



999



Table of Contents

- I. [Introduction](#)
- II. Epistemology of 88
 - A. *First Rebirth*
 - B. *Second*
 - C. *God*
 - D. *Satan*
 - E. *Darkness and Light*
 - F. *Jesus*
 - G. *Hierarchy*
 - H. *Money*
 - I. *Exponential*
 - J. *Three Pillars*
- III. All Rivers
- IV. Diagnosed?
- V. Catharsis
- VI. On Kings and Prophets
- VII. Prophecy and Archetype
- VIII. Who am I?

Introduction

Both of these manuscripts point to the same thing. Union.

Not the doctrine of any one tradition, and not a metaphor. I didn't even contemplate this was the purpose of 88 until writing was well underway. 88 shows what it feels like from inside; descent, dismemberment, the bridal chamber, the moment the water stops drowning you and starts carrying you. That book arrives at Union the way you arrive anywhere: after a long way through. 999 states it plainly, up front, because 88 didn't have room for plain speech. Gerizim is the same claim made physical; a place built by hand, stone by stone, by anyone willing to add theirs, whether or not they've read a word of either book. One shows Union. One says it. One builds it.

There's always a risk when attempting to do too many things at once, one ends up doing none well. That being said, I found that the only way to deal with this for 88 was a sort of triage for the multiple purposes written in, so long as they fell under the same few umbrellas. 999 is several things though, I know it wouldn't exist or even have anyone interested in reading it without 88. Although 88 ended up being a way for me to metabolise a lot of experiences and pain, I'm surprised to find myself in the same condition, slogging through the drafts that follow.

In some ways it has been good to begin assembling another manuscript from some bits that are more raw, it is bringing me back to the same methods, procedures and struggles I applied and learned from when in the early stages of writing and assembling 88.

There were two things I struggled with the most in 88, the letters in the candelabra section, which I will circle back to later, but the other was the main take away I got from my editor a few years back. That I needed to write myself out of the manuscript. I have this same urge with 999. It will be harder to achieve, but at the same time, perhaps easier second time around. The whole purpose is to put a real grounded human touch to something that is broad and ethereal.

I struggled for years to account for myself in the manuscript while still leaving room for the journey that produced it.

There are spiritual concepts, names, and claims throughout that are stated without enough background to land for anyone who wasn't already standing near where I was standing. I held to a hard word count of 33-34,000 for 88, in part for formatting, but mostly because attention spans are short. What resulted was that the density kept increasing. More said in the same space, not less. 999 is the room that constraint didn't allow: context for the claims, more of the journey behind them, a way to retell the story in a different register, at the same limit.

It is an easy enough ask, however things needed to be genuine in the manuscript, or it would fail a smell test. It has made me more accountable not only to other people, but also to myself and to G-D. A great deal of scripture and wisdom of philosophers does exist in the text, but as natural outflows of the narrative as I was writing. Paraphrasing and naturally drawing on these references in a way cemented them within me, informed my perspectives and behaviours in meaningful and recognisable ways.

Although 999 comes after 88, there's a large amount of it that was written concurrently with sections of 88 over the years. I've tried to include only what's most relevant in this first section. The rest is musing, epistemology, documentation; some of it written from an earlier, less settled state of the journey than where I stand now. Read as much as serves you, no more than that. I have difficulty editing parts of the sections that follow, because in some ways they're milestones on the way to Truth more than Truth itself. For now, there's value in leaving them a bit unpolished; the polish was for 88.

I've gotten specifics wrong, especially where a tradition's own claims resist being folded into anyone else's frame. The plainer I speak, the more there's to disagree with. That's the trade. Agreement was never the point of writing this down. A record of where I've been is.

This book took nearly six and a half years to write, though most of that time I wasn't writing it so much as living inside whatever it turned out to be about. The first pages came in 2020, disappeared, came back changed. I finished full drafts multiple times over the years thinking I was finished, and only then would understand I hadn't completed anything. I'd written a truer account of where I'd recently been than of where I'd

already moved to. Somewhere in the middle of it I lost the ability to tell whether I was writing something universal or writing my way out of gaslighting, pain, and trauma. Both were true.

Every tradition I passed through had its own name for the same territory. Not identical claims but overlapping ones. I don't offer this as proof of anything, only as the shape my own passage took. Names like Mahdi, Mashiach, Maitreya, Kalki, Christ, Pahana, Saoshyant, among many others appear throughout. These aren't identities I claim, but currents that moved through me. The patterns these names point to are older than any one tradition, named independently by countless cultures. I don't believe I'm the singular figure any prophecy points toward. I do believe I was transformed by passing through states of consciousness that many traditions independently describe in messianic language, and that the names became mirrors and milestones for that passage, not titles to keep. Anyone who looks for how prophecy points to them will find evidence somewhere. I think that's baked into scripture, and it's part of why it resonates across so many generations.

There's a tension in the writing I want to name rather than resolve. I feel no hesitation borrowing from and weaving together traditions and gods that aren't 'originally' mine. I also remember who I am: a citizen of a country with its own history of narcissistic abuse toward some of the peoples whose stories I'm drawing on. That discomfort hasn't gone away. I don't think it should.

What's helped me sit with it is love, gratitude, and respect for these traditions and the people who carry them. I hope that's felt through the pages. An Anishinaabe Elder helped me reconcile this personally, in stating that the wisdom of "his" ancestors isn't reserved for him, but free for all. In that moment his ancestors became mine, and mine his.

It's also in coming to see oral tradition as wiser than written tradition on exactly this point. Language written down can outlast the Truth it was written to carry, attributed to one author, while meaning drifts under it. Oral tradition survives instead through an interpreter who takes responsibility for the truth in each telling, and who can be replaced if they're not equal to it. The Spirit of the story has a caretaker who has already done the work of interpreting. I've tried to write 88 the way an

interpreter tells a story, not the way an owner records one; passing something along, not claiming it.

The mystical framework wasn't just a literary device. During a period of sustained relational and institutional abuse, I built a universe inside my own head. Images, metaphors, lessons drawn from a lifetime of experience and mistakes informed a place that took on a life of its own. It became a way of holding the truths I was discovering, and it kept me standing when the people and systems around me kept trying to knock me down. This isn't decoration over a difficult story. It's the structure that got me through it.

Which is to say: I know this manuscript has the potential to spark something in a reader, but not everyone. People come to this with different responsibilities, different capacities, different seasons of life, different paths already underway. Some of you have many children and forty minutes a day. Some of you're in crisis and can't hold abstraction right now. Some of you would rather encounter this through action than through text. All of that is legitimate, and none of it disqualifies you from the thing 88 and 999 are pointing towards, the same thing Gerizim is, Union.

My own stake in this is bound up with the order I came to these traditions: the Christian Bible first, then Gnostic texts, Quran, pseudepigrapha, Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita, then Upanishads and sutras and pieces of the Mahabharata. Interspersed with indigenous traditions, occult and philosophical texts I still find I've only scratched the surface of. The order isn't important in itself, though it may matter more to someone raised Christian, as I was, than to someone who wasn't.

Gerizim is in the West Bank. It's the Samaritan Jewish Holy Mountain. If New Jerusalem is meant for all of G-D's children, it cannot be built on the abomination that would come from memorializing hate and genocide in G-D's name with the destruction of Al-Aqsa. Gerizim is where I see the temple. It's under perpetual renovation, as everyone affirms Mashiach in their own heart while helping build it. The first stone: a physical cornerstone with all the names of God engraved on it. A peace monument.

It's a vision that over time has become clearer; of the temple being built there, not by one hand but many. David laid a foundation for his children to build on. It wasn't his to finish.

Not a shrine to any single mashiach; a place where the labor of building itself is the teaching, open to anyone willing to add their hands, whether or not they've read a word of this manuscript. A Gaudí-like perpetual construction: every pilgrim lays a stone, places a piece of glass or timber, and receives the anointing of Mashiach directly from G-D. If the text is one path in, Gerizim is meant to be another, lower-threshold, tangible, something you walk toward and place a stone on rather than turn a page for. Both are the same invitation. Neither is required to receive it.

It's largely symbolic of something that lives and flows through everyone. Surrendering to it is harder for some than others. Some people have always had the Spirit moving through them; others have to work at it. I can't say which is better. Both are right.

I have no means, and no real intention, to pursue this alone. If it's ever built, someone else lays the first stone, not me. My doing so would undercut the vision itself. No single hand but G-D's should claim the foundation, least of all the one telling this story. I feel the pull toward it anyway, strongly. I'd rather name that pull than pretend it isn't there.

More than that: I hope this eventually exists entirely apart from me. The intensity and ecstasy described in Tekel to me was and is very real; the only thing greater than Union is more people in the same or similar Union. I hope these rudimentary blueprints are handed to people who can carry them without needing to associate the idea with any one person. If the temple at Gerizim ever requires believing in me, or in this manuscript, it's already failed at what it was supposed to be. I'd rather it be built by people who've never read a word of 88 than by people convinced by it.

What follows moves in stages. Epistemology is the rawest material; records of how I came to think about truth, ego, God, and hierarchy the way I do now, written closer to the events, six and a half years ago, than the rest. All Rivers End in the Sea of Fana is the more considered version of the same ground, an attempt to trace what's shared

underneath the traditions I passed through. Diagnosed? walks through the specific psychiatric labels I was given or suspected of, one at a time, and what each one did and didn't get right. Catharsis is what I see as broken in the world, and what I hope for instead. Prophets and Kings touches on the particular narratives of them, how they manifested in my journey, and doubles as a deeper dive on two prophets describing a transferable method for understanding not only them, but the human epic, and how we can let greater forces and emotion guide us into a more universal understanding. Who are We to be? sits with the discomfort of being read as a prophet, by others and sometimes by myself.

We will circle back around to what I hope for, that more and more people enter the Bridal Chamber and that you and others will begin to hear the prophecies pointing to something already alive in you and them as they did with me.

II

Epistemology

These sections comprise things mostly written near the beginning of the journey. I sometimes still feel a bit off about them, like they aren't fully developed and I'm looking back on a less travelled, more naive version of myself. I have a more nuanced view of some of the things I criticised; capitalism comes top of mind. Although I have often felt like it is rotten to its core. I now understand better not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Any system can be turned to serve the majority over a minority; capitalism has done this in the past. Ultimately I now see all of our disagreements and conflicts through a class lens. Genetic, national, religious, or tribal are all noise, used by people who benefit from division and hierarchy. I am not trying to throw out what was old and present something new, but to affirm and explore what is old and ontological.

I also think it is easy to see both affirmation and rebuke and not know which one to dwell in. Although I think institutions are rotten, I also see the value they bring and their potential to do real good in the world.

Although I have real issues with the hierarchy in my own tradition, I also had several people in that hierarchy in mind when I began writing. Good Shepherds exist in degrees; there are actual people represented in the vision of the Shepherds returning on the clouds. They were pastors, teachers, elders, imams, rabbis, bodhis, swamis, gurus. These very same people do, not exclusively, represent a larger portion of the 144,000 Sun Dancers I reference and write to.

It's worth saying plainly what this section actually is, since its order can be misleading. First Rebirth and Second read as foundational, and structurally they are, but they were among the last things written, drafted in the final quarter of the whole manuscript, once I already knew what needed a floor under it. God, Satan, Darkness and Light, Jesus, Hierarchy, Money, and Exponential Curves are the oldest material here, partially formed in drafts before I had written the first pages of 88 itself. Three Pillars is recent, written to name what the section had already been doing without my having said so, with a lot of ideas that once existed in 88 and were trimmed. What follows isn't a record of how my thinking developed in order.

There's value in leaving these sections close to what they were. They're some of the scaffolding that stood behind the first half of 88. Read this the way it was built, if you want, First Rebirth and Second first, the rest in order after. Or don't. If the abstraction of the first two pieces isn't landing, Three Pillars, at the very end, names plainly what the whole section was actually doing, and might be a better door in than the one I put first. Move through this section however serves you. I only ask that you not mistake the density for the point. The point is smaller and plainer than the density makes it look.

What follows moves through ten pieces. First Rebirth and Second are presented as foundational: how I came to see truth as a spectrum rather than a binary, and the discipline for living inside that without losing myself in it. God, Satan, Darkness and Light, and Jesus apply the same lens to religion itself: a God who shows no favouritism, evil as a role rather than a species or person, light and dark as truth and ignorance rather than one tribe's righteousness against another's. Hierarchy, Money, and

Exponential Curves take the same argument to the scale of nations and systems; the same ego, given more room to do damage. Three Pillars closes it by naming what the whole section was actually doing: breaking down self, belief, then world.

First Rebirth

The phrase "ignorance is bliss" is familiar, but reducing it to a saying limits its depth. Bliss comes at too high a cost. It's a Klesha. Temporary comfort ultimately gives way to cognitive dissonance, distorting perceptions. When others define truth for us, we abdicate responsibility. This creates false comfort. Ignorance intertwines with defence mechanisms, shielding us from the shame that sometimes accompanies humility. That shame, honestly felt, is different from shame used as a mechanism of control. The first is signal, proof that something in us still wants to grow; the second necessitates defence mechanisms or leads to illness. Yet shame itself, in its honest form, is essential for learning, growth, and actualisation. The difficulty is being able to differentiate between the two.

Humans naturally categorise, classify, and order the world around us, often reinforcing existing belief structures. Most understand that simple truths appear binary: right or wrong. Yet this binary view rarely captures whole truth, which exists on a spectrum. Shades of grey acknowledging underlying complexity. Too many variables force us to confront our prison of subjectivity, leading us to select portions of truth's spectrum as foundations for understanding, constantly updating our views based on better comprehension.

This method of ordering proves messy. When fundamental beliefs face challenge, updating is more difficult due to our rigid view of foundational truths. Rather than reset every spectrum connected to challenged notions, we often ignore new information, either go to an existing or inventing a new myth, delaying and sometimes amplifying, anxiety, anger, and frustration. We constantly strive to better understand our world while simultaneously reinforce belief structures, manifesting as stubbornness and rigid thinking that frequently leads to offence.

We adopt mental shortcuts out of fear or habit, but the sheer volume of data makes linear spectrum thinking unsustainable. The spectrum shares the same foundation as binary thinking. We only perceive portions of what appears infinite. The moment we believe we comprehend something entirely, we revert to binary thought. Our tendency to accept myths as facts creates fundamental flaws in understanding. Particularly regarding self-perception, which is built upon institutional myths from government, religion, and/or entrenched wealth as well as family, other individuals and social structures.

Complete knowledge seems impossible; Linear and spectrum thinking have limits. Let's change the paradigm and define endpoints. We must recategorise truths as knowable versus unknowable. What lies beyond our grasp extends to the fourth dimension and beyond, while everything within our three-dimensional universe remains, theoretically, knowable given unlimited time.

Dialectic of Truth reveals that opposites are often simultaneously true. Rather than selecting parts of truth's spectrum, we must join extremes into a circle and attempt to stand at its centre. Truth exists in everything, both revealed and concealed. The infinite spectrum remains accurate within our limited vision. What if the beginning and end of truth's line are identical, the singularity one might call God. Then the line becomes a circle, seemingly infinite yet more definable. Peering past the circle to where they overlap with others, the circles eventually become spheres. Dwelling too long in one leads to stagnation, then reversal; spheres collapse into circles, circles segment into lines.

This search for truth can and must unite us. Begin with your focus. Train it on what we share, not ignoring differences but beginning with shared truths to deepen understanding of each other, turning from divisiveness towards synthesis. Whether or not you believe in God, we all recognise that some things lie beyond understanding. Religion both illuminates and obscures truth, and the moment we consider our vision of God more complete than another's, we engage in hierarchical thinking that casts dissenters as wrong or other. We exclude their truths from our own. We choose this ignorance and darkness. Truth is greater than what any one person can possess, it calls us to weave together our glimpses.

Being 'in Spirit' parallels what many characterise as spiritual awakening, often occurring or beginning at rock bottom when we shatter rigid self-concepts and become humbled, receptive to recognising errors. This process is something many people go through. But in order for meaningful and lasting change, it requires pain, work, and discipline. This requires not just breaking the pillar of self, but deconstructing our understanding of religion, relationships, politics, history, and social structures through a holistic systems approach to life.

Lessons carry some necessary shame and guilt, but we can influence how much we feel. Insufficient feeling leads to repeated mistakes and compounding errors. Some tend to transfer guilt and shame onto others. Repentance, prayer, and meditation. Their definitions evolve with experience and are crucial for efficient learning. Great power lies in taking accountability for our words and actions.

Understand ourselves through conscious and subconscious connections. How we respond to stimuli, navigate daily life, and interact with people and environments, reveals all memories remain accessible through emotion. Patterns emerge everywhere. When they don't make sense, we move past them until one solidifies enough connections to reveal greater truth or emotion.

Training flexibility into our psyche makes daily operations easier. We learn to see ourselves as fluid, elastic. A river dragon confronting obstacles, finding paths of least resistance, moving forward and reflecting rather than fixating obsessively. Eventually, we become like the river itself, handling multiple obstacles simultaneously with singular focus that naturally adjusts priorities.

This singular focus becomes love for family and, by extension, everyone. We begin seeing all children as our own, transported to childhood where we can relive lessons and translate them for those willing to listen. As this understanding deepens, we become the river without realising it, then ocean, understanding we were always part of the ocean and left only to learn how to bring others with us.

Intuition becomes trained as an autopilot for updating truths about ourselves, the world, and Spirit. Life becomes incredibly complex in its

simplicity. We feel at one with the ocean, understanding that without it, we're nothing. We must remember to avoid favourites, resist conceit when God answers to our chosen name, and listen beyond the echo through the noise to hear all Names resounding in gentle cacophony.

Second

First rebirth was cognitive, recognising truth exists not in binaries but spheres. Conceptualise and see oneself as construct, a lattice of inherited illusions waiting to be unspooled. The second rebirth was experiential in learning how to navigate those spheres, how to find truth in the tension between extremes, and how to inhabit perspectives I'd only intellectually understood without getting stuck in circular reasoning.

