question persisting clearly, was in 1969. Students in the United States university where I taught went "on strike" for "students' rights." This was at the end of the Vietnam War. The war had made many young people distrust what their elders had told them to believe, what they were to strive for as the good life.

I was with so many of the students who talked seriously about wanting to "think for myself - to listen to myself." I felt strongly, from my own seeking, that reaching deeply within for fundamental guidance meant just that - not unquestioningly following some guru, teacher, or highly revered system of beliefs. These outside-of-oneseif creeds and rules might be used as a resource but not walls to confine the seeking spirit.

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\* I discussed these two times in an article appearing in *The Universalist*, No. 34, January 1992. After its publication I was asked to go deeper into what I wrote there. That came to be this pamphlet.

I found that so many students, with whom I talked then and since, seemed to yearn for what they called "freedom." But when I raised questions about a student's sense of direction, we suddenly appeared to be on a kind of ship without a rudder. They couldn't seem to begin to work out even the first self-directing steps. I sensed that at best they were looking for a new guru, a new something to guide them from without. Furthermore, exploring seriously what the good life might be, according to their heart-of-hearts, was something most students didn't seem interested in doing. Drawing from within themselves, listening with serious and deep reflection to what was at their essence, was something that somehow was beside the point. As I look back on it now, it seems to me that the deepest parts of themselves were behind closed doors.

I wondered from time to time, if perhaps similar doors were closed deep within some people who gave spoken testimonies at Quaker silent worship. When I heard some people's spoken testimonies at Quaker Meetings, the messages often came across to me as being from people who genuinely wanted to be with "the leadings from that of God within." But at the core of what I heard them saying, at the heart of what seemed to provide guidance and sustaining strength, appeared to me to be unquestioned assumptions based on the teachings of a guru, a holy book, or some other authority outside the person.

I began to get what seemed to be an answer to this question of why it was that people who wanted to listen to the still small voice didn't and, instead, turned to outside authority. The answer was this: if one listens to what is within, one can also encounter fearful uncontrolled feelings - and most of us have learned from infancy to run from this kind of unreasoned fear; we have learned to deny those sharply disquieting feelings that I was beginning to see were deeply in place in the dark recesses of my unconscious world.

I have found, bit-by-bit, that the life of listening to myself, being open to what is mystical within, on a regular basis - apart from certain spiritual peak experiences such as mine on the Island of Erraid - often means that I encounter fearful self-diminishing feelings. Along with "the voice of God within" often comes despair, feelings of not measuring up,

feelings of guilt, loneliness and helplessness. Frequently these feelings present themselves liberally laced with feelings of indifference to myself and others, feelings of wanting to punish others (who are "unjust") and other angry feelings.

My experience at Woodbrooke illustrates the coming together of the fearful and the spiritual. Each morning, there, I got up for an hour of quiet before breakfast. Darkness changed to light as I sat in an armchair, alone in the second floor sitting room, looking out over the garden and pond. I just sat, with my quiet time book and my coffee as I did those mornings on the Island of Erraid. Again, I would often let images in the dreams of that night "talk." My pen seemed to be moving automatically as the images "spoke." Some of the dreams were frightening. Sometimes, too, when I first sat down, up would come thoughts loaded with feelings of my being "bad" and that "it was all my fault." The implication was that I should be punished. I knew that these scary feeling states sometimes emerged during the hustle of the days. But usually at those times they felt like a kind of behind-the-scenes, non-specific mood which I often would sort of put aside or deny. However, here in the morning I found myself open to the specific nature of these and other feelings. I let myself cry, shake with the fear, feel and respond in ways I didn't during the day.

One of the strongest and most debilitating feelings that sometimes came up during my quiet times at Woodbrooke was a kind of loneliness that seemed to express a fundamental conflict. I felt this conflict as I came to be closer and closer to that which was within. All my life, like this time at Woodbrooke, I wanted to fit in, but didn't feel I could.

One example of this goes back to my childhood. Part of me wanted to be seen by others and myself as a Man - the Real Man prescription I had learned growing up. "In my bones" I felt these expectations, held for Real Men: In order to be strong I was expected to repress my fearful feelings. I was expected to deny deeply threatening feelings whenever they gripped me; these feelings were often some variation on the theme, "I'm bad, I don't measure up, I'm unworthy." I was expected to "instill self-confidence in myself" in order to win success and the good life for me and those who depended on me. I would be "weak" if I experienced any deep

uncontrolled fear except, perhaps, in times like the death of a loved one. "Weak" people were losers in the game of who-gets-ahead-of-whom which was played extensively in our way-of-life. If I were a loser, I was expected to be "a good sport" denying possible self-diminishment and resentment. Finally, I was expected not to see all this as it was - blatant self-deception.

