

New York Times #1 Best-Selling Author

Richard Eyre

Life Before Life

*How knowing where you came from
can change who you are
and where you are going*

Richard Eyre

Life Before Life

How knowing where you came from
can change who you are
and where you are going.

©2000 by Richard Eyre

Other Books by the Author (partial list)

The Discovery of Joy
Spiritual Serendipity
Stewardship of the Heart
*Lifebalance**
The Awakening (a novel)
What Manner of Man
*Teaching Your Children Values**
Don't Just Do Something, Sit There
*3 Steps to a Strong Family**
*Teaching Your Children Responsibility**
*How to Talk to Your Child About Sex**
*Teaching Your Children Sensitivity**
*Teaching Your Children Joy**
The Wrappings and the Gifts
*Children's Stories to Teach Joy**
*Alexander's Amazing Adventures: Values for Children***
Simplified Husbandship/Simplified Fatherhood
Free to be Free
*The Change That We Call Birth**
The Secret of the Sabbath

* Co-authored with Linda J. Eyre

**Audio tape series

Our birth is but a sleep
and a forgetting.
The soul that rises with us,
our life star
hath had elsewhere its setting
and cometh from afar
not in utter nakedness
and not in entire forgetfulness,
but trailing clouds of glory
do we come
from God who is our home.

Heaven lies about us in our infancy . . .

William Wordsworth
“Ode: Intimations of Mortality
from Reflections of Early Childhood”

Within you is a spirit that lived before your physical birth and that will continue to live after your physical death. Eternity goes both ways.

God had clear and beautiful purpose in providing you with this mortal phase of eternity. Part of that purpose has to do with the struggle of being on your own *here*, without memory of *there*.

But you do have some sliver of memory -- just enough to feel it is true when you hear it -- just enough to believe in the earlier life of your own soul.

Table of Contents

Page

Preface: Trailing Clouds of Glory	
Chapter 1: QUESTIONS OF ETERNITY	
<i>Believing in the future / Believing in the past</i> <i>(two names for the same spiritual quest)</i>	
Kilimanjaro and Kolob	
<i>Deciding to write</i> <i>(what and where and how)</i>	
Chapter 2: OUR SPIRITUAL COMPASS	
<i>Why people know what they know</i> <i>(and how)</i>	
Chapter 3: OUR SPIRITUAL SENSE	
<i>What most people already know</i> <i>(kind of)</i>	
Chapter 4: OUR SPIRITUAL PAST	
<i>What most people don't yet know</i> <i>(but can)</i>	
Chapter 5: ANSWERS FOR MORTALITY	
<i>Why it helps to know</i> <i>(what changes when we do)</i>	
Conscious Application:	
<i>Using the insight to change your life</i> <i>(and your word)</i>	
Postscript: Continuing the Quest	

Preface: Trailing Clouds of Glory

Books about life after life are generally written by those who claim to have experienced it, albeit briefly. Life before life, on the other hand, if it exists at all, has been experienced by us all. A book about it should be written by one who, through prayer and other process, has found insights that ring true and spiritual memory that is partially reopened.

I'm not sure why I've had this experience -- of the sliver of slightly reopened spiritual memory -- unless it is so I can write it and share it. Nor do I know whether to call what I've experienced "visions" or simply "answers." They range from reading something and knowing it's true . . . to holding a newborn child, staring into his eyes and feeling that he has just come from somewhere else . . . to actual spiritual glimpses of our former spiritual home.

Some of my experience may not be too far removed from yours. Wordsworth's poem says our souls came from God "trailing clouds of glory" and "not in utter nakedness and not in entire forgetfulness." The spark of divine nature that glows or smolders within each of us occasionally prompts a feeling, a longing, almost a spiritual homesickness for a higher sphere, a sudden stab of sweet sentiment which seems to transcend where we are now and open the briefest glimpse of where we once were. It is as though the veil of forgetfulness is a semi-permeable membrane, blocking conscious memory but letting certain feelings seep through.

If it is these feelings, these "trailing clouds of glory" that I am counting on to allow you to believe what I have written in this book. Things that are real carry with them a ring of truth which is recognizable to our spirits -- spirits which, I believe, with Wordsworth, "cometh from

afar . . . from God who is our home.”