When you want to truly comprehend what someone thought, you don't just read their words. You attempt to think as they thought, feel as they felt, see through their eyes. This is what method actors and writers, deep empathy requires. I applied it systematically to the authors of spiritual texts. When something is motivating you, making sense, teaching you, it's good to follow it to its conclusion. Efficient learning requires both discipline and surrender to what pulls you forward.

The method began with imagination informed by study. The more one learns about a historical time and place, the richer the imaginative space becomes. Prophets generally have some profound occurrence which begins their calling. If a large percentage of what composes each individual one is more or less the same spiritually, then it becomes easier to understand and see them through their words, stories, and contexts. One reads not just for information but to meet and perhaps inhabit the consciousness that produces such words.

The progression is organic, difficult to script because each person has their own imagination, favoured authors, and figures they naturally gravitate toward. It unfolds differently for different people with different archetypes, often feeling outside conscious control as they're triggered by circumstances and encounters. We all have unique paths.

What began as curiosity evolved into psychological identification. Certain patterns in ancient stories matched patterns in lived experience. The

figure who emerges at the end of an age of decay. The one who must descend into darkness to bring renewal. The reluctant renovator. These weren't distant mythological figures but descriptions of something recognisable, something being lived.

Then coincidences accumulated. Not one or two, but patterns that strained credulity. Alignments of timing, recurring numbers, circumstances mirroring scriptural sequences. At a certain threshold, coincidence becomes pattern, and pattern becomes signal, no matter how hard you try to explain away or ignore it. It becomes impossible when the signals repeat from multiple angles in rapid succession. This is when psychological identification sparks into something else, call it spiritual connection. Alignment with patterns larger than individual consciousness, recognition that the archetypes aren't just psychological constructs but real patterns that recur across time and cultures. You can learn to meet them and perhaps become like them.

But here lies the danger: one must not stay too long inhabiting any single archetype, or risk losing oneself entirely. It's a part of and apart from. Are you a reincarnation of one of the Names? Perhaps, but impossible to prove or know with absolute certainty. Don't spend time on this unless there are lessons to harvest. The method requires balancing on a knife's edge. Inhabit the pattern long enough to learn from it, extract its wisdom, understand its function. Believing you are that archetype for too long rather than learning through it is how one can lose their mind.

A Truth became a safe tether, one to hold onto when things became too surreal; that if I was "the Mahdi" I'd become who I first saw when I heard the name. Someone misunderstood and recognised posthumously who would die a recluse. Reminding me that archetypes are to seek, not become, at times like titles to work towards. The goal isn't to become one, but to weave from many threads. Remember that you're not to run from the trial, but to remain conscious within it until it teaches you what is required. Act without attachment to its fruits. Do what must be done without being consumed by the doing. Having compulsion to speak, but only speaking when one has no stake in how it lands.

Being able to switch between them becomes easier with practise, lets one learn from literary, historical, spiritual and mythical figures. Not

becoming one messianic like archetype, but learning how to weave from many threads the archetypal fabric of what it means to be fully human. Metaphysical space is a powerful crucible for transformation; a way to get at roots, to live fully. To repeat mistakes as little as possible while making as many mistakes as possible and harvesting the lessons from them. It's alienating yet deeply unifying. It resembles what some call the Akashic, though I don't claim to be a reader. What I felt, more than reading anything, was being rewritten myself, and only when the impulse wasn't mine to begin with. The moment ego reached for anything, it would either withdraw or hammer me into submission.

The overlaps between religious traditions are more important than distinctions. What are they aspiring to? What patterns appear across cultures, centuries, vastly different contexts? Messianic figures describe not different beings but different cultural expressions of the same pattern: ego death, divine encounter, rebirth into service. The pattern is real. The pattern recurs. Anyone can align.

Human consciousness follows recognisable patterns. What we call gods or demons have psychological correlates in complex and shadow. But psychology and spirituality diverge in their approaches. Psychology tends toward pathologising. It names, diagnoses, medicates, and manages. It has become more religion than science, complete with dogmas, priests, and orthodoxies that punish dissent. Spirituality, at its best, seeks transformation rather than management, roots rather than symptoms. Where psychology will eventually ask "How do we make you functional within your systems?" spirituality doesn't move beyond "What needs to heal? What is this symptom pointing toward?"

The critical difference between spiritual emergence and what gets labeled psychosis lies in two capacities:

First, dual awareness. The ability to maintain distinction between the mind-scape (where spiritual truths, visions, and archetypal experiences unfold) and physical reality (where bills must be paid, children fed, work completed). Both are real, but they operate in different registers. Losing the boundary between them is where the danger lies, yet there's value in testing and probing it.

Second, compassion and whole-person vision. The ability to see the entirety of people, not just their shadows, is important. Spiritual awakening often brings the ability to see conceit, manipulation, ego structures in others with uncomfortable clarity. The world can appear darker when you perceive these patterns more easily. Confronting and trying to heal old wounds shared with others often compounds pain. If one can't also see the good in people, the wounds beneath their defences, the whole of their humanity, then feedback loops spiral into bitterness, paranoia, and eventually mental illness. The test is not whether you see darkness, but whether you can see darkness and light simultaneously, can hold the paradox of human nature without collapsing into cynicism or naive optimism.

Labels become prisons when they replace understanding of circumstances and roots. "You're this" or "you're that" creates an identity trap, a fixed state rather than recognition of a process, a transformation, a response to unbearable circumstances. Better to speak of facts and contexts: "You're experiencing this in response to that." Labels can aid understanding if held lightly, but they calcify into excuses, stigma, and self-fulfilling prophecies when taken as ultimate truth about someone's nature.

Healing trauma is seven generations in each direction. We pay for the sins of our fathers, individually and collectively. When trauma isn't processed, it doesn't disappear, it transmits. One can look within when abused, learn from it, transform it. One can ignore it, bypass with positive thinking, unconsciously repeat similar behaviours on others to normalise what happened, to dull the pain by making it seem universal, inevitable, just how things are. Or one can project it outward, treating present people as though they're past perpetrators, unable to hear their actual words or intentions because the trauma response has overridden present reality. In this state, every explanation becomes evidence of manipulation, every boundary becomes proof of abandonment or control, and the wound hardens into a lens that distorts all relationships. The person becomes unreachable to reason, relating not to who you are but to who their pain tells them you must be. These patterns take many forms: reenactment, triangulation, identification with the aggressor,

frozen or dissociative transmission. Darkness channels through people this way, flowing through wounds left unhealed, using those already hurt as conduits to hurt others in turn.

Something my kids taught me during Covid, that I've written about before in a different form: I watched one of them direct a negative emotion at the other. The other felt it, processed it in their own way, and sent it back. It escalated until both were more upset than whatever had started it. What made sense to me, articulated more recently by someone else in a way that I can't top: emotions are shared experiences, not personal ones. Or rather, both at once. What can an emotion teach us about ourselves? It's easy to fixate when we decide it's entirely the fault of someone or something else, but stepping back, we bring a great deal into the feeling that has little to do with the other person or circumstance. Road rage is a clear example. Most people don't have it; those who do, I feel some sympathy for. Something outside anyone's control, something everyone has to endure, can trigger such a spiral. Given how much cortisol and other stress hormones build up over time, their mental and physical health are negatively affected by this behaviour.

If someone does something that bothers us, we can minimise it, excuse it, but we should strive to turn it to something good. For me the easiest good is to understand that the lesson is for us to learn not to do the same to others or to be able to empathise when someone lets us know we have done the same or similar. It's far more effective when we listen, apologise, and remedy the situation, but also apply this to our own thought patterns and impulses.

Breaking these cycles requires conscious choice to feel what was avoided, to name what was denied, to heal what previous generations couldn't name or wouldn't address.

This process requires learning to differentiate emotions previously experienced as undifferentiated pain. The revelation to me was understanding trauma as distinct from anger. Trauma can express itself through anger, can use anger as its voice, but they aren't the same thing. Learning to separate "I am angry at this person about this present circumstance" from "Trauma is using current anger to show me old unhealed wounds" proved crucial. It also helped to understand the

difference in paying attention to who was more likely to bring anger into conversations. If one person can't de-escalate themselves, refuses your attempts to do the same, then eventually you'll have no choice but to receive a transfer of pain in some way. In this state you'll very likely feel it as anger, your own subjective experience trying to contextualise the extreme emotion, but also because anger doesn't respect boundaries or safety, its transfer is inevitable. When one can get past the intensity of the moment, feel it as pain that is now yours and the other person's, then healing is possible. Perhaps not for them if they aren't ready to see past their own, but for you.

It took years to fully transmute the pain I was carrying. I was learning how even as it kept compounding, and it was hard to keep pace with it. Now that it's no longer compounding, I can see past my own pain to its source, understand that it was always theirs to begin with, and use that understanding to love them, show compassion and grace. Seeing the source of their pain becomes the source of yours. I have healed; they may still feel it. Always do post-mortems, pay attention to patterns, and watch for when the transfer hurts too much to see past it as only yours.

Each negative emotion points to something specific when you learn to read them: Anger signals unconscious boundary violation. Fear signals perceived threat. Shame signals internalised judgement. Grief signals loss. Trauma signals unhealed wounds bleeding into the present. Anxiety signals unresolved futures based on chaotic past, mind racing toward or away from something. Not everyone understands that the negative emotions we feel are to teach us, not to lecture and channel them into another. There are many ways to differentiate the emotions, but more important than the terminology is the experienter, what memories become triggered, the greater Truth calling through it.

When anxiety is undirected, it can spiral into panic or despondency. But anxiety becomes an analytical engine when steered. Racing thoughts that accompany the anxious state can be aimed at what needs analysis, turned from destructive spiral into productive problem-solving. One needs the discipline to differentiate what is and isn't inside one's control. This makes it easier for thoughts to resolve themselves rather than

perpetually recycling, yet still ride the wave. Whatever feels difficult at first becomes second nature when one truly applies themselves to it.

Negative emotions aren't pathologies to eliminate but navigation data. This is emotional differentiation. Moving from "I feel bad" to "I feel grief about X, which is distinct from fear about Y, both separate from trauma expressing as anger about Z." Each requires different responses, different healing approaches.

The spiritual approach invites difficulty as curriculum rather than something to avoid. Not masochistically seeking pain, but recognising that when darkness appears, one can descend into it and emerge with what it teaches. This is distinct from spiritual bypassing; pretending everything is fine, slapping positive affirmations over pain while avoiding actual work, and distinct from remaining trapped in pain as identity or excuse. Falling for the lie that "Satan" has power in order to excuse yourself from feeling enough shame to learn from mistakes, we treat him as a false messiah, someone to channel our shortcomings into, someone to blame for our own folly.

There's a balance point: engage with difficulty long enough to learn from it, extract lessons, build strength through endurance. Not so long that it makes you sick, or traps you in dynamics that have nothing left to teach. This comes through trial and error, through stumbling before finding one's footing.

Understanding extremes allows finding truth in the middle. This is how we temper emotions and ego, how we return to centre rather than ricocheting between poles. It's also how we build mental strength and discipline. Holding paradoxes, understanding that apparent opposites aren't binary truth, but often illuminate each other. Truth frequently lives in the tension between extremes rather than in choosing one side over the other.

This extends to understanding oneself as dual: the observer consciousness witnessing experience, and the self that is becoming, the amalgam of archetypes and experiences being woven into something new. If the soul is on a journey toward enlightenment, focusing on who one is becoming makes bearing present pain considerably easier. It

creates a powerful positive space that remains grounded, that attempts to act with temperance even amid chaos.

The method itself is transferable. What begins as one person's necessity is a replicable approach. To study deeply and imaginatively. Inhabit the consciousness of teachers, prophets, archetypes. It's practise in shifting consciousness, useful in many avenues. Recognise patterns across traditions rather than defending singular claims. Allow psychological identification with archetypes that resonate. Notice when coincidence becomes pattern becomes signal. Stay alert to the danger point. Learn through the archetype but don't lose yourself in it. Maintain dual awareness. Honour both spiritual truths and mundane reality. Cultivate compassion alongside clarity. See darkness and light simultaneously. Differentiate emotions rather than collapsing them into undifferentiated pain or bliss. Invite difficulty as teacher while knowing when to withdraw. Hold paradoxes; find truth in the middle; understand extremes to navigate toward balance.

This is the Pentecost mechanism. Not one person becoming THE messiah, but a method by which many can access the Spirit, can align with archetypal patterns, can undergo their own deaths and rebirths. The pattern doesn't belong to any individual. It's a template that recurs because it describes something true about human transformation.

When your expectations about external saviours shatter. When you realise no one is coming to rescue you, that is until you do your own inner work. The Spirit that seemed reserved for special figures becomes accessible. As much as one puts in, the Spirit meets you in equal measure. It is both a part of you and apart from you. Apocalypse becomes a present experience available to anyone who can bear it.

This is the second rebirth: discovering not just that truth exists in spheres but that the method for and speed of navigating between them can be honed through practice. In this shared honing, individual sparks merge into the eternal fire of unity.

God

If we're to have any hope of surviving as a species on this earth, we need to focus wholly on what unites us, don't ignore what divides us, but start with what common truth is shared, and in doing so, we will better understand each other and our differences. What does unite us? We all search for truth. The truth of what makes us happy, sad, love, hate, of why we feel emotion. Where does that emotion come from? Some people say God gave us this gift, others believe that it is an accident of nature, evolution.

Whether or not you think there's a god, I think we all understand that some things lie beyond our understanding. Religion helps us find truth, but it also obscures it. Because religion does both, one's opinion of God is picking one part of that spectrum of truth and valuing it as more important than another part of what God is. The second that we value our own vision of God as being more or less complete than any other person's vision of God, we're doing so within the paradigm of hierarchical thinking.

Because we have allowed ourselves to define God in this way, we're casting those who do not agree with our vision as wrong, or other. It is the most dogmatic, zealous practitioners of religion who forced those who disagree with them into calling themselves atheists. Atheists understand that there's something called the fourth dimension, that the possibility of existence outside of space and time is real whether it is perceived as nothingness or heaven. They're mislabelling themselves in rejecting what mainstream religion defines as God. Every person on earth believes and understands some part of the truth of what God is, whether or not they recognise it as such. At the very least, there are likely many things about what God is not that we would agree on.

If we're children of God, created in his image, every time we celebrate human achievement, it is an act of worship. Most people either believe that God is a personal God that is ultimately good, or that God is neutral and distant. There's truth in both visions of God. God is good, but in order to understand what is good, we need to understand what is bad. To understand closeness, we must know distance. When we celebrate human achievement as a collective achievement, we see it for what it is, a marvel and a gift that we together achieved through God or rather

through each other. Whether directly or indirectly doesn't matter. Ascribing an achievement by one person and celebrating the individual is tempting, because we too want to feel special and be recognised as being important. This is because of the insidiousness of hierarchy.

The same hierarchical instinct that ranks one vision of God over another shows up again in the names we use to call God by. Every tradition insists its name comes closest to the truth: G-D, Y-W-, Allah, Brahman, the Tao, the Great Spirit. I don't think the answer is picking one and setting the rest aside, and I don't think it's flattening them into a single generic label either. Both moves lose something real that each name is carrying.

I wrote in 88's opening message, that the first commandment, put no gods above God, was never a claim of supremacy but a statement of universality. Every name a tradition has ever raised toward the unknown, if it's aimed sincerely at what's genuinely beyond us rather than at a graven image of our own making, is a name for the same thing. G-D isn't one god competing with others for the top of a hierarchy. G-D is what every name is reaching toward, incompletely, from wherever it happens to stand. Put no gods above God doesn't mean silence every name but one. It means don't let any single name convince you it has cornered what all of them are pointing at.

That's why insisting on one name above the rest is its own kind of hierarchy, the same instinct this whole section has already been describing, just relocated from doctrine into vocabulary. The moment I claim my tradition's name for God is more complete, more correct, more real than someone else's, I've done exactly what I warned against at the start: mistaken my own limited vision for the whole of what it's describing. The names aren't competitors. They're witnesses, each one carrying back a partial, honest report from the same unreachable source. None of them, mine included, is the thing itself.

Satan

This section will likely offend some readers. I'd rather say that plainly than soften it. It may seem as if individuals' pain and suffering are being

discounted. Recognise that the more hideous the perpetrator is, the harder forgiveness is, because forgiveness is far more complex, and the perpetrator not only caused the trauma, but that trauma lasts because they also make forgiveness so much more complicated and painful than it should be. That rape, murder, hate are all in service to some greater truth sounds pathological.

As children, our understanding of the devil or satan is simple. The devil is bad, God is good. The Devil is responsible for all that is evil, God is responsible for all that is good. As we grow, we have difficulty reconciling God for allowing Evil to exist. We tend to either dismiss the whole notion of God being bad or good, or continue to search for slivers of truth to support and understand how God is good and the Devil is bad. If God is creator of all things, then who created the devil? If the serpent caused Adam and Eve to sin, why would God have created the serpent? Was it punishment or learning to be banished from the garden?

The creation story was a way of describing to a audience with a more primitive view without the millenia of scientific discoveries that have happened since the creation story was first scribed. When we go back to the creation story, that the earth was created in seven days is a clue that time is meaningless to God. If time is meaningless, then everything to him is happening all at once, and to us, seems out of order. That when the Children of God took a bite from the apple, that was the singularity that brought everything into existence. That we were meant to eat that apple; if we weren't, God would have built a wall around it, or warned his children about the crafty serpent.

How can we understand God and how he is our father without the growing pains of childhood? The whole point of our religion is to understand our own origin and try to use it to piece together some vision of what may come. There's a hint in our creation story of a point in the distant future when we too will return to the garden. That when that happens, instantly we will all be Adam and Eve, and taste the apple, truly understand Good and Evil, and finally be able to eat from the tree of life again.

When I look at Job, I now see why he remained faithful. He relished the suffering and he definitely had a hand in perpetuating his own suffering.

He was in relationship with God, and understood that the more he suffered, the deeper his understanding of love and Truth became, because he suffered with God. The devil was a tool of God used in a forge to shape Job into something greater than he was.

How do we then accept that rapists and murderers exist and are worthy of God's or anyone's forgiveness, or that they're used as an instrument of God? Because of what is to come, the suffering we have both suffered individually and collectively was to prepare us to feel the joy of oneness with God, of being centred in Truth. The bliss that is felt is the burden of blame being lifted.