At Woodbrooke I turned a corner. I came to know that it was OK to feel alone, not to fit in; it was OK not to follow the cultural prescriptions such as "being a Man," it was OK to see the forbidden and not-to-be-seen workings of the fearful both within myself and within our Western way-of-life; it was OK to be afraid - all the time, if that's the way things worked out. In accepting all this, I was flaunting the taboo in our culture against being with the uncontrolled, irrational-feeling fearful within. But it was inevitable that I flaunt it in order to understand what I was doing and understand why some others might not do it with me. I wanted to do this and I needed to do it, even though I might find myself being seen as "different," even though I might feel deeply alone.

In my quiet time of January 22, 1987, I went through a moving experience which deepened my conscious awareness of all this. Here's what happened:

I came to my quiet time, at dawn as usual, with some particularly "down" feelings from the evening before. That evening, in the study of one of Woodbrooke's tutors, I was with my small seminar of fellow Woodbrooke people. We had been meeting weekly and had grown close as friends. The announced topic for the evening was "What is God to you?" I volunteered to go first as I had been thinking about this question all week before.

For what felt like about five minutes I tried to explain what was happening to me in my quiet times, how I sensed the spiritual so clearly along with the most disturbing fearful feelings. I talked about how I felt the presence of God in my quiet times so often and how that awareness seemed to follow my acceptance of feelings of fearful guilt, self-diminishment, and other deeply disquieting feelings. I didn't try to

intellectualize or fit it into any theory - just told how it happened. I did speculate on how my acceptance of the dark fearful feelings and the seeming presence of the spiritual appeared to be connected in some way. After I finished talking I noticed that one older man had quietly slipped off to sleep. I looked around at the others. No one responded or questioned me. It seemed like an awkward pause. Then two others went on to talk about God as explained by their understanding of The Bible. That was all. No one else spoke. The tutor changed to another topic for the rest of the evening. I left that meeting of people who I had enjoyed as friends, feeling lonely, feeling a bit naked and feeling that somehow I was way out beyond where I should be.

The next morning, in my quiet time, I found these feelings were with me still, only now I experienced them more fully. In my quiet time book I wrote, "I feel bashed. Like I can get up but am a bit dazed. I feel rotten. All those good people out there and I'm gonna be divorced from them. I'm different from them. I'm different than they are."

Then, as often happens in my quiet times, my pen began to move writing the words of what seems to be an inner voice:

Stand up tall.  
Alone is OK.  
God is a personal thing.

I began to relax. I left my quiet time book on my knee, had a sip of coffee and looked out at the fast lightening sky.

As I was sitting there, I noticed that something seemed to have appeared, about ten inches out from me and about three inches down from the level of my left shoulder. It was the face of a man with sharp features and penetrating eyes. He appeared to be about forty-five-years-old. I could see every detail, his every wrinkle. His face measured about six inches high and about five inches wide. For some reason he belonged in the early 1900's.

Then the face began to fade. It sort of moved back and away from me, toward the window. But as it moved away, one of its eyes seemed to emerge, growing in size and distinctness as it neared me.

The eye was about six inches across and it was looking right at me. All its particulars, including a few bloodshot lines, were clear and vivid. It stopped at the place where I had noticed the face, just before. I shivered, and seemed to be rooted to the chair. Then I noticed my quiet time book, still on my knee. I wrote, in my quiet time book, "Let the eye speak:" and waited. In a moment my pen began to write these words:

Hey. I'm sad - looking so threatening, but really soft and loving. Please bring me to you; keep me with you; I want to be with you; I want to go with you. I want to see beyond the mountain.

When my pen stopped writing I felt the fearful tension draining from my muscles. I looked over to the eye. It was looking at me, steadily. I found myself feeling warm and at one with it. I saw it slowly become less distinct and finally disappear with the kind of an afterglow - a vague suggestion of the reality there a few moments before.

After Woodbrooke, I allowed the "eye" in my life, so-to-speak, allowed it a home in me. I allowed myself to see what before I was afraid to see lest I felt too different, lest I threatened some people too much, lest I felt the kind of loneliness I wasn't ready to accept before.