Most readers who know me at all know me as a writer of parenting and family books. Why, they might wonder, have I jumped out of that genre? Perhaps you will agree as you read that this is the ultimate family and parenting book. In our life before life we lived as spirits and as part of the spiritual family of God -- as His sons and daughters. As our true and eternal parent He provided a plan for our progression which involved a mortal experience on a physical earth. Knowing this can make each of us better children, better siblings, better parents, and better people.

Richard Eyre

Kolob Canyon

in the first year of the
first decade of the
first century of the
sixth millennium

Chapter One

Questions of Eternity

*Believing in the future / Believing in the past
(two names for the same spiritual quest)*

Chapter 1: Questions of Eternity

*Believing in the future / Believing in the past
(two names for the same spiritual quest)*

The Third Question

The question of life *after* life fascinates us. Some who have had near-death experiences have felt their spirits leave their bodies and move toward a better, brighter place. Some of these have written books about this beginning of afterlife, and the books have become best sellers.

Little wonder that we have intense curiosity about afterlife; we're all headed for it. And accounts of people who at least started to experience it can bolster our hope and our faith.

Where do we go when we die? Why are we here? These are perhaps the two most asked, most pondered, most personal, most important questions ever asked (and always asked) by mankind.

Their answers (or various attempts . . . or starts at answers) are found throughout the spiritual and the secular, in Bibles and in best sellers, in sermons and in seminars, in scripture and in self-help.

The questions are ponderous, powerful, and personal because within them we seek a framework in which to live.

But they are incomplete (and unanswerable) without a third question, which is: "Where did we come from?"

How can we grasp what and who and why we are without knowing from whence we came? Even in earth-time the present and future can only be well-grasped or well-planned in the context of the past.

Questions of Life

In closer focus than the three great questions of eternity are the wide array of questions we ask about this life -- questions that impact our perspectives and our priorities, our faith and our future.

- Why is there such suffering, such cruelty?
- Why is there such inequality -- some with so much, some with so little?
- Why do some things seem so familiar when we see them for the first time?
- Why are children within the same family so completely different from each other?
- Where do our gifts, our inclinations, our talents and our opportunities (many of which we have from birth) come from?
- Why is there such difference and division among religions -- would not God lead us all in one way?
- Why do most people feel such need, such drive, for independence, for ownership, for control?
- Why are we so drawn to nature and to animals?
- Why do some things (and some people) “ring true” to us and feel right, while other things feel wrong?
- Why are we “moved” and “touched” by some things when we have no intention of becoming emotional?

Only in the context of a spiritual future and a spiritual past are these questions even approachable. One phase of ongoing life establishes the needs and parameters for the next phase and our individual freedom of choice both requires and creates the broadest diversity.

Without this eternal context there are only the comfortless non-answers of chaos and chance.

With thought and with belief, we realize that all these and a hundred other questions about ourselves and about our lives are really sub-questions of the three eternal questions -- whence, why, and whither. From whence did we come, why are we here, and whither do we go? And of these three, the most fundamental, the first in sequence, and the one that brings most light to bear on the other two is the first.

A Two-Way Eternity

Polls show that more than 95 percent of us profess a belief in God or some higher power and that between 70 and 80 percent (depending on how the question is phrased) believe there is a spirit or soul in man that continues to live after the physical death of the body.¹

The question addressed by this book is “Where did that soul in which most of us believe come from?” If we are spiritual beings, where did our spirits originate? Did they flare into existence at the moment we were physically conceived or born? Or did they have a spiritual beginning and come from a spiritual place?

Many conclude that a spirit that goes on beyond death must have had a beginning that predates birth. To some, this suggests reincarnation -- a soul that recycles through different bodies and different lives even perhaps through different species. Others are repelled by this idea, feeling that they have always been who they are but that they may have come from some other place. The English poet, William Wordsworth expresses so beautifully this second sentiment -- that our soul “hath had elsewhere its setting and cometh from afar.”