Blame for ourselves as victims and blame for the victimizers. Forgiveness is difficult for everyone, but especially for those who are traumatized and whose lives have been forever altered by that trauma. Once we learn to forgive, we then know what it means to be forgiven. By helping those who suffered to forgive, we need to feel the same awful emotions as deeply as they do, because we do communicate through feelings, the only difficulty is understanding and articulating them. It is difficult to expose oneself to someone else's pain, but not as difficult as it is for someone to truly share it.

Our understanding of evil, of the Devil, is flawed. The beast is not a force apart from us, malevolent and terrifying; the beast is within each of us. There's an earlier version of the Beast who was named. Narcissus from Greek mythology is an early representation of the Beast. He is one who loved himself so much that he wanted his followers to self-destruct to prove their loyalty and love for him. We all have a version of Narcissus within us, and the more power we give to him, the more powerful he becomes.

When a true acolyte of Narcissus gets hold of power, we all know how it ends: a loop ending in destruction. We do not need to repeat the lessons of the great wars fought for ego. We all know that ends in destruction. This is why we hold onto hope that Narcissus can be stopped this time, or perhaps next. In order to do so, we must not blame his adherents for following him, but rather show them compassion and grace, because the reason they take comfort in the beast is because the society around

them has not given them sufficient comfort. The beast has no power except what is given over by us.

When they lash out in anger and violence, it is because we have failed to teach them self-control, peace and empathy. We're all adherents of the beast of narcissism, as long as we continue to buy into the comfort of the hierarchy that only exists unto itself.

Darkness vs Light

Another way that people understand evil is in the context of darkness and light. That sin is darkness, and the abyss is darkness. We're tasked to bring light into the world, and many people believe that means to proclaim their version of light to the world, through their own religion. This is somewhat accurate, but it is missing a greater part: that light is truth; knowledge. From it springs all good things; from ignorance springs all things evil.

Many who grew up in the church have been told about the path less travelled. That one comes to a fork, and the scary narrow path is the path we must take, and that the easy wide path leads to destruction. I now know that this metaphor is overly simplistic, yet at the same time has been overcomplicated. The origin and the destination are the same. The path is the same. When you choose the "dangerous" path or the path less travelled, you're acknowledging that life is hard and full of pitfalls. When you acknowledge this, you're better able to navigate those pitfalls, and better able to learn from them. When things are hard, it is easier to push through. When you do overcome obstacles, you learn from them, you shine brighter, your relationships are better, you're a part of more positive loops, and life seems good. Heaven.

When you expect life to be easy, taking the path that looks open and safer, every pitfall and hardship feels like a punishment. One expects life to be easier than it is, and the tendency is to lash out and blame those around you for how you perceive them as making things harder for you. Relationships break down, you push away those close to you. You begin to devalue yourself, and the more you devalue yourself, the easier it becomes to devalue those around you. Your life becomes harder and

more painful than it needs to be, those around you feel it and are less likely to be able to maintain closeness. One becomes more and more lonely and angry and enters feedback loops of pain. Hell.

Jesus

Every religion has myths or mythology. It is largely their mythologies that distinguish them from one another.

We today all believe in myths, and they do have a purpose, for whether or not one claims to believe in God, we all believe in them. They have always been used and will be used to explain something that cannot be explained rationally, or rather rationally for a wide audience. The difficulty is that in order to support our own view of the truth behind the myths, there's a tendency for mythology to grow into other myths to support some original one(s). Many religions believe in prophets or like people them have received revelations from their deity. The words of these prophets contain undeniable wisdom weaved through their particular religious, cultural and or national mythology. These myths have developed and changed over time as we begin to rationally understand the truth behind them. As we understand them better, they no longer are myths in the same way; the difficulty is that the entire house of cards is supported by other myths. It is nearly impossible to extract one myth without being confronted with another myth.

Why, if the words of prophets are inspired by God, is there so much difficulty understanding? Disagreement about them? This is where they revert to mythology, because there's no better way to communicate their revelation to the people receiving them. The words were limited by our ability to process them. How does one describe seeing God other than that he is a whisper, every word spoken at once, light, love, powerful; these are all accurate, but these could all be describing a forging of the conscious and subconscious. The mythology enters in when there's no other way of communicating the message in a way that the intended audience can understand.

They understood their audience, as they were a part of it. They were limited by their own understanding, and at some point, they would need

to accept some myths themselves. They too were overwhelmed by having to process every word spoken at once and try to present a shape of them; they were, after all, human.

Look at the early church, at the chronology of the Bible. In the first decade or so of writings, there's very little mythology. Look also for the audience of who the books were written for. For the Christians, there's more mention of God not showing favouritism than there's about Jesus being incarnate of God. Even in the chronology of the Gospels, which now looks to me like a recruiting handbook, one can observe the mythology around him grow and change. He begins as a Son of Man who barely hints at being the messiah, let alone God incarnate, then slowly over four books is transformed into something superhuman. The early church formed fast, faster than the apostles could keep up with. Churches were forming independent of them. They were also operating within a certain broad acceptance of divinity, spirituality that was based in the Greco-Roman world he lived in as a Jew; individual cities had their own sets of myths and folklore.

Look at the early heresies and the means by which the church codified the divinity of Christ. To me they look like unions between sets of beliefs. The state declared one over the others and enforced adherence by pain of death. The enemy once was assaulting the church from all sides, but now the enemy was within. They didn't do so in the Spirit. When the Spirit speaks through them, they speak truth and violence is unnecessary. Violence comes from those in an argument whose position is untenable.

I was told that faith was believing those myths without questioning them, but the Bible says otherwise, for we're encouraged to challenge the words of the prophets. When one hangs onto the myth that many Jews believed about the messiah coming in glory to smite the evil people and bring his chosen people to God, many Christians have thrown their lot in with the Pharisees, those who persecuted Jesus; by your evil desires, you condemn yourself to that punishment you so desire for others.

If you believe that all it takes is saying a few words about faith in Jesus as the son of God and saviour, then you too condemn yourself, for you too must take up your cross; it will not be done for you.

I confided in a close friend about the difficulties with the myths, that I didn't agree with most of them, and he asked me why I continued to go to church. I couldn't give a reasonable explanation other than Jesus, not God. I don't question that God exists. It was not Jesus as God that kept me going to church, rather it was Jesus the man.

I was warned not to question his divinity, yet it was precisely in questioning it that led me closer to him and by extension, God. For those of you reading who are beginning to feel darkness, those who believe unwaveringly in the divinity of Jesus, in the holy trinity, let me remind you that if you knew it to be true, if your faith left no room for doubt, there would be no danger in discussing it. If there is darkness sensed, one must discover its root to remove it properly; if the darkness returns, you have not gone deep enough.

If Jesus was a man, born of parents, conceived out of wedlock, treated as a bastard, if he was no more son of God than anyone else, if he did die and was raised in Spirit instead of body, if the miracles that he performed were more demonstrations of excess knowledge of the physical world, of the healing power of love to heal broken souls, that the miracles could all be explainable by natural phenomenon, and he was just another prophet in a line of them, would it take anything away from the power of his message?

It was in contemplating this that I understood it didn't matter to me, and more than that, if he was just a man, it makes him and his journey more remarkable, not less. A man who became a living facsimile of God through will and surrender rather than birthright. I don't need the divinity to be literal for the message to hold. If anything, a Jesus who got there without a supernatural head start is the harder, more useful proof of what's possible for the rest of us. If he did indeed start a cascade of people living in spirit with God, he is still the messiah to me, because accepting him as a human forces us to contemplate how we learn to love as he did, to sacrifice as he did. It was not some supernatural force that only he has access to; rather he showed us all a way to the Father, and the Father does not show favouritism, for we're all sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, the "firstborn" of God.

What a terror that we're called to lose ourselves and submit to the spirit as he did.

Isn't God in all things, not only the three? God does not show favouritism.

Myths have consequences, and faith requires us to believe that the myths will reveal themselves in truth. When we believe those myths, once we think we understand the truth behind why they were written, we often accept it on faith and continue on with our lives.

It is easy to believe in Jesus' divinity but talk of his divinity as some supernatural phenomenon that we can see with our own eyes, and we venture into the realm of the occult. Why we like this myth, along with other myths we all believe, is that it's used as a crutch to get on with life and feel good about oneself. If Jesus is divine, he will save us and all we have to do is accept it. Easy-peasy. Look at the wages of this myth. It is mythology which is the stumbling block put before the path of the children of God. Everyone has different myths that determine and are rooted in their own view of themselves.

Jesus as a facsimile of a boundless fount of wisdom and life or light, or the deity, is exactly what he is and why Christians are drawn to him. He never claimed any divine right or power or authority to himself. Jesus is an embodiment of God's light on earth. This seems like a distinction without a difference, and I say yes, it is. The point is that he was a facsimile; he couldn't contain the completeness of God in human form. We have turned Jesus into a graven image of God. We have many names for God, but when we name him, we aren't recognising that when we call out his name, he reflects back that name to us in our ordering. The name of God is also a facsimile of the light, a piece of it that we try to define the edges of.

I see light at the centre of all religions; the darkness is creeping in at the edges, but we're the ones casting the darkness to define the edges of the light that appears pure, does not burn, and also use our darkness to block out the parts of the light that do burn. This is why Christians continue to fail, continue to sin, because they believe that Jesus will save them from the burn, when he is merely there to keep you from dying, for

many would perish if they got a full dose of light before they were ready; he is trying to show us how to be made compatible with the Spirit.

The difficulty people have is overcoming their own conceit. Many Christians believe that they're now God's chosen people, the new Israel. This is true, but they are ignoring the fact that every single human being is chosen in this way. Christians have become arrogant, used the word and the myths to justify exploitation. Most religions claim to be the one answer, path, or way to God, so Christians aren't alone in this mythology. It is, however, antithetical to Jesus' teaching.

Why does the myth persist?

Imagine a sales strategy: there's this guy named Jeshua, a student of a prophet who preaches repentance. He is the messiah because he will show us, God's children, the way to godliness. We should follow his teachings. Denial of instant gratification. Giving away of material possessions. Denying all of the things that lead to power and influence in the world. What do you get? Happiness, but you will likely be ostracised by your old community, and once we reach a critical mass, we will be hunted down and killed. But it won't matter, because you will already be one with God.

Not an easy sales pitch, but many people still followed him, because they were already denied gratification; they had little material possessions to give and had no power or influence, and the joy in oneness was enough to sustain them. Anyone who has anything to lose will have a really hard time, and oh yeah, there are no shortcuts.

This is why the early church needed the myth, because it needed to hint at a shortcut, and it played well into the existing ideas about hierarchy. As the apostles aged and the church diverged, they needed to refocus people on the way to the light; the journey towards it never ends, and too many were too focused around the edges. They affirmed the most accepted mythology among the Christians, and the followers of Jesus became a religion. This is when Christianity began to repeat many of the mistakes of other religions.

It is thinking that faith requires acceptance of myths that both gives religion its longevity, but also leaves the followers open to predation, of

allowing people to twist them to their own purposes, to build new mythologies on top of to cement one's interpretation of them.

The difficulty of undoing myths is monumental, because the order is different for different people; requirements are different; there is no universal method or order for everyone to use. Look at the state of politics and the myths that exist on all ends of the spectrum. What has become controversial is there to highlight the myths that need to be reconciled.

Hierarchy

Hierarchy is a natural state for us throughout our evolution as a species. We used it to build civilisation; before it, we lived in tribal societies that were egalitarian for its members but were always at risk of being wiped out or enslaved by other tribes. By organising our society and structuring it, we were better able to withstand invasion as well as natural disasters. This allowed us to continually have the capacity to feed more and more people, and support more and more acquisition of knowledge. We used it to bring light into darkness.

Where do the fundamentals of hierarchy come from and why do we need it? Throughout our history, we have attributed the unknown to God. We place God above ourselves, as the top of our hierarchy. We naturally apply this same hierarchy to how we structure our society, and have become very sophisticated in our ordering of society in order to propel us forward.

Our world/society is set up to reinforce hierarchy, a hierarchy that is also applied to our understanding of truth. We accept that there are people better than ourselves and that we're better than others. Where does this come from and what are the implications for society?

Our politics are also set up this way, and are on an extreme trajectory, a concentration of authority by authority. Because hierarchy is a natural state for us, we tend to value or defer to the truth of someone higher in the hierarchy more than we do someone lower than us. Our tendency to do this has led to many advancements in technology and material wealth, distributed however in the same hierarchical fashion. Those at

the top get first crack at not only material wealth, but also greater knowledge, light, and material wealth is a means to the end of more material wealth.

We apply this hierarchy to race, class as well as religion. We believe that we understand God and the rules that govern our society within the context of our hierarchy without understanding that our position in that hierarchy is precisely why one understands God and the rules of our society in the way that they do. That hierarchy reinforces itself: hierarchy. When we begin to understand God as a collective truth that we all share, that we're all children of light, we can take stock of what a mess hierarchy and our hierarchical way of thinking is and the unnecessary suffering it causes. That God is above us like our own parents were above us when we were children. Once we become adults, we begin to better understand what our parents instilled within us, and we begin to look at them as our elders. Not lording above us, but alongside us, helping us as we learn to help.

As long as hierarchy exists, race, class and gender will continue to inform and exist within a hierarchy. We still need a form of it on the way into Truth. We can shift what it means, how it's practised, and who it serves.

Our politics, those we give authority to, is a popularity contest. To be successful in politics, one needs to accept the power structure that exists to be able to understand and navigate it. Its logical end is a more extreme version of what already exists. It attracts people with inflated egos, inflated by their privilege, and that is what primes them for our version of hierarchy. Because they appear larger or better than they are, they are the ones who stand out and are heard. They are also the ones who see themselves as better than most to put up with the roils of becoming a politician. To be able to be elected by peers and to be heard by them, you need the money and influence that our existing paradigm can offer.

What we're all learning now and have been, is that concentrating too much power in one person or position encourages narcissism. In order to make it to the top of the hierarchy, it must be because one is special. They are smarter, more experienced and knowledgeable as well as

morally superior. When we understand God as being at the top of a hierarchy, we accept as normal having one person at the top of the hierarchy, and we're often too tempted to let them answer only to God, not to us, because we're unworthy to question God, we're unworthy to question those who claim to speak for him.

Democracy in name gives us the chance to remove a leader, but that's not the same as shifting where power actually sits. Real power doesn't move with an election when the people running for office already bought their way to the starting line. Gatekeepers who've fenced off the commons and charge us rent to use it don't relinquish that fence just because a different name wins. As long as that arrangement holds, democracy stays a word rather than a fact.

Look at what recent leadership has laid bare: power sustaining itself through the same loop it uses to grow. Once a genuine narcissist sits at the top of that loop, it accelerates, and the acceleration ends in suffering. Convinced of their own specialness, the people running the loop find it easy to write off everyone beneath them as lesser, uneducated, beneath real consideration. This leads to contempt, hate, then murder.

What they need to understand, and what we need to stop granting them, is that there was nothing special about how they got there. Power handed down through inheritance, connection, or capture isn't earned, whatever story gets told about merit. The claim that we're all created equal collapses the moment we admit hierarchy is still doing the sorting.

Look at the worst of them, the ones who cause the most damage. When people with power behave like children, it's partly because no one taught them otherwise, and partly because we built a system that rewards the behaviour. Treating people as lesser than yourself means missing the basic job of leadership, which is putting other people's needs ahead of your own; it also flattens your own relationships into transactions. The more wealth someone accumulates, the more everything around them starts to look like a deal rather than a bond. Seeing people as instruments is a learned habit, not a given. We deprive the wealthiest among us of the meaning that comes from working for what you have, and in turn they deprive the rest of us of health, home, and enough to live on.

We know, most of us, what it means to actually understand someone we love, to find comfort in that closeness rather than a transaction. It's a kind of sadness that when the powerful see us as lesser, it's because some part of them feels lesser too, and what we're receiving back is their own pain, amplified by every bit of authority we've handed them. They bear responsibility for the damage; so do we, for continuing to hand over that authority. Net worth was never meant to be a measure of self-worth, because the more of either we accumulate, the harder it becomes to square any real notion of equality, under law or otherwise, with the world we've actually built. Wealth is good at teaching people how to rationalise the harm it causes, and we tend to admire whoever's best at that rationalising. The bigger the walls we build for ourselves, the more it says about how much our own egos have swelled to fill them.

Money

We live in a time of heightened inequality. This is perfectly understandable within our current paradigm and structure. It shouldn't shock us when we have allowed money to be more than what it was intended to be. Money is a tool used to exchange for goods and services. This is the simplest understanding of what money is, and we all understand this. Money, however, is no longer that simple. When we listen to those who have money, we're giving power over to money and those who have it. We believe that if we listen to those who have greater knowledge of money, and if we apply that knowledge and work hard, we will get our share, and if we're lucky, possibly more than our fair share.

When people trust in markets to be free and fair, they are ignoring the fact that money equals power.

What we have also done is allowed money to value more than the barter value of goods; we use it to value virtue and self-worth. We assume that because someone has more money, that something about them is special that allowed them to acquire more of it.

We need to remember the original purpose of money. That when we begin to hoard money, it is a symptom of the sickness of our current capitalist system.

Capital has now become the mainstream religion of those who have it and want to acquire more of it. Many of us worship at its altar. Economists and businessmen are our priests; billionaires are favoured by God; stock exchanges, banks, and stores are our temples that we worship at, allow to run our lives; and the violent arm of our governments are the temple guards and also the crusaders who go into the world to convert the heathen. Net worth is equal to self-worth, and those who have money are inherently better.

Before we can even think about ending capitalism and what will come to replace it, we also need to understand how capital is a curse, but also a gift. In order to truly understand how broken the system is, it needs to break down. That it too is in a feedback loop, and that the bigger that loop gets, the more we can learn from it, and the more connections to that loop we see, the more loops or spheres we begin to recognise.