I rented a stone cottage in the Cotswold Hills a few months after leaving Woodbrooke. It had a twenty-five mile view. I lived there by myself, for five days each week, for six months. There, I found myself writing each morning after my quiet time, about the things I was coming to see. I found myself writing about how people like me learned to deny fear, how we repressed threatening feelings which then seemed to be resettled into the unconscious to become a dark destructive force, pressing us to dislike and perhaps to hate ourselves and others.

As I became clearer about this seeing, I found myself clearer about asking myself if what I saw were true. I found myself checking it out and changing some of my understanding as I tested it against the data of my experience. I did this as I looked back at my own experiences and I also checked my understanding as I found myself using my understanding to find meaning in what I read and what I watched on television. What I was coming to see so often helped explain what otherwise seemed inexplicable.

For example, after an hour-long documentary about the atrocities committed by a company of American soldiers against unarmed old people, women and children at the Vietnam hamlet of My Lai, I could understand what had before seemed unbelievable. It seemed unbelievable that in about two hours of macabre slaughter and savagery, those soldiers killed face-to-face, three- to five-hundred people. Not only could I understand it, but I found myself becoming more clear about how what I saw in myself and others helped me see how apparently we had the same potential - a kind of dark punishing force within us like was released from within those American men who wantonly killed at My Lai.\*

I saw one of the men, in particular, tell the TV interviewer of the raw destructiveness that emerged from him. The ex-soldier was showing newspaper pictures of the event which he kept in a scrapbook. He talked of wanting to commit suicide to get away from his awareness of what he called the evil within himself. He apparently could talk in a relatively dispassionate way because of the strong anti-depressant drugs he was taking. From his and other stories, I saw how apparently the men's unconsciously-held dark dislike of themselves was projected on the villagers. The Americans punished as if they were powered by raw hate inside, gushing out unfiltered and undampened. For example, I heard ex-soldiers talk of what I saw as their repressed sexual guilt pouring out. Some of the detail of the savage rape was told by family members who watched it happen before the men killed the young women.

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\* See Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours at My Lai*, (N.Y.: Viking Press, 1992.) This book was written by the directors of the Yorkshire BBC documentary on the U.S. military action at My Lai.

As I watched this documentary and looked back at other "unbelievable" accounts, such as stories of Nazi atrocities, I began to understand more of people's self-destructiveness. I began to look back at my own life and see the same process of repression and self-destructiveness that was so important in creating the inner raw material I saw pressing those soldiers at My Lai. But, I came to see also, that by seeing this in my life - unveiling its destructive power as no longer an invisible force - I could release its hold over me. I could live with it, not by it. Let me illustrate how repressed fearful threat seemed to build up in my childhood:

I grew up as an only child. My mother told me in words and actions how she didn't respect my father and she told me repeatedly how she was going to die any time now, from a serious mastoid problem. This came across to me as the facts of her life as she saw them. I found myself covertly competing with my father while at the same time loving him - competing for being the Man in my mother's life. Because my father was a traveling salesman, away all week, I could play out being her Man, when he was on the road. In my childlike way, I felt that if I were good enough I could save her; I could beat the doctor's predictions that she would die soon, if I just took care of her well enough.

That little sketch is a vast over-simplification, of course. But I hope the picture comes across. From the conflicts and guilt I felt in all that, I repressed the fearful feelings, as they came up. I covered up, to myself, my sexual feelings toward my mother and my shame connected with desiring my father's wife. I covered up my feelings of being a horrible failure when she did die, as predicted, during my childhood. Now, years later, often I find myself feeling "not a Man," a "no-good" and sometimes "dirty" and "a phony." Sometimes some innocent-appearing incident seems to set off one of these feeling-states. Sometimes they sort of float up from within, or all of a sudden I just find myself feeling that way without an apparent cause. At times when faced with an everyday problem, I feel that I just can't meet the challenge. These kinds of unreasoned and often self-hating feelings emerged full bloom when I was living two weeks in silence at the Rangoon Buddhist meditation



center. From that experience, from my quiet times, and from other experiences I have come to know that these feelings are full of ghostly self-punishing dark feelings and, as I understand it now, emerge from a specter-like world filled with threat which I repressed to a large extent in my childhood.

I have learned so much from seeing the dark and often self-punishing feeling-states which seem to reside permanently down below. I have come to call these results of repression, "material."

I feel, now, that my job is to come to accept these and other "material" that drive me from below - despite how awful the raw feelings strike me, how "bad" they might make me feel. My job is to make this unconsciously-held "material" become part of my conscious world where it is accessible and accountable.