Wordsworth goes on, “not in entire forgetfulness . . . but training clouds of glory do we come, from God who is our home.” Most of us, at times, have glimpses of almost-memory, fleeting sensations that there is more to us than our few years here on earth, feelings of haunting familiarity with things or people we have just encountered.

Some call these feelings *deja vu*, and many wonder if they are evidence of life before life.

The more one ponders, the more the idea of a one-way eternity (or a spiritual existence

¹George Gallup and D. Michael Lindsay, *Surveying the Religious Landscape*, Morehouse Publishing, 1999.

extending into the future but not into the past) seems illogical. If there is a spirit within us, it came from a spiritual place. It is that spiritual place, that “premortal or pre-physical existence,” that this book is about.

We all want to know of life *after* life because it increases our faith and our hope. Knowing of life *before* life can do the same, perhaps even more so. If one writes of a near-death experience and a place beyond, we are reading about what happened to *him*. If another tells us about experiences before birth, we are reading about what happened to each of *us*. If we believe that we came from another place, and from God, everything expands -- from our perspective to our own self-worth. We begin to see purpose and meaning in life’s experience, and our hope in life hereafter becomes balanced by our faith in life before.

A Third Alternative

Among the 70 to 80 percent of Americans who believe in a soul that continues to live after the body dies, nearly half believe in reincarnation -- that their spirit preexisted in a different body and will continue to exist in still another body, perhaps with intervals and a final destination in Heaven.

The other half seem to believe in some form of heaven as the spirit's destination but have no belief in a life before, apparently assuming that this spirit originated at their birth.²

In other words, the two options, it seems, for those who believe in an eternal soul, are that our spirits either jumped from one life form to another until they got to us or they suddenly sprang into existence at the moment we were born or conceived.

Most people, I believe, are not fully comfortable with either option. Reincarnation, on the other hand, while it "answers" certain questions, essentially requires that we share our personalities with a lot of other people, past and present. It makes us less our own. And the notion of our spirits just flaring instantly into existence seems simplistic, shallow, and inadequate in light of all the nuances and complexities of who we each are.

There is a third alternative -- the one this book asks you to consider. It is that each of our spirits lived long before they inherited our bodies -- not in other persons but in another place -- in a premortal realm where we each developed and became who we are and from where we foresaw this physical life as a continuing phase in our experience and our spiritual progression.

²George Gallup and D. Michael Lindsay, *Surveying the Religious Landscape*, Morehouse Publishing, 1999, p. 28 and 32.

Hope and Worth

Why is life *after* life so much more talked and written about than life *before* life? Two possible answers and a counter thought to each:

1. It seems more natural and legitimate to predict, project, preview, and prognosticate the future because it hasn't happened yet. Predictions and conjecture are *about* the future. When dealing with the past, we're accustomed to having a history of remembered and recorded facts. Still, when there is no documented history of a particular period, we don't assume it didn't happen, we look for clues and insights, and try to reconstruct it.

We should do the same for our spiritual past. To those who believe in a spirit or soul, the best assumption is that it has a past -- a past we should look for and be vitally interested in. We won't find our spiritual past in dusty relics or archeological digs. We will find it deep within our own souls, unlocked and encoded only by our personal faith and prayers. And we should not expect too much detail. Our life on this earth has a purpose which is partly to do with developing independence and faith, both of which would be undermined by a full memory of who and what and where we were before. But faith is strengthened by knowing we came from God and knowing something of His purposes in sending us here.

In the spiritual sense then, our past is very much like our future -- known only through faith and predicted (or remembered) only by spiritual vision.

2. Some would say thinking about and believing in life after life is more important and more valuable because it gives us *hope*. Yet believing and understanding life before life can give us *worth*. Believing that we're more than a genetic coincidence, that we brought with us personalities and characters and gifts we developed in a place before, and that we are children of

God sent here for a purpose . . . these beliefs can give us a self-respect and a sense of spiritual identity that can enable us and that can add dimension to our hope for a life to come.