We also need to accept that if we nibble around the edges, to try and stop the loop from being uncontrollable, all we're doing is delaying the inevitable and continuing on the same cycles we have seen throughout history, of the rise and fall of civilisation. Eventually the same destructive loops of the past will begin, and because they grow at a different pace, or out of order, they will likely gain critical mass and lead to more destruction and suffering before we're able to understand them anew.

There have been moments before when society reached for a great equalizer, and each time the effort to reset seemed insurmountable even as it succeeded for a while. If we manage to nibble around the edges and add more people to the "haves" from the "have-nots," there is no guarantee that we won't be back at the same levels of inequality again, but likely, with the pace of change, we may have to fight for decades to unwind what has already been cast, with no guarantee that we won't end worse off than we are.

How is it that markets keep climbing in the midst of crisis after crisis? It is because the priests and virtuous capitalists have repeatedly dipped into the storehouse for personal gain, to prop up the institutions that serve our overlords, to perpetuate a system based on their greed, for the stock index is no indicator of economic health, unless you believe that economic health is concentration of wealth at the top. Stock indexes only

measure the best performers; if power is feeding power, if money is concentrating to itself, it is considered good. But if any company does not do well, they get bumped from the list. They have been telling us that they know best, that it is required. It is only required to prop up the broken system. It merely denotes how good the top performers are at exploiting the system.

They have added so many layers of complexity to make understanding "monetary policy" a confusing task that most people don't have the time or capacity to try and understand. This is to make us compliant and has forced us into the comfort of ignorance, because to understand how we're all enslaved by this system of "money at any cost" is frustrating, enraging and disturbing, especially when we feel powerless to do anything but comply and buy into the system. Our ignorance is both a comfort we seek shelter in, but it is also encouraged and directed by those who have power in order to be able to seek more of it.

What we need this time is a complete rethink of where all of society's problems are rooted: in hierarchy, a hierarchy reinforced and fuelled by capital/money, the religion of the West, stolen from the East and twisted by hubris into a religion of oppression. It is inflicted upon the world, and to add to it, they desecrate God and religion, parading sad representations of them and twisting their memory to their own purposes.

Exponential Curves

We all understand the idea of exponential curves: population growth, sum of human knowledge and technology, compound interest, etc. We all have a grasp of this, and understand them as exponential curves only as we begin to approach the point where the line goes vertical. What we need to parse out is that these curves often seem unnatural because they seem to go on into infinity. It is unnatural, because population growth, climate change, resource extraction all have a ceiling, and we're learning more and more and understand in our own way that when any one of these lines hit the ceiling, it will lead to massive suffering and destruction. We do not know exactly where that ceiling is, but things seem more precarious the higher we go up that ever more vertical line.

We also wonder at the curve, because it also shows progression. That we're able to accelerate our acquisition of knowledge, generate more material comforts for more and more people. We see how they represent something good as well as bad, and too often we wonder at the good side and take comfort in it so we can better ignore the opposite effects of the same truth. What we need to understand is that the curve is a plot of a feedback loop. How does this help us? Feedback loops end in one of two ways: either one or both sides of the loop stop participating or engaging and feeding into the loop, or the loop will continue to cascade out of control and end in destruction. We're all struggling to understand how to control the loops, because until they end in destruction, these loops seem to drive society and civilisation to greater heights and greater understanding.

Ending the destructive loops requires faith: faith that ending a negative loop does not necessitate ending the positive ones; faith in our fellow man; faith that selfishness can be overcome and that we will come together; faith that our existing power structure won't be replaced by something worse, because when we finish the work on ourselves and help each other, we won't need rules, authority and overseers. They will be replaced by elders, guidelines and best practices, and teachers. This is what we all long for.

As society appears to be crumbling all around us, this faith will become easier as it feels harder. As more and more curves become clearer as feedback loops, we can all see that we can no longer nibble around the edges of what is at the core of both what has driven us and what is also holding us back. As the future becomes more bleak and we jump from crisis to crisis, we will begin to understand that the future is only written because we believe it, and that we can end these feedback loops before they lead to destruction. That we can reform society and share our burdens, because once we share them, they are no longer burdens; they are life, sustenance, bliss, lessons in truth.

We have enough food to end hunger. We have the resources to end homelessness. We keep focusing on slivers of the truth when the whole truth is so much more fulfilling and wonderful: the more chaotic things

become, the more out-of-control loops there are, the easier it will be to see Truth.

Three Pillars

Think of the self as resting on three pillars, three categories of belief that make up who we are and how we meet the world. The first is the pillar of self. Who we understand ourselves to be. The second is the pillar of our understanding of religion, of God, and of the people closest to us. The third is the pillar of the real world. Politics, history, the structures we've built to organise a society and to explain what our bodies and our institutions are for.

I started, as most people do, with the first. When I hit rock bottom, it was more in the vein of a midlife crisis, but something that felt a bit more deliberate than imposed. Nonetheless, it was this that shattered the pillar. The rigid self I'd built cracked open, and in the wreckage I was humbled enough to become open to being wrong. This is the part everyone recognises, the part with a name: rock bottom, a come-to-religion moment, whatever a given tradition calls the floor giving way. I set about the ordinary work of picking myself back up; repairing relationships, returning to work, taking stock of what had been blinding me to my own hand in my own suffering. It didn't hold. I felt, at times, like I was play-acting my former self, and the more I performed the return, the more I felt myself drifting back toward where I'd come from, accepting myths I had no real control over. I was treating them as though they were still rooted in truth. This is when I began to believe I was something I was not. Rebuilding only the first pillar wasn't repair. It was set upon a foundation that was still cracked in two other places I hadn't touched yet.

It was only when I understood that being in spirit meant deconstructing all three pillars together. Not just the self, but the pillar of religion, spirituality and relationships, and the pillar of the world itself: what we accept about politics, about history, about our own bodies, about how a society decides to organise itself. Breaking one pillar and leaving the

other two standing isn't transformation. It's redecorating a room in a house whose foundation is still failing on both sides.

This is, in the end, the shape this entire section has taken. First Rebirth broke the first pillar. The self, its shame, its habit of ordering truth into rigid binaries it could defend. Second showed the method for holding what came after, the discipline of inhabiting a pattern without losing yourself inside it. God, Satan, Jesus was the second pillar breaking: religion, God, the unexamined myths I'd inherited. And Hierarchy, Money, Exponential Curves was the third: the world itself, the systems I'd accepted as given rather than built, and built badly by the same ego this whole section has been describing since its first page.

Three pillars. One collapse. Understood in three parts, because that was the only way I could survive understanding it at all.

III

All Rivers

Plain speech is more vulnerable than image; the more precisely one tries to pin something down, the more exactly it can be disagreed with. That was the trade made in writing this. 88 is far more allegorical and meta, in part from that risk I kept sensing while writing it, which is what led me to lean into the apocryphal style I seemed to default to at times. If you push on any single claim here in 999, you'll likely find where it comes apart. I have, since writing it. It stays because the reaching mattered, not because I still hold every conclusion with equal confidence.

This section tries to be more methodical about theological traditions and their overlaps, though it's by no means scientific or comprehensive. In my own journey through scriptures and philosophies, their impact was far more profound when I saw them building upon and augmenting one another from a paradigm I at least had some understanding of. Where I differ from someone arriving at the same ideas by a different path, I hope we both recognise a chance to expand, not replace. All Rivers is

somewhat the epistemology of the journey in 88, but written closer to the end of 88.

The same me-bias I worked to write out of 88 is present throughout the rest of 999. Ego is involved in some capacity in anything written to be read; I don't think that's avoidable here, only worth naming.

If someone is resistant to the overall message, they'll find fault no matter how much effort I put into accounting for it, since questioning how we approach G-D can trigger, for some, the kind of national, cultural, or religious ego that turns dialogue into otherness.

There are many terms and ideas here, some of which may not be used exactly as the reader understands them. In trying to stay closer to a broader sense of each word or phenomenon, will always be limited by the fact that these terms often mean more than what sits on the surface, and different people arrive at different depths from different directions.

All Rivers was originally something I considered part of 88. I see now that the same ideas need different ways of reaching different audiences. I've had difficulty classifying the writing, though I hope it does some of the work self-help and comparative mysticism books do. There are already plenty of good books in both categories. It would only be the futility of ego to think I could do better than them. I can only do differently.

All Rivers End in the Sea of Fana

This title is not a claim that all traditions are identical. Their differences are real, hard-won, and worth preserving. The differences are outgrowths, the places where the same root pressed through different soils and took the shape of what surrounded it. We mistake the outgrowth for the root. It's a forgivable mistake, because the outgrowth is what we can see and touch and argue about, while the root runs deeper than argument.

88 is not a comparative text. It doesn't seek to flatten traditions into a single undifferentiated spirituality, which would insult them all equally. The journey seeks instead to trace the roots. To show where the rivers rise, how they run, and how they all arrive at the same shore, even when their practitioners at times insist they're going somewhere else entirely.

The outgrowths from the same root are the same tree producing variations of fruit. We cannot strip away or sacrifice the branches that bear fruit to the perceived/conceived benefit of another, only pull away from that which produces little to none.

The method is allegorical reading. Not allegory in the diminishing sense, not "merely symbolic," not a retreat from literal truth. Allegory in the original sense: a way of reading that holds the outer garment of a text and the inner body it clothes simultaneously, understanding that the garment is not the body and the body is not the soul, yet all three are one person. The Zoroastrian tradition as well as Zohar say it plainly: the narratives are their garments. One who thinks that the garments constitute the scripture itself will have no share in the world to come. Many traditions have a version of this warning. The question this document asks is what the garments, read carefully, reveal about the body they clothe, and what the body, understood deeply, says about the soul within.

The evidence offered here is not only textual. It is experiential. As the author, I didn't encounter these traditions as a scholar encounters archives. I encountered them as a man drowning encounters water; completely, involuntarily, without the luxury of practised detachment. What was discovered, surfacing, was that every tradition I had passed through on the way down had a name for where I'd been. Not the same name, but the same place nonetheless.

This is the witness that the traditions themselves have always said is the only real evidence: not argument, not doctrine, but the person who has been there and returned changed.

Begin with what every tradition agrees on, which is also what every tradition finds most difficult to say.

There's something in the human being that is not the human being. Call it the soul, the Atman, the Ruh, the divine spark, the Buddha-nature, the pearl of great price. Every tradition has a name for it. Every name is a gesture toward something that precedes naming. The Upanishads say Tat tvam asi (that art thou) pointing to the identity between the deepest self and the ground of all being. Sufi tradition says the same thing in the

language of love: the lover and the Beloved are not two. The Christian mystic Meister Eckhart says it in the language of ontology: there's a spark in the soul that is always already one with the divine. The Kabbalist says it through the doctrine of the divine image; tzelem Elohim, the human being as mirror of the infinite. The shaman says it by entering the spirit world and returning: the visible and the invisible aren't separate realms but two registers of the same reality.

The agreement is remarkable. What differs is the diagnosis of why we cannot see it.

For the Gnostic, the obstacle is the Demiurge, the ignorant or malevolent creator-god who fashioned the material world as a prison for the divine spark, who keeps us distracted by the sheer density of matter from remembering what we are. The image is of light trapped in clay, divine prisoners who have forgotten the country they came from. Liberation is gnosis, not belief, not obedience, but knowledge. Direct, experiential recognition of one's own divine nature. The Hymn of the Pearl, one of the oldest Gnostic texts, describes a prince sent from the kingdom of light into Egypt, the land of darkness and forgetting, who falls into a deep sleep, forgets his mission and his origin, until a letter arrives from his Father reminding him who he is. He wakes, retrieves the pearl, returns. This is the structure of every mystical descent and return, in every tradition, stated with such purity that it reads less like myth and more like memory.

The Gnostic diagnosis, that the material world is the problem, is the place where traditions most sharply diverge, and the divergence is instructive. The Christian mystic does not agree. The material world is not a prison but a site of encounter. The Dark Night of the Soul, John's map of the spiritual journey, describes not an escape from embodied life but a stripping of everything within embodied life that the seeker has mistaken for God. The consolations that are withdrawn in the dark night are not the world itself but the ego's relationship to the world, its need for confirmation, comfort, certainty, the feeling of being spiritually special. What remains when all of that has been taken is not nothing. It's the soul in naked contact with what was always there.

This distinction, between the Gnostic escape from matter and the Christian mystical transformation within it, is one of the genuine fault lines between traditions. But look at what both are describing: a process in which the false self must die so the true self can be known. The Gnostic calls the false self the creation of the Demiurge. The Christian mystic calls it the ego's attachment to its own image. The Sufi calls it the *nafs al-ammara*; the animal self governed by instinct and desire. The Buddhist calls it *avidya*; ignorance, the misidentification of the transient aggregate of experience with a permanent self. The Vedantin calls it *Maya*; not illusion in the sense of non-existence, but misperception in the sense of mistaking the outgrowth for the root, the wave for the ocean.

Different diagnoses. The same disease. And the same cure: die before you die, so that dying does not destroy you.

Every tradition has a name for the death that is not death.

The Sufi tradition calls it *fana*, annihilation. Not the destruction of the person but the dissolution of the false person, the ego-construction that has claimed to be the self. What remains after *fana* is *baqa*, subsistence in God. The mystic does not cease to exist; they begin, for the first time, to exist as they actually are. The Rumi tradition describes this as intoxication: at the apex of *fana*, the actions and speech of the mystic are no longer their own but a by-product of the divine encounter. The mystic becomes a vessel. What was empty is now full. What was opaque is now transparent.

The Christian tradition calls it the dark night, the cloud of unknowing, death to self. John of the Cross maps it in exquisite, almost clinical detail: first the night of the senses, in which exterior consolations are withdrawn; then the night of the spirit, in which interior consolations, the felt presence of God, the sense of spiritual progress, the comfort of one's own faith, are withdrawn. In the second night, the mystic cannot pray, cannot feel, cannot locate God anywhere. They experience what John calls *nada*, nothing. This is not abandonment. This is the deepest form of purification, in which the last attachments of the ego to its own spiritual experience are burned away, leaving the soul in naked union with what was always there, unnamed.

The Kabbalistic tradition calls it bittul, self-nullification. The tzimtzum, the contraction of the divine to make space for creation, is reversed in the mystic who contracts the self to make space for the divine. The Lamed Vav, the thirty-six hidden righteous ones whose anonymous selflessness sustains the world, are the most complete expressions of this: so nullified in the ordinary ego-sense that they're invisible, their presence felt only in its effects, like the roots of a tree felt only in the strength of what grows above.

The Hindu tradition through Vedanta calls it moksha, liberation, but understands it not as the soul's escape from the world but as the recognition that Atman was always Brahman, that the individual self was never separate from the universal self, that the wave was always the ocean and forgot only in the distraction of its own cresting. The Bhagavad Gita's nishkama karma, action without attachment to its fruits, is the practical discipline of this recognition: to act fully in the world while releasing the ego's claim on the outcome. This is the hardest and most complete description of what the Christian mystic means by dying to self while remaining in the world.

The Buddhist tradition calls the false self anatta, not-self, and insists that the mistake is not merely psychological but ontological: there never was a fixed, permanent self to begin with. What we call the ego is a verb, not a noun, a process of misidentification happening in real time, observable in motion, capable of being seen through. The Bodhisattva is the one who, having seen through it, chooses not to pass into final liberation, nirvana, but to remain in the world of becoming until all beings have been freed. This is the most radical eschatological gesture in any tradition: not the individual's escape from history but the individual's voluntary return into it, again and again, out of compassion. The Bodhisattva vow reframes the entire eschatological horizon from personal salvation to collective liberation.

Of everything gathered here, this is the one place where holding both sides at once feels less like synthesis and more like standing at the edge of something that won't resolve. I don't think that unease is a flaw to fix. The other traditions describe a false self dying so that a true one can be found beneath it, however hidden. Buddhism refuses that consolation

entirely: there was never a self there to find, and even reaching for a hidden true self is ego in a subtler disguise. I find both of these true at once, not by turns but simultaneously, and the more deeply I sit with one over the other, the more the other makes sense rather than less. This might be the sharpest instance in the whole essay of what First Rebirth already names: that truth lives not in the binary but in the sphere holding both ends, and that the discomfort of not resolving it's closer to the actual practice than any resolution would be.

The shamanic traditions, the oldest human spiritual technologies, describe the same process in the language of dismemberment and reconstitution. The shaman's initiation across cultures follows a recognisable pattern: sickness or crisis that cannot be resolved by ordinary means, a descent into the spirit world, often experienced as literal death, an encounter with forces that tear the initiate apart, and a reconstitution in which the shaman returns with knowledge and healing power unavailable before the descent. This is fana and baqa in the language of the body. It is the dark night in the language of the community. It is gnosis in the language of direct encounter. The shaman does not read about the spirit world. The shaman has been there.

Here is where the traditions most illuminatingly diverge, not as contradictions but as outgrowths.

The Sufi tradition insists on the Pir, the living master, the guide who has made the journey and can therefore lead others through it safely. Without the Pir, the path is not merely difficult but dangerous: the seeker who enters the dissolving territory of fana without guidance may lose the thread back entirely. The Pir holds the thread. The relationship between master and disciple, murshid and murid, is not hierarchical in the ordinary sense but ontological: the disciple annihilates not only in God but first in the Pir, who serves as the medium through which the divine outpouring flows. This is the tradition's hardest insistence and its most generous gift, the acknowledgment that no one makes this journey alone.

The Christian mystical tradition insists on grace, the recognition that the union the mystic seeks cannot be achieved by human effort or striving. Eckhart's Gelassenheit, letting go, is not a technique but a surrender.

The more the mystic strains toward God the further God seems; the moment the straining ceases, the divine presence that was always there becomes apparent. This is not passivity. It is the most demanding form of activity: the sustained discipline of releasing one's grip on one's own spiritual progress.

The Vedantic tradition insists on viveka, discriminative awareness, the trained capacity to distinguish the real from the unreal, the permanent from the transient, Atman from the ego-process that claims to be Atman. This is the intellectual dimension of liberation, and Vedanta is unashamed of it: the tradition trusts the mind's capacity to see through itself if properly trained. The path is not anti-intellectual but trans-intellectual, reason pushed to its own limit until it breaks open into something beyond it.