Clearly, the idea is for me not to try to eradicate the fearful glut of formerly threatening feelings within the deep mystery of the unconscious; but to get to it, to feel and understand it as best I can and to live with it. I find myself doing this while, at the same time, I find myself more and more relaxing with my "material" within. I find myself appreciating the fact that there is this deep aspect of myself. When I open myself to what is within, I bring so much meaning and richness to my life. Denying the unconscious out of fear, fighting what wants to present itself in my life, seems basically in the wrong direction.

Repression and self-delusion might be in the wrong direction as I have come to see it; but it certainly is in the right direction according to our culture. Our Western culture, as I have come to see and know it, provides plenty of ways to withdraw from fearful feelings and let them slip away to be ensconced below the levels of consciousness. Readily at hand are such things as alcohol, drugs and the casual use of anti-depressants. Then, too, there are the ever-present distractions such as non-stop TV watching and obsessive involvement in work, play and hobbies. Also there are other ways to divert one from being with the

fearful inside. Some of these involve strong sensation mixed with the risk of serious loss, such as manipulating money or power and making war.

If one becomes an artful denier of scary feelings, then one is seen as strong, as I discussed before. Then one has reached a mark of status and fulfillment in life. One feels "good." One no longer feels guilt and shame or "bad" when one doesn't live up to the lofty Western noble ideals while he or she profits from acquisitiveness and greed done at another's expense.

I've seen how this is taught so well to children in schools, churches and by Western child rearing practices. In my work trying to help teachers understand children, I've seen hundreds and hundreds of little school children learn to feel unworthy or "weak" if they acknowledge the terror which can well up from within or if in other ways, like crying from distress, they acknowledge the fearful within when it presses to manifest itself.

I saw, as I worked in the schools, children's covert self-dislike heightened, often to a subtle kind of self-hate. Youngsters in schools were faced continually with their deficiencies by most of their teachers. Well-meaning teachers relatively seldom showed the young people aspects of themselves that could be esteemed. Then the children were offered surcease from their heightened fear when the youngsters did what the teacher desired - when homework was done well or when rules were followed dutifully. This might have helped teachers control the youngsters under their care by making children feel "I'm good" and other feelings of being approved of, when they did what the teachers wanted them to do; but so many children paid a lifelong price for being controlled this way. It intensified the culturally supported habit of self-deception. They learned to cover up painful "I'm bad," and "I don't measure up" feelings. They simply repressed them. Another price they paid, of course, was learning to look to authorities for approval.

I quit my teacher training job. I no longer comfortably could watch children in the schools being hurt, usually unwittingly, by their teachers. I

found myself taking steps to re-orient my life in line with a conception of "happiness" which honored, not covered up, what was within.

I think back to the image of the eye which seemed to "talk" as I wrote its words, that morning in my quiet time at Woodbrooke. My pen wrote: "I want to see beyond the mountain." As I look back over the past few years I feel so fortunate, feel that I have been led to see beyond the mountain of Western culture and its dark destructive shadow.

I think the idea of a "mountain" is an apt metaphor for culture. It feels looming and built up, over the eons, with the material of our inheritance. I think it is apt, also, because like a mountain, I don't think I can remove it. I can explore it and come to know it. I can find ways around it, over it, perhaps through it. Maybe, too, my exploration, my ways, my example can be used by some others who, too, want to see beyond the mountain.

I find that as I venture beyond the mountain I need a new basic orientation - a new conception of The Good Life. Basic to this is a new way to view "happiness."

I have found, as I have said, that the conventional conception of The Good Life, holds, in part, that "happiness" is defined as one's successful flight from fear - one's subsequent "peace of mind" which comes from the absence, consciously, of fearful, self-diminishing, terror-filled feelings. But a key element in "happiness" as I have come to see it, is my living with and knowing myself at deeper and deeper levels - being one with my deeply terrifying feelings and with my culturally induced feelings of being "weak" because I am feeling them. Living with all that is within seems to be an integral part of my experiencing the presence of God, within.

This aspect of The Good Life is dependent on coming to see myself and my world without the self-deception that is needed if I were to fight fear, withdraw from the pain and repress my feelings of threat. My Alternative Good Life, is to work to draw clear awareness from within by coming to understand the results of past repression in my life, by coming

to be aware of the delusion rampant in our culture, and from knowing the ingrained tendency to deny the fearful. Truth, or taking authority from within, needs to be distilled from all this understanding and from being quiet with the presence of one's God.