What could be more important and more valuable than these two eternal “book ends” of hope and worth?

a sense of
sense of
WORTH

faith in life before life

NOW

faith in life after life

HOPE

a

Kilimanjaro & Kolob

*Deciding to write
(what and where and how)*

Kilimanjaro and Kolob

*Deciding to write
(what and where and how)*

The Prompting

For years I had struggled with it. A prompting I resisted but that wouldn't go away.

“Write what you know about life before life. Share the light you’ve been given.”

The promptings came at random, unexpected times: watching a young family in a restaurant; driving across a desert into an orange and purple sunset; once at night in a dream so potent it woke me and kept me up, thinking, for the rest of the night, *“Give what you’ve received. People need to know what you know about the life before.”* Once in a book store I picked up a copy of the book called, *Life After Life*, and as I turned it over in my hands it seemed for just an instant, that I saw on the back of the book another title, *Life Before Life*.

I resisted the promptings because I wasn't sure if anyone was interested, and most of all because I didn't think I could find words to express what I know. After all, I write books about goal-setting, life balance, parenting -- practical things, things people know they need, things you can give people methods for, things you can explain with examples and stories. I wasn't ready . . . wasn't even capable of writing about the spirit.

But the promptings didn't go away, and gradually they turned into a desire. When I would sit down to work on other books -- on time management or family communication -- my mind would wander and I would find my pen scrawling thoughts about the nature of premortal life and the purpose of this mortal life.

I began to realize that these thoughts, regardless of how many people were interested,

were vastly more important than the other things I was writing. Gradually the conviction came that I had to try to write them, whether anyone would ever read them or not.

A new millennium was beginning. The promptings became more specific: "*Write it now.*" There is no better time for looking forward and backward than at a millennial change. The awe of a new thousand years releases us a little from the mundane present -- allows us glimpses into a higher realm of reflection and perspective.

It occurred to me that to write about something so removed from the here-and-now I would have to remove myself from the familiar comfort zone of the day-to-day and go some place where I could think with removed perspective and clarity about what I had come to know about the eternities. Where though? Where and how would I find the words? Where would I find the way to say what I now knew I had to.

During the time that I was having these thoughts (and these questions), our family was planning a trip to Eastern Africa to participate in some humanitarian work in a group of primitive villages in Kenya. I suppose that a part of my motivation for going was the hope that such a dramatic change of scenery and of perspective might somehow help me get started on the writing I now felt I had to do. There was also an option, while we were in the vicinity, to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, the massive and picturesque highest peak on the African Continent. As we read about how difficult the climb was, and how much time and expense it required, there were a lot of reasons not to go. But there was something about it I couldn't resist, something that I felt might be related to my questions about how and what to write.

So I would go. I would follow the promptings and see if, on that place half a world away, I could find the words to share what I had to share, the reality and empowerment of an

earlier place and time from which all of us came.

The Mountain

Mt. Kilimanjaro sits right on the equator near the border between Kenya and Tanzania. At 19,400 feet, it is the highest peak in Africa, and because it rises so singularly from the relatively low and flat African plain it has been called the most impressive mountain in the world. It certainly impressed me.

You see it first from nearly 50 miles away, a snowy mound pushing impossibly high above the green jungle horizon. As we bumped along the rutted Kenyan roads, I couldn't take my eyes off of the mountain -- looming larger and larger as we got closer. The previous two weeks in the small Kenyan villages and the vast Massai Mara Plain had humbled me and placed me in a grateful, thoughtful mood and mind frame, but I still had found few of the answers I sought about how to write this book.

That night, as we stayed in some small climbers' cabins at the base of the mountain, a brilliant moon rose directly above the white, glacier-covered dome of Kilimanjaro, and I said a simple prayer -- a prayer about how to present spiritual reality in a way that readers could recognize as truth. No answer came that night, but I knew I was in the right place and I knew I was asking the right question.

It takes five long days to climb Kili. And each of the five days are completely different in their challenge and in their climate and terrain. The first day you climb through a rain forest -- a wet jungle filled with vines and birds and monkeys -- Tarzan's Africa. The greater altitude of the second day brings you to a semi-arid desert -- scrubby little trees and dry, sparse grass. The third day you feel the mass of the mountain suspended above you and the terrain is tundra -- no trees at all, just delicate, low-lying bushes. The fourth day is like walking on the moon --

nothing but gray dust and boulders. And the fifth day you are climbing on a glacier, sliding and slogging at nearly 20,000 feet toward the rocky outcropping that is the top.