The Bodhisattva tradition insists on compassion as the non-negotiable foundation of all spiritual development. Wisdom without compassion is not liberation but a more refined form of selfishness. The Bodhisattva's return, the refusal of final liberation, is the tradition's answer to every spiritual individualism: the awakening that does not turn back toward suffering beings is incomplete, regardless of how profound it feels from the inside.

The shamanic tradition insists on the community as both the context and the purpose of the journey. The shaman does not descend for themselves. They descend on behalf of the community, carrying its wounds into the spirit world and returning with healing. The individual's transformation is always in service of the collective's wellbeing. There's no private enlightenment in the shamanic worldview; there's only the one who has gone further into the darkness and returned with what the community needs.

These aren't contradictions. They're the same truth pressing through different soils. The Pir, grace, viveka, compassion, and community service, aren't competing methodologies but different facets of a single recognition: that the false self cannot dissolve itself, that something larger than the ego must be trusted, submitted to, received. Whether that something is named God, Brahman, Buddha-nature, the Spirit, the ancestors, or the community, the gesture is the same. The hand opens.

What was gripped is released. What was always there becomes apparent.

And now the eschatological horizon, which is where the traditions appear most different and are perhaps most secretly the same.

Every tradition has an end-time narrative. Revelation. Qiyamah. The Day of Judgement. Frashokereti. Kali Yuga's end. The coming of Maitreya. The Seventh Fire. These narratives describe the world's transformation, the burning away of what is false, the revelation of what is true, the gathering of the scattered into a unity that was always their nature. They're written in the language of cosmic event, of armies and angels and the dissolution of the present order.

Read allegorically, not to diminish them but to find their depth, these narratives describe what happens inside a single human being who undergoes the full arc of spiritual transformation. The burning of Gehenna is the burning of the false self's accumulated defences. The Day of Judgement is the moment of unflinching self-knowledge, when every self-deception is seen clearly and the soul stands accountable to what it actually is rather than what it claimed to be. Qiyamah is the standing every soul makes before the truth of its own record, when nothing spoken or hidden remains unweighed. Frashokereti, the Zoroastrian renovation of all existence, is what occurs when a person chooses Asha over Druj at every available moment until the choosing becomes their nature. The coming of Maitreya is the awakening of boundless compassion in a consciousness that has completed the Bodhisattva's curriculum. The Seventh and Eighth Fires are the community's collective arrival at what the individual mystics find in solitary descent.

This reading does not make the literal reading wrong. It makes it incomplete, the garment without the body, the body without the soul. The literal reading preserves the urgency, the communal dimension, the sense that history itself is moving toward something. The allegorical reading preserves the interiority, the personal accountability, the recognition that the end-time is not coming from outside but is available right now to anyone willing to enter the fire. Both are true. The question

is which register the reader is standing in, and whether they have the courage to stand in both at once.

The traditions that have most honestly held both simultaneously are the mystical streams within each tradition, the Sufi inside Islam, the Kabbalist inside Judaism, the Christian mystic inside Christianity, the Vedantin inside Hinduism, the Zen practitioner inside Buddhism. These are the currents that refused to let the garment become the whole truth. They insisted, often at great personal cost, heresy charges, persecution, exile, that the inner life of the tradition was as real and as urgent as its outer form.

They were right. And they were saying the same thing.

What is being offered here is not a new religion. There's no new religion to offer, only the oldest recognition, dressed in language new enough to be heard again.

Every tradition you stand in has a door that opens inward. The door is usually unmarked, often obscured by the furniture of doctrine and institution, sometimes deliberately hidden by those who prefer their followers to remain in the outer courts. But it's there. It has always been there. The mystics of every tradition found it and left directions, clumsy, partial, translated through the limits of their own language and culture and moment, but pointing at the same opening.

The direction is always the same: go in. Follow what burns in you, not what merely warms. When the ground dissolves beneath your feet, do not grab for the familiar furniture, let it dissolve. What you're afraid to lose is not what you think it is. What waits on the other side of that loss is not what you fear.

The traditions disagree about the furniture. They disagree about which guide is trustworthy, which practice is essential, which name to call out in the darkness. These disagreements matter; they're the outgrowths, the particular genius of each tradition's encounter with the same mystery. Do not abandon your tradition's outgrowths. Tend them. Learn their particular wisdom. But do not mistake them for the root.

The root is what you are before you were taught what you are. All rivers know this, even when they forget. We are all moving toward the sea.

IV

Diagnosed?

I had an idea a few years ago that only came back to me in the last few months; to write out a process I went through reflecting on mental illnesses. My own awakening did make people around me notice something was different. My family is full of nurses, teachers and therapists, the community they're still a part of is Dutch Protestant. The combination augmented, I think what would appear to most people from the outside, suspicions of a screw being loose or some mental illness. I am not writing this section to prove I was never unwell, or to settle scores. I am writing it because the overlap between spiritual emergency and psychiatric categories is real, poorly understood, and was used in my case as a tool of control couched in genuine concern, however misguided. What follows is an attempt to hold both facts at once, not folding this into blame, but trying to speak of reasons.

At first, after my spiritual experience or awakening, everything was new and I did have a lot of stumbling to do. I lacked the ability to contextualise properly to myself, and in retrospect it was naive to think there was any way whatsoever to include my family in what was happening. I have found with many religious people, though certainly not all, a certain amount of ego that piggy-backs onto religion itself. Belonging and agreement become a way of gaining allies, earned by accepting and repeating a preferred narrative rather than through the harder work and discipline that actually transcends simple, black-and-white thinking.

The more people around someone agree, the more that agreement functions as evidence for their particular version of "truth," their specific reading, their specific doctrine, reinforced simply because others have accepted it too. When I question something like trinitarianism, to someone whose belief depends on that doctrine, my questioning can register less as an honest difference and more as disqualifying, proof I've placed myself outside what they've built their alliances around. It's when people feel threatened this way, or feel a need to regain control of a

narrative slipping from their grip, that this dynamic gets weaponized, against me, or against anyone else who cuts against the shared story.

Others are threatened, but often this is taught and learned behaviour. My openness, according to institutionalists, is itself a threat to an established order. Those orders are constructs, reflections but not full reflections of G-D, and that's exactly where people shut down or project. Even years on, with the worst of the pain and processing behind me I am still seen as someone potentially dangerous. The fears are real, I have felt it too, which is why one must be careful in whatever process people are going through. The risk is getting too high on our own vapours. This is something where at first, when I would get into a sort of trance state, it was like being high. My energy levels were higher, I was more attentive and also much more able to stay in the moment I was in. The explorations of eschatological overlaps would at times make me wonder at and sometimes relish that perhaps I was special. It was hard to ignore the fact that the stories of the early church living without a real hierarchy and for each other, willing to die rather than utter falsehood became very real to me, difficult to discount when I felt the same way. There's something however which is important to understand and mitigate for, the spiritual "high" which without control can be dangerous. There are many spiritually awakened people who go down this path and start proclaiming that they're some special conduit. It's not letting the high take you so high there's a crash that follows, immediate or long term. It takes practise and discipline. I had to learn this quickly or someone would suspect I was somehow mentally ill, but mostly because I was primary caregiver at the time to my kids. I had to make sure I was stable. I did stumble briefly near the beginning, but resolved after to never get to that point again. That being said, the circumstances and process of undergoing severe narcissistic and spiritual abuse kept pushing and nudging me closer to this. It also didn't seem to matter how important it was to me, the fact that other's were cut out and not in direct control of it meant that I appeared dangerous and unpredictable when to me I was entirely predictable, living out what I believed scripture intends for us.

In retrospect I have more insight into what was going on around me with the people around me's 'concern,' however in the thick of it, I could only

learn to carve out a separate space for this journey. I remember going through web articles breaking down some mental illnesses and seeing that, for at least the ones I was looking at, they gave a list of symptoms and if you have a specific portion of them, then you likely would fit the diagnosis. I found it interesting, because I didn't have whatever was suggested to me that I did, I could see directly how some of the things I was experiencing did look like and for this exercise would count as symptoms. What this also served to do was keep me vigilant, I was open to the fact that I may just be developing or going through stages of mental illness. Thing is, religious psychoses aren't diagnosable in and of themselves. There's ambiguity there, but also, I understood the process was happening *within* me, my mind's eye, and although it manifested in some ways outside of me, it was mostly in feeling out extreme emotions, trying to take in and absorb as much as possible from whatever was going on around me. It was about a year and a bit that I didn't write anything after the first few months after the awakening, when I did write and disturb my family. I did know I would write again eventually. I felt more secure and insulated after about a year, enough to write again.

Regardless, I was naive in thinking that there was any way to have a rational conversation. I was also in a bit of a personal state, as I had just written the mountain scene in 88 and emotion, imagination and a whirlwind of spirit was around writing it. It along with a bunch of coincidences that aligned becoming apparent in quick succession did leave me a little scared and dumbfounded, why I started to attempt to share that I was writing. It was foolish and sometimes I felt swept up in urgency, it's something which I have had to work hard at understanding what it is telling me and not let it make me act impulsively.

This did escalate paranoia, which lead to an increase in those around me questioning, testing and probing. To me it was as though they had a need to quantify what they were feeling and externalize it. They were scared and paranoid, because they imagine I would be some self-proclaimed "prophet" or guru and go off the deep end forming a cult, or standing at a street corner with a sandwich board. Maybe someone they've seen portrayed on television, writing compulsively on the walls of a padded room. It certainly didn't help that at least while writing in this

period, it did feel as though I was being compelled to keep writing. I was breaking through the safe threshold of the aforementioned high and part of my attempt to let my family know I was writing was to keep me grounded, I was searching for a tether and needed someone else to tell me to stop, otherwise I had difficulty seeing how I could on my own. Over a few days, things were so confusing, I didn't understand how, but I still felt the same spirit and the same naive optimism that they could hear my rational arguments which cut against the version of Truth they were clinging to and the specific mythology they hold to so rigidly. But I did have a break down, it was me being spun in circles, projected at which escalated and compounded until the weight was too much and I physically collapsed. There's a certain amount of gaslighting that we want to believe. For me it was the weight of confronting how much of my hope, love and adoration for the people around me was me desperately needing to believe it, not based entirely in reality. It was shattering to confront this; that whatever progress I felt was happening were projections, either from me or from them, not real. The truth was that I was mentally, physically and emotionally exhausted, pushed to my limits attempting to work on a toxic relationship pretty much alone, believing that the others were more interested in the Truth I thought we were building together, not in just telling me what they thought I should hear.

That was what lead to the foundation of a hell that was being prepared for me. Perhaps that is hyperbole, but it was a version of hell that was not just for me, other people have experience with it too, some worse than mine, some not... this leads to a personal narrative that for a time existed in 88, I think maybe it has a place here, and it can lead into me trying to lay out the personal struggles in such a way that doesn't condemn, only reflects things others can identify with... this has not been easy, but I continue to endeavour to, the process has lead to and feeds healing and ease in finding peace amidst chaos. I still have anger towards these people as they continue in specific actions and behaviours that I have on multiple occasions told them are harmful to me. I am still unable to have a relationship with my kids that isn't directly controlled by the very people who caused the injury that they tell others is inherent and is to be feared.

As difficult as the betrayal, the pain, the abuse were, these are behind me now. I'll never forget them, and never be completely free of what they cost. That's why healing, determination, and gratitude sit alongside the pain rather than replacing it. I understand and forgive; I no longer need them to acknowledge what they caused, only hope that at some point they'll learn not to repeat it with others. This is something I can't control, and my own attempts to push it, draw their attention to it only made things worse. I can forgive them, but they can't accept being forgiven. This is why staying close to them remains difficult; receiving forgiveness requires asking for it, something fundamental to the religion I was raised in, and part of the frustration and confusion is so much of their identity is also tied up in the very same religion. What I've found is that people are subjective in how they apply their own lessons about Truth. We all learn to favour our own set of facts, forgetting that others will hold theirs just as firmly as you do. When someone tries to hold onto me instead, to control rather than to understand, I've learned to become sand rather than stone: the tighter the grip, the more slips through the fingers. Conflict is a chance to work through a difference, but when someone is too stubborn to give any ground, they fall back on very human tactics of manipulation and control, which usually starts to look like narcissistic behaviours and tactics. It is almost always tangled up with spiritual abuse, one leading into or out of the other.

I think abuse is more often correlated with, or causal of, what gets labeled mental illness than genetics is. I want to be careful with that word, since "abuse" tends to trigger defensiveness, especially in anyone with abusive tendencies of their own. I don't mean to set myself apart by using it. This isn't unique to me. Abusing a position of power, being emotionally manipulative, letting a relationship bend to serve oneself over the whole; these are ordinary human tendencies, not exotic ones. All of us have been on both sides of this at some point, harmed and harming. What actually makes a dynamic abusive isn't the moment itself. It's the refusal to acknowledge it and try to reconcile. Then the repetition. Then sunk cost can take hold of them and they can't help but deny, deflect, attack or start playing the victim.

Abuse like this rarely comes from villains. It comes from people caught in their own fear, some watching someone they love change in ways they can't follow and/or grasping for whatever stability they can still control. That doesn't excuse what it does, but it explains why it happens, and why the people doing it often don't experience themselves as doing harm at all.

There's a specific mechanism worth naming here, because "they don't experience themselves as doing harm" doesn't go far enough on its own. Some people are wired, by temperament or by their own history, to read ordinary disagreement as attack. Not most disagreement. All of it. A raised eyebrow, a boundary, a simple correction, anything that doesn't reflect back the version of themselves they need to keep believing in, lands as a threat to their survival rather than as information. I don't say this to excuse what follows. I say it because what follows makes a strange kind of sense once you see what triggered it: to someone experiencing ordinary feedback as an existential threat, becoming defensive, or aggressive, isn't cruelty for its own sake. It's what a person does when they genuinely believe they're the one under attack.

This is where putting yourself in someone else's shoes, which is supposed to be the thing that saves us from cruelty, gets turned inside out. It only works if you're actually looking for what the other person feels. If instead you reach for what you would feel, and hand that feeling to them, empathy becomes a mirror instead of a window. Someone convinced they're constantly under threat imagines everyone around them is plotting or resentful, because that's what they'd feel in that position, treats their own imagined resentment as evidence, and feels licensed to strike first at a danger that was never actually there. It looks like empathy from the inside. It functions as projection. I don't think this is villainy, most of the time. I think it's a person mistaking their own fear for someone else's intention, and never getting far enough outside that fear to notice the substitution.

I recognise the physiology of it too, because I've felt my own version, and not only from words. There have been points where it went further than words. I don't need to litigate the specifics here. What I've noticed is that gaslighting floods me with the same cortisol, the same narrowed

attention, the same threat response that the other kind did. The differences between them are real, but subjectively. In what my body actually does with them, they overlap more than they diverge. I don't think the people who did any of this to me were exempt from that same chemistry. Ordinary disagreement, for someone primed to read it as attack, can trigger the identical cascade a real threat would. We were, in a sense, running the same hardware, calibrated to fire on different signals. That doesn't make what happened to me any less real, or my hurt any less mine to hold. But it means the person causing it wasn't necessarily choosing cruelty so much as living inside a threat response that they never learned how to stand down.

The mechanism is usually simple, even when the damage isn't. A boundary gets crossed once, out of fear rather than malice. When it isn't named or stopped, it gets crossed again, until crossing it becomes normal, and the boundary itself hardens into something closer to a wall. Labels, diagnoses, interventions, whatever form the containment takes, they stop functioning as care and start functioning as control, often without anyone involved consciously deciding to make that shift. Nobody wakes up choosing to become the mechanism. They arrive at it one small accommodation at a time.

What makes it survivable, eventually, is naming the pattern rather than the person. Once you can see the mechanism operating, fear producing control producing more fear, you stop needing anyone to be a villain in order to stop participating in it yourself.

What follows is the hospitalisation sequence as I experienced it. I include it not as indictment but as a concrete event that later diagnoses were hung upon.

They panicked, escalated, whipped themselves into a frenzy. They sent doctors, therapists, and on several occasions, the police. When I escaped, they sent watchers after me, thinking I wouldn't notice. When I confronted them about it, they called me delusional, paranoid. Projecting their own confusion and paranoia onto me. I did not take pictures of the

watchers. I knew what I saw. To me, my family looked paranoid; their actions were paranoid.

They had the police escort me to hospital on a Friday morning, where I was locked in a room for 30 hours, awaiting COVID results. Being confined, I was angry. I was already seeking help away from my family, but they wouldn't believe me when I told them. I also felt safe for the first time in nine days, relieved that they would leave me alone in this place. I knew I was not locked up for my sake, but for theirs. I began to see my stay in hospital as a gift nonetheless; a safe harbour.

For three days in hospital, I finally had the respite I desired. In this time, the people there were so good to me. They treated me with dignity and respect. They cared for me, a stranger, and I began to care for them. I wanted to learn their names, be courteous and grateful, because in them and their calling, I saw nobility.

I do not blame my family for becoming what they feared. They were motivated by love, but that motivation was misused, and it hurt our children, who watched their father chased, whittled down and made homeless without understanding why. They exposed their own paranoia to the very people trained to read it; police, doctors, therapists. All while insisting how afraid they were of mine. Didn't seem to matter how many people understood me and my circumstances, I was only seeking help when I was desperate, or was being questioned. They were actively recruiting, gossiping and reinforcing.

It was here I ate, drank, listened to those who shared the floor. Occasionally my family would reach out, and I began to notice my own blood pressure rise, my pulse race, each time they directed more of their fear at me. I finally understood that what I was feeling was anger. Rage, fight or flight; something I had never before let myself feel let alone escalate. No one had ever seen me angry. When I finally did become angry, all they saw was the beast they were constructing. It took me ten days to even recognise what anger felt like. My delusion to me was that I still believed I was not angry.

After three days, my senses returned. I had finally caught up to myself. I met with a psychiatrist; one who listened, who was clear as the first

Christmas. As he opened the door for me, he gave me a great gift: a simple hand on the shoulder. In that gesture, I set out to finish what I'd started. This too shall pass.