Living The Alternative Good Life also means, inevitably, that I move away from contributing to the Western "win" culture with its emphasis on exploitive acquisitiveness, greed and violence, covered up by denying the resultant feelings of guilt and shame. It simply doesn't feel right inside to be contributing to the rampant striving for happiness through self-delusion and sensation which I have learned distracts one from being responsive to what comes from within.

In living these alternate aspects of The Good Life, I need all the help I can get. I am moving out against perhaps the most powerful mainstream in our culture - that which supports self-deception and gives power to invisibly-held dark destructive forces deep within. One way I get the help I need is to share with another person I trust.

I don't know if I could have come to be open with myself at the deeper levels if I hadn't done a great deal of trusting creative one-to-one sharing. This has been and is so important in helping me to accept and live with so much of the result of my repression which I explained above and call "material." I speak of sharing with a person who will listen with love; who won't give advice; and who, in turn will open him or herself to be listened to that way, by me.

First I shall talk about co-counseling. It is one way I learned to share with trust and in the process, to listen to myself. Hour after hour for twenty years I was the counselor for people I knew were lovable and good but whose feelings inside sometimes told them they were unlovable, "bad," guilty, and worth nothing. I watched their faces as they agonized with it all. I felt it as I held their hands. Then in the second half of each session, we changed roles. Then when the other person became my

counselor, I often expressed these same feelings from the depths of myself. As I let it all out, I felt their regard for me as a lovable person.

Co-counseling helped me feel safe enough to let the dark unreasoning fear in my unconscious come up, hold me in its grip - almost. *Almost*, because I felt my co-counselor's hand in mine, felt his presence that reminded me of the world as it really was, not the fearful melange of unreasoned threat below. Also I had perspective on the deeply fearful, because during my years of co-counseling I learned to discriminate. I learned to know the difference between fearful feelings which seemed to arise largely from past repressed threat - "material;" and on the other hand, I recognized fearful feelings arising from real and present-time danger.

These days I share on what feels to be a deeper dimension than co-counseling, within my relationship with Katherine, my wife. I find that I can "go with" the dark feelings, which now we both call "material," and I know she knows that it is "material." I know that she loves me and knows me as I am. We share openly and honestly when it comes to our feelings of self-worth or those feelings which come from those dark forces which seem to seek to drive us from within. We help each other be with all we are - including what seems most scary, inside. We support each other to be more of ourselves.

We have worked out ways, within our relationship, to listen to each other, to help the other know that he or she is just fine even though the person, at the moment might be full of the deepest darkest self-reproachful feelings. We do this within our shared trust and partnership with The Spirit which is within each of us and deeply a part of each of us.

Katherine and I do what we call "share" or "go with feelings" almost every day. This has the highest priority. If one of us feels a need to share, we sit down, hold each other's hand and begin to share whatever the feelings of the moment might be. While one of us is sharing the other person listens until the first person has shared all that they want to share. This can include hurtful punishing feelings toward the other person.

From the beginning of our relationship, Katherine and I wanted to commit ourselves to be with all of ourselves in an honest and loving way, particularly when it came to self-destructive feelings or feelings which would be hurtful toward the other person. We share these things even though it often is scary. We share these feelings because, in sharing them we have found that our relationship deepens and grows and we each grow in self-acceptance and understanding.

I have to emphasize, in conclusion, how all I have said here isn't another way of saying that God will take care of me; in the end all will work out well if I just follow truth as it is revealed to me from inside. It's different from that.

Maybe the best way to explain this difference is to tell you of what happened one morning at the Cotteridge Quaker Meeting, in Birmingham. I was there during the quiet Meeting one Sunday toward the end of my time at nearby Woodbrooke. As I remember, no one had spoken a message yet. All was quiet.

As I sat there with my eyes closed, I remember coming to feel a distraction. Part of my attention moved to it - something in the upper right hand corner of my inner field of vision. A scene emerged there. It was the image of a flying boat resting on the water. There was a neatly-made low rock and gravel wall behind it. It was the China Clipper at its base next at the causeway to Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. As a boy, in the mid-thirties, I had collected pictures of this famous flying boat then in the San Francisco to Hong Kong service. I had made a wooden model of it. It had a place of honor in my room.