Day 1

I hoped for answers or insights on the first day, but it was hard to focus on anything other than the overwhelming beauty of the jungle -- the vibrant abundance of an earth I believe was created for us -- a creation which our spirits witnessed.

But how could I approach and discuss that creation? Questions of creation are polarizing and divisive questions. How could I skirt that debate and prompt readers to think about the origin of their *spirits* rather than their bodies? If I am to write about premortal life, where do I start? What is the most logical, easy-to-believe part of what I know. What fits best with what most people already believe?

I stopped, alone, for a few moments in a clearing, watching a family of ringtail monkeys high above in the jungle canopy. My questions were in the air, suspended in my mind as before, only now there was an answer, or the first part of an answer. Interestingly, it was not a general impression or a vague idea. It was words, specific words, a finished complete sentence:

“Tell them that the spirit which still lives after physical death also lived before physical birth.”

I realized that the very jungle I was standing in illustrated that fact -- the fact of the regeneration and ongoing continuity of life. I knew that fact was the place to start, that I must begin with a logical extension of what most people already believe. Those among the majority that believe there is a spirit in man -- a spirit that continued after death -- can be prompted to think about where that spirit came from. Few would conclude that the physical merger of a sperm and egg would create a spirit. The first step in believing in life before life is realizing that our spirits *came* from somewhere.

Forget for a moment the questions of how and when this magnificent earth was made. Focus on *why* it was made. Ponder the possibility that it was made *for* our spirits, spirits which preexisted and which came into our bodies much as they will one day go out of our bodies.

I thought about that for the rest of the day as we climbed up out of the rain and mist of the dense jungle, and by the time we camped I knew what I wanted to put in the first part of this book.

Day 2

The second day was as dry as the first day was wet. It was an easy walk on firm, hard, arid ground, the trail winding up past smaller and smaller altitude-dwarfed trees.

The answer of yesterday had evolved into another series of questions which I pondered to the rhythm of my trudging steps. “How can I persuade people that there is more to them than physical genetics? What kind of reasoning or logic can lift people above the physical day-to-day enough that they will accept and believe in who they really are?”

I realized on day two how much I wanted people to believe what I did. The perspective of a pre-earth existence is a thing of such beauty to me, a thing that has made such profound difference in how I live and in how I think. I began to feel a sort of desperate need to make it easily acceptable, a pressure to make it all compelling and believable.

I was more aware of the brilliant blue sky that second day. It stretched on endlessly, out over the vast African plain. And as I stared into its blue depth, the next part of the answer configured itself, word for word, in my mind:

*“Tell . . . just tell. Do not try to convince,
compel, contend, or convert. Simple truth
will do all that by itself.”*

I realized that once again my answer had come partially from where I was. This beautiful, sparse desert was so much simpler than yesterday’s jungle below. It was vivid and basic and simple, it needed no embellishment. And so were the truths about life before life.

Maybe it was the altitude, maybe the thinner air actually weighs less, but this second answer seemed to lift a weight from my shoulders. My task was not to make a case or convince

a jury, it was simply to tell what I knew of life before life, to tell it simply and clearly and to let its truth speak for itself to any who would truly listen.

Day 3

“Tundra” is the term they use in Alaska to describe vegetation so fragile that you hate to step on it. At day-three altitude no trees can grow -- just scrubby, delicate little bushes here and there. The tundra is a type of vegetation I’ve never seen before, yet it’s somehow familiar and pleasant. We’re at the upper edge of the vegetation line. Breathing is harder and slower. Everything, it seems, is slowing down, except for my thoughts which seem to race. I love the answer parts that have come, but they are just a preface. The real “how” -- how to say it, in what order to tell it -- is still murky. How do you figuratively walk up to someone and say, “I know something *about you* that you don’t know.” Where is the credibility, where is the common ground that will make people want even to read it, let alone believe it?