This happened almost five years ago, but this became an event which was used as a lever, something to withhold relationships and resources and left me feeling stripped of my humanity. I have made peace with it and the subsequent proposals of diagnoses. That is actually what I am setting up in this section, the diagnoses others have suggested I have had over the years, some conditions with overlaps, admissions of symptoms and the circumstances I was in, how they influenced these processes, how they were triggered and what I was doing to try and account for in them. I was equipped in a way, the therapists in my family helped me in understanding at least at some level what had always interested me, psychology. It both kept me vigilant, curious and equipped, but also made for a difficult environment to go through the change I was, since they had a compulsion to fit whatever was happening to me into a narrative they could understand and control apart from me and my experience which they had little control over.

I do see psychology as an attempt to be scientific about something that is one of the most subjective subjects we study. It's relied upon heavily in our justice system. I can see why, but also see how difficult it is to introduce doctors and psychiatrists into a court proceeding as though they're experts, especially when they're so limited by their regulating bodies in what they can report, who they have to report to, and the liability of disgruntled patients, or people who have a vested interest in the outcomes of their diagnoses. It was frustrating to be told again and again that what I was going through was morally wrong, was abuse, was domestic violence, against the law. I needed evidence to corroborate it. My witnesses were all participants. Therapists and doctors can validate my experience, give me tools and affirmations, yet none are allowed to comment on it in writing in any meaningful way, this is forbidden.

Here is the list of diagnoses others have suggested and I have considered. It's not a clinical self-assessment, nor an attempt to litigate each one into non-existence. It's an attempt to show where real

symptoms overlapped with real circumstances, and the labels began to do more work than the symptoms themselves. The label can give you a reference point along your journey, something to reflect on to learn about oneself, it can also become something that enslaves you and keeps you stuck, some even hide behind them.

I will take them roughly in order of how long they have been in play or how acutely they were proposed around the crisis: first the longer-standing patterns (ADHD, depression), then those more closely tied to the period itself (hyperthymia, bipolar, cannabis-induced psychosis, delusional disorder, schizoid). The list is longer than I would like. If at any point it begins to feel repetitive or heavy, skip ahead. The point is not that every reader must sit with every entry; the point is that I did.

ADHD

A pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning, usually first noticeable in childhood.

- Inattention / difficulty sustaining focus.
 - *I was diagnosed as a child and as an adult. I can be focussed, I can feel the flow state. It was my difficulty in switching it off and on as a child that was causing the symptom. It was my difficulty in seeing the bigger picture and not having enough control in my own life that derailed me as an adult. Whatever was diagnosed, to me, is a gift, an ability.*
- Impulsivity
 - *I have a general sense of self confidence, have less inhibitions and fears about things I have spent time reflecting on. I am introverted and rarely do I rely on other people to validate my thoughts or experience. Being decisive and confident was causing my symptoms.*
- Hyperactivity or restlessness
 - *I have had this, that is restlessness. Hyperactivity I think can be confused with someone who is in a flow state who is unable to control it. Learning how to manage priorities and the flow state so there isn't a burnout, a diminishment of whatever is in the tank, is how to curb and control. I am also a curious person like*

new experiences and adventures, something I have been learning is to slow down and appreciate the moment I am in more. Mindfulness has helped me as I've gotten better at it to the point where I no longer consider these problems.

Depression

Persistent low mood and/or loss of interest, with a cluster of physical and cognitive symptoms.

- Low mood / anhedonia
 - *There have been a few periods in my life where I did have depression. One was returning to Canada after having lived in Korea. I was a third culture kid and I had difficulty adjusting to life here. Another period was when I was done school, could only see my failures in previous jobs, was in a shame spiral that was difficult to pull out of. Although the first period was something I went through 10 years previous mostly alone, this one did have an impact on people close to me and I am sorry for being a source of negativity and for making them feel what they did.*
- Sleep and appetite disruption
 - *During the first period when I was 18, I did have a serious appetite and sleep issue. During this period I did learn how to induce sleep, allowing a period for racing thoughts to try and see what I could resolve, then meditate, focus inward physically to feel the blood in my veins, the breath in my lungs, then to focus on the rhythm of both and slow them down. I haven't had long term sleep issues since and the most critical element is how much stress, how much cognitive dissonance is flowing through, resolving as much as possible as close to events as possible is the most efficient way of processing what is happening instead of things getting triggered through emotions and clouding our perceptions, adding to the noise and making it more difficult to understand with distance.*
- Fatigue / low energy

- *This is more like anhedonia, feeling a lack of motivation means one is not active, not eating as much, sleeping more or less. There needs to be a spark to get one going.*
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
 - *This is something I have felt, but I think no more than anyone else feels at certain points, like they're wasting their talents, or failing and using the gifts we were given to their full potential. Specific failures to other people I have let down, I still can go back to. They represent strengthening resolve to not repeat whatever it is.*

Seasonal Affective Disorder

A depressive pattern tied to seasonal change, most often worsening in fall/winter.

- Seasonal mood shift
 - *This is something which I have only had during periods where my baseline stress was high and draining personal situations and relationships. When the baseline is lower, then it's easier for the weather, for the low sunlight of winter to have an effect.*
- Low energy / oversleeping in low-light months
 - *Can't say one way or the other, sleep is not an issue for me. The thing is this too is subjective. During periods I had excesses of processing while I was in close proximity to the people who had me hospitalised, I did sleep less for a day or two around stressful events, which then gets extrapolated and reported and insisted is indicative of sleep issues. I am sure now, especially watching for triggers, keeping a healthy mind and environment means I won't show symptoms again. By accepting it, diving into it, it's cured as long as I accept I have it. That's the same paradox running through this list: the acceptance itself, whether rooted in oneself, or rooted how one reacts when in the presence of another, is what dissolves the symptoms, not the diagnosis.*

Hyperthymia

Not a formal DSM diagnosis but a temperament pattern — persistently

high energy, optimism, and confidence, sometimes considered a mild, stable cousin of hypomania.

- Elevated baseline energy/mood
 - *This is what was first suspected, related to bipolar disorder. Unburdening oneself of past shames, regrets, seeing every day proof that you're transformed and transforming is a big jump to your baseline. It's how this manifests, how it may lead to other symptoms and impulsive ways of thought that makes it a danger.*

Bipolar Disorder

Episodes of depression alternating with mania or hypomania — elevated mood, decreased need for sleep, grandiosity, racing thoughts.

- Elevated/expansive mood
 - *This is basically covered in the hyperthymia part. I have also discussed how there's a sort of spiritual high, a way that it can begin operating a bit like a drug which then makes one susceptible to thought patterns and behaviours of an addict. Hypomania was first suggested to me by a family member, I was open to it which led me to read up on wellness, increase mindfulness and learn more about mental illness and mental health.*
- Decreased need for sleep
 - *Covered under depression above.*
- Grandiosity
 - *Taken at face value, some people see me as equating myself with the people they've elevated, and conclude that I'm being grandiose. What they're not seeing is the inherent grandiosity in their own worship of a messiah or prophet as though that figure were G-D itself. This was, more than anything else on this list, the thing insisted upon. I think it served a purpose beyond diagnosis. Read one way, the manuscript is a record of healing and growth that happened during and despite abuse. Read the other way, easier for anyone looking to take things out of context, the manuscript becomes evidence of grandiosity, and the abuse I was describing becomes evidence of persecutory*

thoughts. That second reading discounts both at once: the growth becomes delusion, and the harm becomes something I imagined. It didn't help that in the run-up to the hospitalisation, most of what I actually said passed through something closer to a game of telephone, filtered through my ex-wife, her family, and my own, until sentences I never spoke came back to me as things I'd apparently said, and no amount of explanation or context moved anyone off what they'd already decided. They have their own prophets or demi-gods that they've turned into idols and elevated. I hold up a mirror to that elevation just by speaking of these figures in ways that bump up against the mythology built around them. I don't see myself as special, and I don't see Jesus or any other prophet as special either, which is exactly the part that reads as threatening rather than humble. The more someone has internalised shame or control imposed by others, the more hope they tend to place in a chosen messiah, and I don't think that's wrong so much as incomplete: we're all part of the whole, all necessary, all special, all one with G-D while apart from it. Just as others should be careful about their own unexamined idols, I need to watch for my own too.

That said, I do reflect on whether I am or am not a prophet. From the outside, it's difficult for me not to see the parallels, without even weighing character, only the events I lived through. I also understand that without knowing me, my desires, my thoughts, or the emotions running through the process, it can look like I'm claiming the role and then acting out whatever people assume that role requires. In some ways that's a little true, though I think I was doing what many earnest seekers do inside their own tradition: reflecting on the lessons and stories of the prophets to see how they might apply to, or shed light on, my own circumstances.

I don't think the real difference between me and the people who've decided I'm forcing this is the amount of time and spirit I've put into it, though that's how it first looks. I think it's hierarchical. Time spent gets quietly read as a claim to rank,

more devotion assumed to mean more advanced, more special, further along than whoever's watching. For someone already carrying their own shame or sense of inadequacy, that reading isn't neutral information. It's a threat, the same mechanism this whole section already named: feedback that doesn't reflect back the self someone needs to keep believing in lands as an attack rather than a fact. Grandiosity, from where they're standing, is the label that makes the threat make sense.

I know people who've devoted just as much time and spirit to this, or more, without any of this friction, and I don't think the difference is that they're calmer or more disciplined about it. I think it's that they were never running the hierarchical comparison in the first place. Someone else's devotion to their own path didn't register as a claim about their own standing, so there was nothing to defend against. We're all somewhere on the same spectrum. The friction only shows up where someone's already measuring their place on it against someone else's.

- Racing thoughts
 - The brain is a muscle. This is not something I try to rein in except for when it will impact what is immediately in front of me. My awakening was like letting off the brakes and letting thoughts resolve themselves. The brain is a muscle, the more we exercise, the quicker our response time, the easier it is to know what to do in any crisis, in how to take the good and bad in a way that builds up our Spirit. It's important that the racing is not leading in circles, but towards something, anything. Doesn't even have to have an obvious or direct correlation to what triggers the thoughts and why we sometimes keep circling. The circling means we're to adapt to ensure we are exercising more than whatever the circling is resulting in. It's also important, something I have continued to learn about over many years is finding a strong basis for equilibrium, and become well practised and disciplined in returning to it as hastily as possible before venturing back off of it in a more controlled and thoughtful way.

Cannabis-Induced Psychosis

Psychotic symptoms emerging during or shortly after cannabis use, attributed to it rather than an independent psychotic disorder.

- Timeline relative to use
 - *This is something which was insisted on by others, but never diagnosed. It's a boogey man when it comes to me, but is a real thing. THC is psychoactive. If one's baseline stress is high, when there's a lot of gaslighting happening to someone, or some other un-noticed or unresolved toxicity surrounding them, smoking cannabis can make it worse, can lead one to give extra weight and energy to negative thoughts and energies and one can begin losing the ability to value thoughts appropriately. I am a cannabis user, there were periods in the distant past where it was an addiction, but this hasn't been the case in almost 2 decades. I have noticed that when my stress is high, it is not enjoyable, can compound things and make them worse. Me admitting that I use cannabis on occasion, attempting to explain how I see it to those who insist I had it, all they can see is me making excuses and minimising or ignoring whatever it is they're fearing, their personal feelings do bias the interpretation, and at times even which words they choose to hear. One of the confusing things that kept happening leading up to the hospitalisation was people selecting words from different sentences and reordering them insisting that I was stating and believing things that I wasn't. My attempts to correct for this only resulted them concluding I was lying, or that I was confused by my psychosis.*
- The convenience of this label
 - *This is what I see as a danger with psychology. The compulsion to slap a label, medicate and believe that is all that is a part of the right thing. I am not saying this is wrong, however it is difficult when people keep insisting you need help with something that doesn't exist. My refusal to accept their diagnosis was only another proof of their diagnosis...*

Delusional Disorder

A fixed, false belief maintained despite contrary evidence, without other major psychotic symptoms.

My understanding of this is a prolonged period of around a month of some combination grandiose or persecutory thoughts despite evidence.

- The specific belief in question
 - *This one I have always had issues with. The grandiose thoughts were already covered in the bipolar section. I suppose I will hold out that I value my own experience, the things I have learned from it over other people's readings of it, which to anyone who is compelled or biased towards diagnosing, gives every disagreed upon fact weight.*
- Resistance to disconfirming evidence
 - *What is difficult is when one is going through difficulty, has had all of their relationships undermined through narcissistic and spiritual abuse, then just stating what is happening without proper evidence is then viewed as evidence of persecutory thoughts; delusion. I have had periods lasting a few days of fears that certain people would do things to me that would continue to have a large impact on my life situation, fears that they would do things they had already done to me. I could often resolve these fears, understand the situation through the lens of narcissism, something which exists to a degree in everyone, humanise those people and move on. If one is forced to endure them for whatever reason, mine being to just be able to spend some moments with my kids, then I may go through another brief period. If these things compound, if one is subject to attacks and slander on a regular basis through lawyers, courts, coercion, gossip, then this could potentially extend to a period of time leading to a diagnosis of delusional disorder. What I have difficulty accepting is that this diagnosis treats my account of others' behaviour as itself a symptom. The fears and paranoia in question were directed by other people. I have no history of violence, abuse, I am a fairly thoughtful "nice" guy, just ask my*

mother;) to me the behaviours of others present as delusional disorder. If those insisting for going on 6.5 years now that I am dangerous to anyone in a way that justifies the treatment I have received, to me it looks delusional.

Everyone suffers from some sort of delusion. Often it's innocuous and inconsequential, sometimes it isn't. Something which was difficult for me, but I can see more clearly now is this. All I can account for and control for is myself. Be open to being wrong, not jumping to conclusions or being haphazard with judgements means that I will learn to spot them more easily. The more I am able to spot and account for, the easier it will continue to become. The less delusion, the less bias, the less our egos control us.

I know that the people I have had difficulty with are human, just like everyone else. I can focus on the consequences this had on me, or I can know that they're growing, learning to be better to others, more accountable in other parts of their lives. I can't be the one to cure them of what has hurt me, I can only show them whatever grace I can and hope that they will continue to grow into the best versions of themselves. That even though it felt like they were dragging me into their hells, they're on their way out of it as I am and as everyone is, a few hard fought steps at a time, a few slips and stumbles here and there that in the moment look like regression, but are just a part of our struggle to climb out.

Schizoid Personality Disorder

A pervasive pattern of detachment from social relationships and limited emotional expression, typically long-standing.

- Social withdrawal
 - *This is something that I believe is diagnosed in teenage years or in young adulthood. This right from the start never sat right with me... I was far from this as a teenager and young adult. What I was experiencing was losing community and friends and most of my family all in quick succession, was doing a lot of negative processing and didn't have the desire, the ability or head space for it. I know that being around someone who is going through a*

lot is difficult. I also understood how easy it is to just agree with the alternative narratives being repeated or spun by others and for it to just compound things. So what was the wise thing to do, to lay low and keep to myself, journal and try to endure the process long enough until I could get some safe distance in order to be able to heal, which was impossible when in the middle of the long drawn out process I went through. Once out from under it, I am back to my old self in many ways, have friendships and relationships again. Yet to some I have a personality disorder? I suppose my delusional disorder is leading me to refuse another diagnosis...

- Restricted emotional expression
 - *This is something too which I think can also be indicative of wisdom and of mental healthiness. I have done a lot of work in learning from and about my emotions. I feel them deeply. I know that if I let too much of the pain of something through, then the person listening will likely inadvertently feel it and process it as fear or evidence of lack of ability to control. That is to say, one should still have spaces to not restrict it, it's only trying to understand where it's safe to do so.*

Everything above was suggested to me by someone else, at some point, by name. What follows wasn't. These are patterns I recognised well enough in my own experience, or watched closely enough in someone else's, to believe that under a different set of circumstances, in childhood or as an adult, they might have taken hold in me too. I include them for the same reason as everything above: not as diagnosis, but as an honest account of how close some of these are, or were, and why they didn't.

When I was in hospital, I met someone with Schizophrenia. In listening to his story, I recognised a family caught in the same patterns. It was sometimes difficult not to jump to a wrong conclusion that some of the narcissism I observed was learned behaviour, not indicative of inherent narcissism, but what struck me was the power they had over him and his

situation. Meeting with doctors without his presence. Being gaslit on a regular basis and being completely dismissed and neglected at the whim of his family. Although the level of severity for him was high enough to make it difficult for him to function, I couldn't help but recognise that apart from those dynamics, he might be perfectly healthy. With my own new sense of spirituality, the way my own family was reacting to it, I saw a path for me which over the next few years did feel at times like I was being nudged towards. Not hearing voices, however I could see how ego could take an experience like this and one may begin to claim god speaks to them, I more or less am suggesting this. I am just sure to couch it as something that everyone does or can experience. Really the biggest thing that pushed me along the path was the gaslighting. It often originates from people causing or contributing knowingly or unknowingly to a problem. I can't say for certain that this person would have the same disease were his environment different, there's certainly my own bias at work here. Although I have a similar enough experience to empathise and perhaps give some context, there's also a risk that my own experience colours the full picture based on me rather than him.

I think there are heritable traits, some related to illness. I think this is often confused and given undue weight when one can't see the behavioural similarities. Healthy habits are something we need to work on, but we inherit tools from teachers and parents. Some get more than others, but there's too much risk of confusing what may have far less to do with a genetic condition than the environmental factors that are also shared. This is true for both our mental health as well as our physical health. And this is where I will state the obvious, healthy eating and exercise are good for our mental health, and our good mental health is being in a positive and affirming enough place to be able to develop and maintain these habits in the way that feels right and organic to the individual, with societal or personal guilt or shame being able to take away from focusing on the wins and growing from them.

Something he had was hypervigilance to the point of making obscure connections to justify and construct a narrative for himself to justify the emotion.

Hypervigilance is, I think, the biggest indicator of PTSD. I won't claim he had it, or that I do, though I think trauma is the right word for what both of us went through, complex or otherwise. Whether mine still counts as post is its own question. Some of what caused it hasn't fully stopped, just dropped to a much lower intensity, which makes "post" feel like the wrong prefix even now. I still get triggers and occasional flashbacks, but they don't rise to a level that affects my ability to work or the relationships I have now. That's a different thing entirely from what it was like while I was in the middle of it, where there's no real comparison. My vigilance manifested in a situation where reality itself was consistently being twisted and distorted to someone else's narrative that I felt I had little or no control over. When I was in the middle of it, the trauma was triggered on a regular basis; now, far less consequential, though not gone entirely.