From the side of the airplane closest to me, I noticed a tongue of flame coming out of the fuselage, just behind the wing. Quickly the beautiful airplane was enveloped with orange-red flames and black smoke. I sat there, being kind of a non-involved observer, with very little emotion. Then the scene began to become less distinct. It slowly dissolved out of the upper corner of my inner frame of vision. Finally,

just wisps of smoke trailed out of the inner picture. As the scene cleared of smoke, a strong voice presented itself to me, saying clearly, "You're on your own, Bob."

Then I was no longer a casual observer. I felt a kind of terror - felt powerless and small. It was the kind of feeling a little boy might have when, in a dangerous situation, that which he counted on to take care of him was rudely taken away. I thought, "I can't face all I've opened myself to. I can't do it on my own. It's just too scary. I can't turn back, either."

Then the voice continued, "But you're not alone."

"You're on your own, Bob; but you're not alone." I have learned that within me is a power to see and to know, that I can trust - if I am honest with myself as I come to know and listen to all of myself, including the heavy dark feelings. This spiritual power is often a mysterious-feeling presence when I am quiet.

I no longer need the kind of shield from my deepest fears, that I felt was there for me as I went to Findhorn the first time and then to Woodbrooke - a feeling of the absence of unreasoning fear, which seemed to allow me to venture into the most scary inner depths. Now I can be present to my deepest and worst fears as a matter of everyday living. No matter how bad I might feel, no matter how afraid I might be - it's OK to feel that way. It seems to be part of a sense of trust, as I take each next step in tune with what is real, inside.

### Epilogue

The editor asked me to write about changes which have taken place in my life because of what I write about here and how others in the wider world might be effected. Let me talk about two such changes.

First, and most important to me is my friendship and love with Katherine, my wife. I wrote about the two of us, above, when I talked about our listening to each other. We met when she came to a weekend

conference when I was at Woodbrooke. I can't summarize or analyze how right this has been for me, how what I talk about in this pamphlet seemed to make it possible for me to share my life with her, after some fifteen years living alone. But it did.

The second change I want to talk about has to do with my work. After I quit my job in teacher education, some ten years ago, I had planned to write, but my attempts left me cold. I found I couldn't write about what I tried to bring about in classrooms - teachers helping each child to live a life based on knowing her or himself, to live from her or his heart.

Maybe one reason was that I found a great deal of anger surfacing - anger about what was happening to children both in the schools and the culture. My dominant feeling during those first years after I quit was *never again* would I be involved with schooling in any way.

I didn't have a plan, those days, with its security and predictability. But I did sense I needed to be with all of me, to give myself space to be in rhythm with my soul. For example, I spent several months driving sixteen thousand miles around the country, camping and occasionally staying with friends - my dog and I. Also I found myself drawn powerfully to do the kinds of things I have described in this pamphlet.

One day about three years ago, in my quiet time, I decided to write about what some friends and I did in our little alternative school I directed for ten years. I shared with Katherine and others, my old slides and movies of what we did at that little school. Something had changed inside. Much of the anger had lifted, too. I now could write about what we were attempting to do in our little school, from a new sense of immediacy and personal meaning. I had been trying it out for myself.

Now, that first article about our little school has grown to be a book-length manuscript. In it, I set out a proposal for schools for young people whose parents want them to have a chance to face and understand themselves, to ground their lives in the strength and wisdom of being honest with themselves. I write most of the book as dialogue - young people and their teachers listening to each other in ways that help them



learn how to listen to themselves. I am so often moved with emotion when I write about these children and teachers. We seem a part of each others' worlds.

Along with the excitement and deep involvement, often I feel a sense of futility, that at times borders on despair. I see so clearly now, how our way-of-life and the ominousness of our world almost inescapably press people to flee from reality, both within and without.

But on the other hand, I see clearly, now, that what I am writing about is a crucial element in our survival as humane people. If people don't face what is real, how can they move to change what has to be changed? In that sense it feels good to be designing an education where young people learn to accept, not deny; where they learn to be with what is within, not close it off; where they learn to see what is, not what we might like it to be.

As I explained in the beginning of this pamphlet, send me your written piece if you wish. I would be honored to read it. We might do one or two things then: Perhaps we could just react to each others' pieces. Or, if you feel ready and willing, I'd like to make photocopies and send you what others have written as I send them copies of your piece.

If you would like to participate in this exchange and if you are financially able, send me a check to help with copying and mailing costs, say five British pounds or eight US dollars. I'll return any significant amount of unused money in about two years, when I'll stop distributing. I hope all who want to exchange will have sent me their work, by then.

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