I was trekking along right behind Charles, a big jovial Tanzanian who was our head guide and who had climbed the mountain a dozen times. As we walked, we talked, and something he said in his broken English triggered part three of my answer. “I remember every time I climb,” he said. “Even first time it seem like I remember it. I think I made for this mountain.”

There is a lot that people know, I thought, a self-knowledge they just have, a spiritual sense of things that is just in them -- so that learning sometimes feels more like remembering. It’s like this tundra and this terrain -- new yet somehow friendly and familiar.

Suddenly I had the third answer in my sequence:

*“Tell them first what they already know
but don’t quite know that they know.”*

There is so much scripture about life before life, so much poetry and myth about a

premortal realm. And we, ourselves, when the mood and the emotion is right, know we are something beyond our body and our brain -- something older and something more enduring.

It is possible to know something and not know that you know it. What I must do, in the third part of the book, is to prompt people to look inside themselves and see what's already there.

I walked in silence behind Charles for a while, pondering this black brother of mine, a man with whom I had almost nothing in common . . . or maybe a man with whom, like every man, I had everything in common.

Day 4

Early on day four, at breakfast, Charles laid out the plan for our final ascent. By the end of today, he said, we would be at a rock field below the base of the glacier. We would sleep for about three hours, get up just after midnight, and climb for seven or eight hours up the steep white ice to the top of the world. He detailed the route and told us about the parts we would do on our own and the parts where we would need his help and that of the other guides. There was a buzz of excitement as we prepared to ascend.

As I listened, my mind was still on this book and I realized that the heart of what I had to say was about God's plan for our descent into mortality. God explained that plan to us in a premortal realm. There were parts that we had to implement and carry out on our own and that was the reason for a physical life without memory of what went before. There were other parts of the plan that could not be accomplished without His self-sacrificing help. There was exhilaration and excitement as we prepared to descend.

Later that morning as we trudged along, I asked Charles a question. We were above all vegetation now, and it looked and felt like we were walking on the moon, stepping over gray boulders and kicking up fine gray dust.

"Why do we start the final ascent tomorrow at one a.m.? Why do we trudge most of the way up the glacier in pitch black darkness?"

Charles smiled like it was a question he was used to. "See last day sunset better from up on glacier," he said.

I wasn't buying it. The final ascent takes eight or nine hours. Why don't we get a good sleep tonight, get up and leave early -- say at 5 a.m. -- and get up there by early afternoon?

Watch the sunrise on the way up.

Charles came up with another answer: “Glacier too soft in afternoon, harder to walk on.” I raised an eyebrow so he tried a third answer, the lamest of all. “You don’t get too tired in the dark.”

We kept trudging up through the moonscape and Charles could sense that I didn’t like his answers. Suddenly he stopped and turned to face me. “OK, I tell you true why we go at night,” he said. “If you *see* where we going, you don’t go.”

That gave me something to think about for the rest of day four. And the thoughts tied magically into the bigger answers I had come for. We came into this earth from a better place, or at least an easier place. If from that place we could have seen our lives in preview, all the pain and all the trial, we may not have come. And if we could remember the place from whence we came, we might consider killing ourselves just to get back home, and we would not develop the faith and the independence we were sent here to gain.

So there is a reason we know as little as we do of life before life. But knowing that we *were* there, and knowing *why* we were sent here can make every part of this life more meaningful.

Tomorrow we would start in the middle of the night and we would make most of the ascent in darkness, but at least we knew where we started and we knew why we were climbing. And with that came the fourth part of my answer:

*“Tell them what they don’t know . . .
and how to believe.”*

This was the heart of what I’d come to the mountain to find. I knew now that in the

right sequence, after reminding readers of what they already know, I could tell them without fear about what *else* I've come to know about our life before life, about the relationships we had in that premortal life, and about God's plan for our eternal progress. Most importantly, I could tell them how to believe it. I knew how because I knew.

That evening as the sun set, I looked down -- impossibly far down on the tops of the clouds below. Most of my answer had come, most of the mountain was climbed. We would sleep three or four hours and then made the final ascent.