It didn't matter how many times you responded correctly, they will keep pushing relentlessly until they get a reaction which is what they crave, the control and the fuel for the power trip they're gripped in. It did feel as though I was having a mental illness imposed on me rather than it being something inherent in me. I still am triggered by gaslighting. Not to do anything other than to try and call it out, explain that it's impossible to have a conversation in which one person can't validate the others experience without making it personal, and if that doesn't make it stop, I will remove myself.

When someone denies the truth, insists that my experience wasn't real but imagined. That my difficulties with what I thought were things anyone would have difficulty with were twisted into some pathology. Being discounted and dehumanised. It does flood me with cortisol, but also I see how it makes me more empathetic and conscientious about other people who in varying degrees are hurt by gaslighting and projections and reminding myself, not for their sake but for mine, that they too are hurt by these things. Also about how I should account for myself with others so I don't repeat the harm caused or channel it into others. If I begin to, I need to make sure that I am able to stop and work towards some healing.

I did feel as though it was impossible to heal from trauma while it was compounding. I don't know whether I was right to frame my experience

the way I once did, and still do, alongside a soldier's, expected to heal from PTSD while still under fire. Whether or not it would be harder to go through a war, or to go through severe narcissistic abuse is ultimately subjective and just as I am sensitive to other people attempting to quantify my trauma to me and place it in a hierarchy, I want to be sensitive to doing this to other people. The thing is pain is pain, trauma is trauma and physiologically it operates the same among the population. The specifics of the cause lead to the nuanced specifics of the cure, but the impact, the stress and the triggers are all felt much the same.

Paranoid Personality Disorder I don't think applies to me, however there are overlaps with what was suggested to me, and I do believe that this disorder can grow from or may even be a diagnosing of victim mentality which I have been trying not to go into. My own frustration is when people responded to my circumstances as though I was a person playing the victim when this is how I saw my accusers, what they were doing, playing the victim to me. It would at times make me feel like I was living in bizarro world when this would repeat. It also felt like gaslighting as people would inadvertently compound the trauma through merely not fully understanding the situation. I can understand the impulse to paint them with the same brush as the people who were actually causing the harm.

I have heard people complain like they're victimised by things that most people just deal with. As though there's something special about them? Paranoia is not exactly the same as seeing oneself as the perpetual victim, but both in a way are rooted in an over and underimportance that their egos are placing on themselves. As if there's some grand conspiracy, or people are going out of their way to target them through whatever control or manipulation they may be sensing, right or wrong...

Avoidant Personality Disorder is I believe rooted in the fear of rejection. In many ways, I did feel rejected by a great deal. It didn't develop into a disorder because I always saw it related to other people's bias. Apart from the story and my immediate circumstances, I didn't feel rejected. I stopped seeking validation in part to shield myself from feelings of rejection, but also to inoculate myself from the general trend of relationships being undermined the more I shared about what was going

on with me. If there was a chance of maintaining some of these relationships in the long-term it meant re-engaging with them at a point in the future which wasn't tainted by the compounding situation and trauma I was going through. It took years for me to lose everything, but when you have nothing left, there's no more mechanism of control from those who for whatever reason view you as a threat. It doesn't mean I had this insight in the thick of it, it just hurt like hell and was confusing to go through. It took years for it to play out to completion, and my relationship with my kids was the hardest thing to lose, piece by painful piece.

Here is the thing I keep circling back to, and it isn't really about any one diagnosis. You can pass a test nine times out of ten, but if the test is only built to track deviation, only designed to flag the wrong answers, then of course all anyone will ever see in the record is the tenth time. The nine don't count toward anything; they were never being measured. The ones compound into a pathology that the method itself manufactures. Not fabricated exactly, but built to find what it's looking for and nothing else. I don't say this to argue any specific label was wrong. I say it because I think it's true of how most of them work, mine included, and probably true of most of us who've ever been measured by someone looking only for what we got wrong.

Underneath it, what I actually remember feeling wasn't delusion or grandiosity by any name I'd choose for myself. It was closer to being certain of very little except that something real was happening to me, and being unable to find anyone willing to sit inside that uncertainty with me instead of needing to name it first.

I want to be clear, there's nothing special about me when it comes to spirituality just as there's nothing special about the difficulties I went through either. Plenty of people have endured the same and worse, just as plenty of people have transited the planes I claim to have transited. To be honest, I don't think I could have survived it though without externalising the reasoning for going through with it. What I want more than anything is peace. What I want is for us to grow into adulthood. It's as simple as just being better to one another, but that is easier said than done. This leads a question at some point about how we purge what is no longer serving us? What motivates me to finish the journey is so that I can find

ways to help, even if it at such a small scale that passes with bare recognition. This was my focus, I always knew at the end of it, that things would be better for me regardless of what happens with the manuscript. I get to keep all of the lessons and still get to live out my best self. It's only in finally being sure that I am not attached to the outcome of the book as the personal outcome is already as complete as the manuscript can take me.

I suppose it may be abrupt, but in conclusion, do these manuscripts present as proof of healing, or as justification for diagnoses? I'll let you be the judge. I know what I know.

V

Catharsis

I had quite a few more rebukes in previous versions of 88. These were the parts I struggled with most, and I think the reason was that they were more for me to resolve within myself than a place to virtue-signal or pronounce judgement. I've cut most of them from what follows here too, not because the underlying critiques were wrong, but because naming problem after problem by name mistakes the outgrowth for the root. Almost every complaint I've ever had about the world, about a group, a system, a movement, turns out on closer inspection to be a complaint about something human that shows up everywhere, wearing whatever costume a given culture or moment hands it.

This is, I think, the one place in 999 where I'll let myself equivocate on purpose rather than try to write around it. Everywhere else I've tried to say what I mean and let it stand. Here, the caution is the point. I hold to something close to Jesus' own teaching: that hatred and murder aren't different in kind, only in degree, that calling one a small sin and the other unforgivable is a comfortable lie we tell ourselves. If that's true, then writing carelessly about what's broken in people isn't a minor risk. It's playing with something closer to the real thing than most people want to admit, which is exactly why I keep checking myself against it.

My own opinions will cloud the end result no matter what I do, and I felt that tension for a long time, wanting to remove myself from the text entirely. I've cut a great deal, but I've come to understand I need to stay in it in some way. It's taken years of work on myself to manage this; I always felt that if I hadn't done the work, it would show in the writing. Yet here I am giving myself a space to let some of my spirit back in. Right or wrong, I think it's both.

What I keep coming back to is this: the rebukes I could write for any group are almost entirely interchangeable with the rebukes I could write for any other. There's roughly the same percentage of difficult people in any group I've ever belonged to or studied. The specific manifestation changes with the culture, the language, the history it's dressed in, but the underlying human problem doesn't. Greed looks different funneled through a caste system than it does funneled through a stock market, but it's the same appetite finding whatever channel is available to it. Tribalism looks different organised around nation than around religion or party, but it's the same instinct for in-group loyalty and out-group suspicion finding whatever line is closest at hand to draw.

What I notice most often is a kind of misdirection that happens almost automatically: a problem that's structural, that would exist regardless of who's on top of it, gets recoded as a problem of identity, of which group is doing it to which other group. People who benefit from an arrangement have every reason to prefer that story, since a structural critique threatens the arrangement itself, while a tribal one only threatens the other tribe. So blame gets exported sideways, onto whichever group is expedient, rather than upward, onto whatever's actually producing the harm. This isn't unique to any one culture, era, or ideology. I've watched people do it while defending systems I'd consider broken, and while attacking them. The direction of the politics doesn't change the shape of the move.

This is something humans have engaged in for millennia. I don't think it's set to change overnight, however just like I see the individual struggle in wrestling with one's ego, I see that extrapolated onto the external constructs the ego was taught to rely upon. Societal transformation is impossible without a critical mass of individual ones.

The thing is, I don't think this is too onerous for most people to contemplate, understand and practise. It's a very small group of people who want the wars that impact all of us, when most of us just want peace. It could be as simple as most of us saying enough, and declaring peace. If there are no soldiers or ammunition, then the ones who desire so can club each other into oblivion, without the rest of us providing the means. So many people prefer peace. The people who seem to relish the opposite are worthy of our pity as much as our hope that they find healing from whatever pain is moving through them.

VI

On Prophets and Kings

What follows isn't a claim that I am any of these figures, or that scripture was written with me specifically in mind. It's a demonstration of a way of reading, examining a life closely enough to find where it teaches you something about your own, the same practice Second describes: inhabiting a pattern long enough to learn from it, then setting it back down.

I've chosen two figures to work through here, but the method isn't limited to two, and some of it isn't even new work, it was already written before I went looking for it.

Moses is already threaded through 88 itself: the sea that divides and closes, the tablets broken and rewritten, years in the wilderness before anything was asked of him, a burning bush that names itself by refusing to be named, privilege he was born into and chose to walk away from. I didn't set out to build those parallels; I noticed, writing, that they were already there.

Joseph belongs in that same category. Betrayed by his own family, specifically over favor and difference, sold by the people closest to him rather than by strangers. Falsely accused in someone else's household,

unable to defend himself in the room where the accusation was made, a specific circumstance, not just a thematic echo, that I've lived a version of myself. He doesn't rise through vindication in a moment, he rises slowly, inside the confinement itself, long before anyone outside notices. And at the end, forgiveness offered to people still too afraid to fully believe it's real, you meant it for evil, and it became something else. I want that to be my story too, someday. I'm not sure yet that it is.

Adam is further back than any of the others, the original exile, the first threshold crossed without return. Outside scripture proper, the old accounts of his and Eve's penance have them standing in rivers after the expulsion, Adam in the Jordan, Eve in the Tigris. I didn't build "Yardena," or the line about going to the waters, with that story consciously in mind, and found it there anyway once I went looking. Those same accounts have Seth returning toward paradise seeking healing for his dying father, and receiving only a partial mercy for his trouble. Seth carries two meanings already in this book, the ordinary son and the redeemer-archetype, and I think I understand now why the same name had to hold both.

Abraham's binding of Isaac asks him to give up what's most precious to him, not knowing whether he'll get it back. I know something of that structure, though what was asked of me wasn't a knife, our relationship was the thing sacrificed. I don't know yet if there's a ram in the thicket waiting for me the way there was for him. I'm still standing on the mountain.

Isaiah is different from the rest of these in one specific way worth naming. Nearly everyone else in this reading responds to being called with some form of reluctance, delay, or doubt: Moses asking who he is to go, Jonah running the other direction entirely, Abraham waiting and doubting and taking matters into his own hands more than once. Isaiah doesn't. When the voice asks who will go, he answers before anyone singles him out: here am I, send me. He volunteers.

I recognise something of that in myself, though I didn't understand what I was volunteering for at the time. The first time I read the warning at the end of Revelation, the one about not adding to or taking away from the words of the prophecy, it didn't read to me as a threat. It read as part of

the equation, a term already accounted for, something I'd agreed to before I understood the cost of agreeing. I didn't know then how difficult things would become. I don't think anyone could know that in advance and still say yes. But I've never been able to convince myself that I was only pulled into this, or driven to it by circumstance, the way so much of the rest of this section describes. Somewhere underneath the reluctance I've also felt, and there was plenty of it, I think I chose it. Isaiah is the only figure here who chose first and was frightened after, rather than the other way around, and that order matters more than it might seem.

Job is elsewhere in this book, in Epistemology, but he belongs in this company too, if only briefly. Anyone who has suffered without a clean explanation for why, and kept arguing with what they believed rather than abandoning it, has something of Job in them. That kinship doesn't need its own chapter to be real. It's enough to say it here: he's one of the ones I recognise myself in, even if I already said what I had to say about him.

Elijah, David, and Krishna are all sitting inside a single passage in *Adrift* without my having flagged it as such at the time: "the Lord said to my Lord," David's own line about the one who comes after him; a chariot and a teaching on attachment and duty that belongs to Krishna and Arjuna more than to anyone else; and "false prophets burning in holy fire," Elijah alone at Carmel, no allies, going against every prevailing belief around him and being proven right by fire that fell when he asked for it. I didn't sit down to braid three traditions into four lines. I only noticed afterward that I had.

Arjuna's doesn't hesitate because he doubts the cause. He hesitates because the people arrayed against him are his own family, his teachers, people he loves, and fighting them, even for a just cause, feels like it will cost him more than losing would. I know that particular paralysis, having to act against people I once loved, in courts, on paper, in front of people whose job was to decide who deserved what, knowing that winning would still mean loss on every side that mattered. Krishna's answer isn't to tell him not to feel this. It's to tell him to act anyway, fully, without attachment to how it turns out, because withholding the action doesn't withhold the grief, it just adds paralysis on top of it. I don't know that I've

mastered nishkama karma the way Arjuna is asked to. I know I recognised the battlefield before I recognised the teaching.

Sita is the figure from outside my own tradition I return to even more than Arjuna. She isn't tested once. She's tested, vindicated, and then made to prove it again anyway. The agni pariksha, walking through fire to demonstrate her purity after Ravana's captivity, should've settled the question. It doesn't. Rama, the very person the trial was supposed to satisfy, later exiles her a second time over the doubts of people who weren't even present for the first proof. I know something of being cleared once and discovering that clearance doesn't hold, that vindication in one room doesn't travel to the next, that the people who most needed convincing were never going to be moved by evidence, because the doubt was never really about the evidence. What stays with me about Sita isn't the fire. It's the second exile, happening to someone who had already done everything asked of her to be believed.

Hanuman is the third door, and maybe the widest one. What struck me first wasn't his strength but that he'd forgotten he had it, a curse from childhood that had to be lifted by someone else reminding him of who he was before he could use it. I recognise that shape from the inside: power that was always there, sitting unused until another person, or circumstance, or crisis, names it back to you. But what stayed with me longer than his own strength is what his devotion did to everyone around him. The vanara army wasn't capable of what it became capable of because Rama was powerful. It became capable because of what Hanuman's devotion unlocked in an entire tribe to what wasn't theirs by blood. Devotion, in that story, isn't a private transaction between one servant and one lord. It's contagious. It moves sideways into people who were never the ones being tested.

And then the bridge itself, which I've come back to more than almost any other image in the epic. Hanuman doesn't just cross to Lanka alone. He builds the way for an entire army to follow him back and forth, repeatedly, in both directions. That's the shape I want for these manuscripts more than any other image I could reach for: not something that pulls a reader from wherever they stand toward one fixed destination, but something that lets the traffic run both ways, lets someone carry what's here back

into their own tradition, and carry what's already theirs back through here, until neither side is quite a foreign country to the other anymore.

M'Bona is the archetype I recognise as closest to Jesus outside my own tradition, and the one that reached me earliest and most physically. I lived for a time in Malawi, between the Shire and a mountain shaped like a star, near a tree at Chilema that has since become its own small forest. M'Bona was killed by his own kin for being different from them, and what's venerated at his shrines today isn't a symbol or a relic in the abstract sense, it's pieces of his actual body, kept and returned to across the region as a source of rain and renewal. An unjust death at the hands of family, and afterward, a body scattered and kept sacred, isn't a distant structure to me. It's close enough to the shape of Golgotha that I don't think the resemblance is accidental, whatever either tradition would say about the other.

What I took from him wasn't doctrine. It was a specific, physical sense of being a rainmaker, someone whose descent, whose darkness, is what the rain actually comes from rather than what it washes away. I wrote once that with the darkness comes the rain, and I didn't fully understand what I meant until later, when it became something closer to a discipline: I possess darkness so it cannot possess me. Not denying it, not being ruled by it, holding it the way a shrine holds what's left of someone after the worst has already happened to them, and finding that what's held that way can still be a source of life for the people around it.

Princess Bari is a name I've carried since I was a name in a list, in the lake-of-fire scene in 88, without ever giving her the room she deserves. She was born the seventh daughter in a kingdom that wanted a son, and abandoned for it, set adrift by the same parents who were supposed to protect her. When they later fall ill with nothing else able to save them, she's the one who makes the descent into the underworld to retrieve the water of life, the daughter they discarded becoming the only one capable of saving them. She succeeds, and becomes the first mudang, the one others turn to ever since, precisely because of what the descent cost her.

I lived my formative years, eleven to eighteen, in Korea, and I don't think it's incidental that this is the story that stayed with me longest out of everything I encountered there. I know something of being cast off by

people who were supposed to protect me instead, and of the particular ache of the ones who reject you being the same ones whose survival you find yourself still bound to, whether you want to be or not. I don't know that I've made my own descent yet, or retrieved whatever the water of life turns out to be for me. But I recognise the shape of her story too clearly for it to be coincidence that it's the one that never let go.

I also want to be honest about something: very little of what follows is original insight arrived at alone. Much of it's built from sermons I've heard, commentary I've read, conversations with people more versed in these texts than I am, synthesized and applied to my own experience rather than invented from it. Where I've landed on a reading that departs from the most common telling, I've usually found, afterward, that I wasn't the first person to see it that way. With Samson specifically, a reading I arrived at independently turned out to already exist in recent scholarship, published by people with far more training in this material than I have. I take that as confirmation of the method, not evidence of any special insight on my part. Anyone willing to sit with a text long enough tends to find that others have been there before them.

Samson

I used to hear this story told one way, and I suspect you did too. A strong man, gifted by God, undone by his own weakness for women. Three times Delilah asks him the secret of his strength, three times he lies to her, three times she springs the trap anyway and it fails, because he lied. And then, somehow, after three demonstrated betrayals, he tells her the truth. Every version of this story I grew up hearing landed on the same word for that moment: foolish. He should've known. He should've left. He should've seen it coming, because he had already seen it, three times over, and told her anyway.

I don't think that's what's happening in the text, and I don't think I'm the only one who's stopped believing it.