Day 5

The night ascent was awesome -- and incredibly difficult. I began to believe Charles. I would not have done it if I could have seen it. With a new moon, only the brilliant stars in the black, space-like sky illuminated the vast, vertical mass of the mountain above us. For the first part of the night we walked through gravel-like “scree” and slid back a half step for every forward step we took. Nearing 19,000 feet, the air was so thin that I was taking a deep, complete inhale-exhale breath for every single step I took. It was incredibly slow and cold, but exquisitely beautiful. By about 2 a.m. we were on the glacier itself, picking our steps carefully as we moved up the frozen white mass.

Resting became an interesting phenomenon. If you don’t stop to rest (and to drink) every hundred steps or so, you increase your chances of altitude sickness. But, if you rest too long, the desire to quit and turn back becomes incredibly strong.

About halfway up the glacier, light began to gather and then I witnessed the most glorious sunrise of my life. It turned the tops of the clouds below into burnished gold and it lit the vast African plain beyond. With the sun came new energy for the final push and new assurance within that I could write the book, that people would read it, and that it could make a difference. For the first time some words came that were not directly asked for -- a simple reassurance rather than an answer to a question:

“Belief in life after life gives us hope.

Belief in life before life gives us worth.”

I sensed during that final ascent that self-worth, self-respect, self-identity, self-*value* are the key benefits of knowing our spiritual past. As important as hope and encouragement are,

they don't work very well unless they are connected to worth. Even in the physical, temporal sense, it's fine to say, "You can do it . . . you can get there . . . you can endure," but unless there is a certain base level of confidence and of self-worth, we don't really believe we can.

Spiritually, it is the same. Hope in a heaven, in a life beyond, in the inherent goodness and immortality of our souls can be hollow and distant unless we believe we came from somewhere, that we have deep spiritual potential, and that this mortal life has real meaning and purpose.

We inched our way along a high ridge and up a black rock outcropping to the pinnacle. The top of the world. A feeling like no other, standing there, turning slowly, 360 degrees, seeing forever in every direction. I was asking the final question, "What is the ultimate purpose of this book? Why do I have to write it? Why do people need to read it? How do I explain the purpose of knowing.

As I looked down onto the mountain beneath me -- beyond the bottom of the glacier, beyond the rock field, down into the mist below -- the clouds billowed and shifted and for just a minute I caught a glimpse of the jungle nearly 20,000 feet down -- of the place we'd started from five days before, the place we would soon return to. It was the physical equivalent of the spiritual glimpses I had had of the life before, brief but sure, incomplete but comforting and beautiful. The clouds shifted again and the glimpse was gone. Having seen it though, even dimly and briefly, made a difference. It was clearer to me where I was now, and why I had come.

My brief glimpse down had brought my answer up:

*"Tell them how knowing about living before
can change everything about living now."*

Perception was the key. Just as I could see more because I had been taken here to this

high view, readers would see more of life and of purpose if they were taken back to where they came from where a longer view of themselves and of God's purpose could give them both hope and worth.

On the magnificence of that mountain and in the clarity of that moment, I perceived the difference it could make . . . to a parent who now sees his children as God's children and as spiritual equals . . . to a wife who now sees her husband as someone she may have known before this life . . . to anyone who now sees his worries and challenges as part of what he was sent here to learn, and views others' problems similarly, without judgment.

It is faith and insight that I want to share, but the real and practical gift may be *worth* and *perspective*.

Four Months Later

Now an admission and an apology. Even after the answers of Kilimanjaro, I resisted. I came home to the everyday and what I knew I had to do seemed too far away and too distant from my writing confidence. I gravitated back to other manuscripts and writing projects. I still *wanted* most to write about life before life, but the confidence and clarity of Kilimanjaro was slipping away.

Then in late October I went to play basketball and run track events in the world Senior Olympics, held in the red rock canyon country where Utah, Arizona, and Nevada meet. It's the perfect time of year there with the golden cottonwood and yellow aspen trees accenting the pine-covered hills beneath the massive red cliffs.