Start further back than Delilah. Samson doesn't choose his calling. He's a Nazirite before he's born, set apart by a vow he never took, strength given to him rather than earned by him. From the very beginning, this is

a story about a gift a man doesn't control, not an achievement he can take credit for. That matters, because everything that follows, the marriages, the entanglements, the repeated pull toward women who will cost him everything, happens to a man who has never once been asked what he wants. He was chosen before he had a self to consent with.

So when he loves, unwisely, repeatedly, the same way, I don't think the text is asking us to shake our heads at him. I think it's showing us a man whose one experience of choosing anything for himself is in exactly the place he keeps getting hurt. Every other part of his life was decided before he arrived. Love is the one place that's actually his, and it keeps costing him everything, and he goes back anyway.

Delilah asks him three times. Three times he gives her something false, close enough to sound plausible, far enough to keep himself safe. That's not devotion, that's the ordinary human instinct toward self-protection, and if the story stopped there, it would just be a story about a man who eventually learned to guard himself. But it doesn't stop there. The fourth time, with every reason in the world to keep lying, having watched the exact same betrayal play out three times already, he tells her the truth.

I don't think that's foolishness. I think that's a man who has run out of the willingness to protect himself from someone he loves, even though loving her has cost him everything so far, even though it's about to cost him more. There's a kind of exhaustion that isn't weakness, it's the exhaustion of a person who would rather be known and lost than safe and alone. I've come to believe that's not stupidity. It's the particular blindness that only comes from loving someone all the way down, past the point where the evidence should've stopped you, because some part of you has decided that being fully seen by them matters more than being protected from them.

There's a detail in the older rabbinic commentary worth sitting with here: one tradition holds that Delilah finally believed him, on the fourth telling, because he swore by God's name, and a devout man doesn't do that lightly. If that's right, then it wasn't only his love that betrayed him. It was his integrity. He couldn't lie convincingly a fourth time because the lie itself would have violated something more central to him than his own safety. The very thing that made him who he was, his honesty before

God, is what she used against him. That is not a flaw in his character. That is his character, turned into a weapon by someone willing to use it.

What happens next is genuinely terrible, and I don't want to soften it. He's captured, blinded, enslaved, paraded for the entertainment of the people he was raised to stand against. This is not a story that rewards him for staying, for loving, for telling the truth. There's no moment where the text turns around and says he was right all along and here is his reward. If you're looking for a story where faithfulness is repaid in kind, this isn't it, and I think that's exactly why it matters.

Because at the very end, blind, humiliated, standing between two pillars with his hands on the stone, something in him is restored, not his sight, not his freedom, not his former strength in any triumphant sense, but his purpose. He asks, one last time, to be remembered. And he brings the whole house down, killing more in his death than in the whole of his life before it.

I don't read that as vindication. I read it as something harder and more honest than vindication: purpose recovered in the ruin, not before it. Some of us don't get the version of this story where we're proven right in time to enjoy it. Some of us only get the version where, at the very end, standing in the wreckage of everything the love cost us, we find that we're still capable of one true thing. That has to be enough, because for Samson, it was all there was.

If you've ever loved someone past the point where anyone watching thought you should, and paid for it, and been called foolish for it by people who never had to choose between being safe and being known, I don't think you were the fool in that story. I think you were Samson, and I too have experienced this kind of love. And I don't think the text asks you to be ashamed of that. I think it asks you to notice what was actually costing you: not weakness, but the specific, devastating cost of loving all the way down.

Jonah

Every other figure in this reading responds to being called with some version of reluctance. Moses asks who he is that he should go. Elijah,

once he's answered the call and won, collapses under a tree and asks to be allowed to die. Abraham doubts, waits, takes matters into his own hands more than once. But Jonah is the only one who doesn't hesitate, doesn't delay, doesn't ask a single question. God tells him to go to Nineveh. Jonah gets up and runs the other way, buys a ticket on a ship headed as far from Nineveh as the map allowed him to go.

I think this is worth sitting with before anything else: Jonah isn't confused about the call. He understands it perfectly. That's exactly the problem.

He's thrown into a storm that the sailors, pagan men who don't even worship his God, recognise as divine before he does. He tells them to throw him overboard, and they do, reluctantly, and the sea calms the instant he hits the water. He's swallowed by a great fish and spends three days and three nights in its belly, which is about as complete a descent as scripture offers anywhere, darkness, digestion, a kind of death that isn't quite death. And from inside that fish, he prays, not for rescue exactly, but something closer to acknowledgment, that he has been cast down and still remembers where mercy comes from. He's vomited back onto dry land, and God asks him again. This time he goes.

Here is where most tellings of this story stop, because here is where the plot resolves. Jonah preaches, one sentence, the shortest and least enthusiastic sermon in the whole of scripture, forty days and Nineveh will be overturned, and the entire city, from the king down to the animals, repents in sackcloth and ash. It is, by any measure, the most successful prophetic mission in the entire Hebrew Bible. One sentence, and an empire turns.

And Jonah is furious.

This is the part of the story that doesn't get preached nearly as often as the fish does, and I think it's the actual point of the whole book. Jonah isn't angry that he failed. He's angry that he succeeded, because succeeding meant God forgave people Jonah didn't think deserved forgiveness. He says it plainly, this is exactly why I ran in the first place, because I knew you were gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and I didn't want that grace extended to them. He goes and sits outside the city, hoping, even now, that God

might still destroy it. God provides a plant to shade him, and he's glad of it, then sends a worm to kill the plant, and Jonah is angry enough to want to die over a shrub he did nothing to grow.

And God's response is the entire book, distilled into a single question: you cared about a plant you didn't plant and didn't tend, and I shouldn't care about a city of a hundred and twenty thousand people who don't yet know their right hand from their left?

The book ends there. No answer from Jonah. No resolution. Scripture rarely leaves a question hanging in the air like that, unanswered, on purpose.

I understand this man in a way I didn't expect to. I have wanted, at times, for people who hurt me to face consequences in proportion to what they did, and then felt something close to Jonah's fury when grace was extended anyway, by others, or by God, or by some worn-down, aching part of myself I couldn't fully silence, before I felt ready to grant it. Forgiveness that arrives on its own schedule, ahead of your own readiness for it, doesn't always feel like relief. Sometimes it feels like a second injury, mercy being handed to someone before you've finished needing them to suffer.

I don't think Jonah is condemned at the end of his book for feeling this. I think he's asked a question he's allowed to sit with, unanswered, for as long as it takes. That might be the most honest thing in the whole story: that being obedient and being at peace with the outcome of your obedience aren't the same thing, and scripture doesn't pretend they are. You can do exactly what you're asked, watch it succeed beyond anything you expected, and still be furious about it, still be sitting under a dead plant wanting to die, still be waiting for an answer that may not come in a form you can accept.

I don't know that I've resolved this in myself any better than Jonah resolves it in his own story. I've forgiven people, and meant it, and still felt the old anger surface when I watched grace extend further than I thought it should, to people who haven't yet done the work I did to receive it, or to earn it. I used to think that meant my forgiveness wasn't real. I don't think that anymore. I think it means I'm standing exactly

where Jonah stood, under the same dying plant, being asked the same unanswerable question, and being loved through the asking of it rather than the answering.

I want to close with something I'd originally planned to say separately for each of them, but I think it matters more as one point than two.

I've come to believe that when scripture reaches for the supernatural, it's often reaching for a way to say something true about the human condition that couldn't be said any other way, not necessarily making a claim about physics. I don't think that makes the supernatural reading wrong. I think it means there's room to hold both at once, true and not true, literal and symbolic, without needing to resolve which one scripture actually intends. Sitting in that tension has taught me more than choosing a side ever did.

Take Jonah and the whale. Three days and three nights in the belly of a fish reads, to me, like three days of existential crisis, haunted by his own choice to run, unable to digest the full truth of what he'd been asked to do all at once. Some truths are too large to swallow whole. They have to sit in the dark for a while before a person can carry them back out into the light. He does follow through, in the end. He also never stops being bitter about it. Both of those are true, and scripture doesn't ask us to pick one.

Samson deserves the same reconsideration. I don't believe he was unintelligent. His strength, if it was physical, was very likely mental too, the same discipline, the same capacity, just aimed in a different direction. He could have torn apart an argument the same way he tore down a temple, undermined a claim instead of a building, shamed the people mocking him with words instead of stone. He chose the building. I don't think that was the only choice available to him, and I don't think the story asks us to believe it was.

None of this is an argument that the literal reading is wrong, or that I need to replace anyone's faith with my own. I do believe G-D is real. But I think it's usually the human ego, not G-D, that wants the laws of nature suspended for any one person's benefit. I also believe in the power of G-D to shape things, people and events, this is tangible and real to me, as

are confluences of people, ideas and numbers. I have never seen the laws of nature suspended, nor do I need to know G-D is in control. I sense it in currents of emotion, vibration and energies, and see patterns throughout creation.

VII

On Prophecy, and Archetype

Prophetic language appears throughout this text because it became, in the moment of writing, the only language wide enough to hold the experience. Moving through crisis and awakening, I found myself drawn into patterns far older than I am, patterns that countless cultures have named in their own ways. Names like Mahdi, Mashiach, Maitreya, Kalki, Christ-consciousness, Pahana, Saoshyant, and others rose not as identities to inhabit but as currents moving through me, reshaping everything I thought I was.

Prophecy has never worked the way people assume when they first encounter it, as a prediction, a forecast fixed at the moment of writing, waiting for one specific event to fulfil it. I don't think that's what it is. I think prophecy diagnoses a pattern rather than predicting a date, and a pattern, unlike a date, doesn't expire. All Rivers already makes this case about eschatology in general, that the burning of Gehenna and the standing at Qiyamah describe an internal process rather than a scheduled cosmic event. I think the same is true of prophecy that names a coming figure or a coming age. It isn't circling a single moment in linear time so much as naming the conditions under which something recurs, conditions that keep reassembling themselves in different centuries, different bodies, different names, because the underlying human situation that calls for them hasn't actually changed.

That also means a prophecy doesn't have a single owner, or a single correct reading sealed at the moment of writing and waiting only to be decoded. I've come to think the truth in it has to be carried, the way I've already said oral tradition works: through an interpreter who takes responsibility for it in each telling, and who can be replaced if they aren't

equal to it. A prophecy gets read again by whoever's holding it now, applied again to whatever conditions are actually in front of them, and it's that re-application, not a single fixed meaning cracked open once, that keeps the pattern alive instead of letting it calcify into something nobody actually has to live out. That's also where I think the real risk sits. An interpreter who treats the words as an unchanging blueprint rather than a pattern they're responsible for applying honestly is the same interpreter who mistakes the map for the territory, and starts serving the words instead of whatever the words were pointing at in the first place.

I was transformed by walking through states of consciousness that many traditions describe with messianic language. These names became mirrors, archetypal lenses through which I could see both my own shadows and my own potential more clearly.

Every transformation touches others. If this work becomes part of someone else's awakening, then I am woven into their journey just as many people, teachings, and moments were woven into mine. Influence is not hierarchy; resonance is not authority. We rise through one another. The experience that shaped these pages was personal, but never private.

Narcissistic abuse isn't about villains in capes. It's patterns, subtle, normalised loops of control, denial, and projection that flow through families like invisible rivers, eroding trust drop by drop. There's a narcissist in everyone; it manifests differently in each of us. In my own story it showed up as gaslighting in family conversations that twisted my words, psychiatric labels wielded like weapons during custody battles, pathologising my awakening to contain the threat of change, and institutional systems amplifying it all. Children used as leverage and mechanism of control. Family members speaking for me to judges and doctors without my voice in the room. These weren't acts of malice from isolated "bad" people; they were desperate grasps for stability in chaos, from people caught in their own unmet wounds of grief and the terror of watching someone they loved slip into the unknown.

What you encounter in these pages is me in, or still close to, the flames. The raw anger, unfinished processing, language that might land accusatory was processing. Above, but not excluding, documenting as I

walked through it. It's not polished testimony; it's the grit of emergence. I participated fully in and reinforced the very dynamics I decry, projecting my shadows outward like Narcissus at the pool. But here's the grace I extend to myself, and invite you to your own: a single wrong doesn't define us, but persisting after recognition does. I stopped persisting.

The spiritual teaching I am attempting to recount isn't "I was wronged." It's: here's what abuse does to the soul, how it fractures consciousness into illusions of control, and what phoenix rises when you surrender to the fire instead of fighting it.

Nearly every awakener faces rejection from kin, calls of possession, separations that carve the heart. Removing my specific fires would unmoor this from lived truth, turning prophecy into platitude. The Ramayana lens, among other spiritual ones, isn't literal casting. No one is pure Rama or Ravana. It's archetype spacious enough for our mess: exile's longing, captivity's faith, antagonists who are devotees too.

If you're in the thick of narcissistic loops or relational crucibles right now, this has the potential to validate or destabilise. Ground yourself first; seek supports that honour your emergence. I'm here not as a guide, but as one who's crossed this terrain, sharing what I found. The gift isn't my story's "truth," it's recognizing the patterns in yours.

VIII

Who are We to Be?

I've talked myself into and out of writing this conclusion more than once, including in the writing of this very paragraph. What follows isn't a neat ending so much as the last two things I still needed to say, both about how I actually see myself inside all of this.

The whole premise here was to learn, teach, and demonstrate in the best way I could what helped and moved me, trying to get down to my core and write from the human side of me more than the me side. I think I've

managed that, in some way, though there's always more I could change or tweak. I could honestly keep writing into this for a lifetime.

The first thing is about ego and identity. The same impulse that reduces someone else's single action to one simple motive is the impulse that would reduce me to one identity and nothing else. We shouldn't limit ourselves to seeing only the outgrowth and mistaking it for the root. There are many variables that may motivate a single action, and seeing it as part of one pattern in the moment ties it to whatever negative emotion produced it, which is part of why emotion is so powerful in imprinting a lesson, writing a memory, changing something fundamental within us that leads to changed patterns of behaviour. The more we can feel and let our spirits guide and teach us, the greater we become.

It takes maybe a hundred little lessons to piece together and learn something that has eluded us or given us difficulty. When we see something wrong or flawed in someone else, it's the ego that motivates us to speak out of turn, to insist on something without understanding how to do it. We may have only learned the lesson in a different order, not more or less of it. Our charge is to be one of a hundred points to one truth for another, a drop in the ocean. Without every drop, the ocean cannot be as it is.

It can be hard to detach one's ego from the outcome. I am not saying everyone does this, only that it's a very human motivation we need to learn from and overcome: needing to be the "teacher" of a truth instead of just adding some light to it, apart from us, with no attachment to individual outcome, understanding, or opinion of our own.

The second thing is about being read as a prophet, and what I've settled into believing about that, at least for now.

Years ago I sat in a church that had briefly been in the news, in part because it had its own self-proclaimed prophet. I remember almost saying "another" instead of "a," and catching myself. I have been hesitant, for a long time, to say that word about myself. I still am. Both sides are true at once: I don't want to be one, and at the same time, I do. It depends which moment you catch me in, and what you mean by the word. What I've come to believe is something closer to this: anyone

speaking truth is, for that moment, a prophet. Not permanently. Not as an identity to carry around and defend. Just for the moment the truth is actually being spoken. I've watched ordinary people, pastors, teachers, friends, family members, even sometimes strangers at the right time, become this. Often briefly, and then stop being it, and become it again later. It isn't a crown. It's closer to a state you pass through. The more you pass through, the more you're inhabited by it.

Not everyone who feels this stops there, and I think it's worth naming what happens when they don't. Someone goes through a version of what I went through, the pattern-matching, the sense of being addressed by something larger, and mistakes the pattern for a possession rather than a passage. Without the discipline Second describes, without the years of work that teach you to hold the pattern loosely, the natural next step is to claim it permanently instead of passing through it. That's usually where cults start. Not with a villain plotting to deceive people, but with someone who had a real experience, stopped there, and built an identity, then a following, then a structure, on top of a moment that was only ever meant to move through them.

That inhabiting is of the pattern itself, never of any one name within it. Staying too long inside a single instance of it doesn't corrupt the pattern so much as cost you everything else the pattern needs room for that doesn't serve you. Every moment spent only being the prophet is a moment not spent being teacher, friend, parent, or simply a person among others.

Second already said this more carefully than I'm managing to here: the danger isn't in recognising the pattern, it's in staying too long inside any one instance of it. Are you a reincarnation of one of the Names? Perhaps. Impossible to know for certain, and I've come to think that's not a gap in the system, it's the point of it. Certainty is what turns a passage into a possession, and a possession into a following. The uncertainty is what keeps the pattern transferable instead of becoming a title one person keeps. The moment I claimed to know for certain, I'd have stopped being useful to anyone but myself, and started building exactly the kind of structure I just described. Union was never supposed to work this way, one person gathering it to themselves while everyone else

stays outside, waiting to be let in. It multiplies, or it isn't Union at all. The only thing greater than being in it is more people finding their way into the same or a similar version of it, which is a different thing entirely from being led into someone else's.

Years before I understood any of this as my own story, I was a patient myself for a few days, and in the next room there was a woman who'd survived something terrible. I only heard her voice through the wall. She'd come out the other side able to see conceit in people clearly for the first time, and able, she said, to finally talk to what she called "our mother," her name for the Spirit. I agreed with her, quietly, to myself. I also found myself wanting to coach her, even then, on how she spoke about it out loud, who could hear that language safely and who couldn't. I didn't know yet that I was describing exactly the lesson I hadn't learned for myself. Years later, it played out in my own life almost exactly as I'd worried it might in hers. I think that recognition, watching my own future arrive first in someone else's voice through a hospital wall, is part of what motivated and motivates me. Her story is my story is so many people's stories.

I once wrote, in an earlier and rawer version of this thought, that I am just an echo. I meant it more plainly than it might sound. Not diminishment, an echo is still a real sound; it still carries the shape of what made it. But it isn't the source. If this section ends anywhere, I think it ends there: not "here is my proof," but "here is what it sounds like from inside an echo", and if you're hearing your own name in old words too, that isn't evidence you're special. It's evidence the pattern is doing exactly what it was built to do.

Are we ready? I have learned enough to know that 10 in 12 won't stop me, nor will 24. The prophecies point through, not at them. I will keep searching until the number is complete.