My basketball team made it to the finals where we were playing the senior team from Russia, big raw-boned players, some of whom as younger men had played on the USSR's Olympic gold-medal team. Going up for a rebound in the second half I caught an elbow across the bridge of my nose and blacked out briefly, barely managing to keep my feet. I tried to shake off the blow and reentered the game. Aterward, though, I felt dizzy and began to experience some clear, watery drainage from my nose that worried me. I went to see a neurologist who worried me even more by telling me about the cribriform plate behind the nose which, if cracked, can leak cerebral/spinal fluid and allow bacteria to enter the brain from the nasal passages, sometimes causing meningitis. But he examined me neurologically and found nothing abnormal and was particularly pleased to find that my sense of smell was in order. Smell, he told me, was often affected by a cribriform crack. He said that while he doubted serious trauma,

he would set up an MRI and a CAT scan the following day if I wanted to be sure.

I drove back that night to where I was staying -- beneath the 2,000 foot red cliffs of Kolob Canyon, part of Zion's National Park. But I didn't enjoy the beauty very much -- I was preoccupied with the possibility of a brain drain.

During the night my thoughts returned to the book I had been prompted to write -- perhaps it was my way of getting my mind off my mind. I prayed with the sincerity we seem to summon when there is a potentially serious worry.

The next day I felt a clear assurance that I would be fine and an impression that instead of going to the radiology section of the hospital, I should get out by myself, into the majestic canyons. I saddled up an Appaloosa horse named Banner and took a ride beneath the five fingers of Kolob.

They look like the five splayed-out fingers of a massive hand, five towering pointed cliffs of warm red rock jutting out overhead into the cool, deep autumn-blue sky. As I rode, my mind was taken back -- *taken* (I didn't take it) to the five impressions of Kilimanjaro. Each of the huge red fingers suddenly represented one of the five parts of what I'd been told to say and the metaphor of the hand of God and the will of God was too obvious to ignore.

I looked up at the first finger and felt the words, "*Tell them that the spirit which still lives after physical death also lived before physical birth.*"

I shifted my gaze to the second massive rock finger and felt, "*Tell . . . just tell. Don't try to convince or contend or convert. The truth will do all that by itself.*"

The third red cliff spoke to me: "*Tell them first about the parts they already know but don't quite know that they know.*" And the fourth, "*Tell them what they don't know -- and how*

to believe.”

I looked at the last finger of Kolob and felt this one strongest of all: *“Tell them how knowing about living before can change everything about living now!”*

I rode back to where I was staying, unsaddled Banner and sat on the porch, in a rocking chair, looking up at the sun’s last rays lighting Kolob’s five fingers, then at the moon rising as I began to write the preface.

Chapter Two

Our Spiritual Compass

*Why people know what they know
(and how)*

Chapter 2: Our Spiritual Compass

*Why people know what they know
(and how)*

A “Ring of Truth”

The story is told of a man whose family was killed in Eastern Europe at the beginning of World War II. The man, who was only a small child at the time, had survived and been taken into France by escaping refugees. He ended up in an orphanage and was eventually adopted and raised by American parents in California. The orphanage had no records other than a note that he had been rescued as a toddler, somewhere in Eastern Europe.

Many years later, as an adult, he developed a powerful interest in his roots and a desire to discover where he had come from. Finally, when he had some financial resources, he took a leave of absence from his work and went to Europe, determined to do whatever he had to to find his childhood home. His only memory, and it was just a shred, was of a church tower which must have been near his house -- a church with a bell that he woke to as he would lie in his crib.

So he traveled across Poland, through Hungary and Bulgaria, looking and listening, trying to recall or to recognize something, somewhere. As weeks turned to months, he visited hundreds of cities, villages, and town, and listened to literally thousands of church bells, each unique and beautiful, but none of which awakened anything familiar in him.

Finally, discouraged and convinced that he simply didn't have enough evidence to work with, he made plans to return home. He booked a flight for the following week and decided to spend his last few days visiting some tiny villages in a very rural and remote sector.

Early the next morning, only four days before he was to leave, he pulled his rental car into a little town, parked, got out and was walking toward a bakery when he heard his bell. He

knew the instant he heard it that this was his childhood home. The years fell away and he heard it just as he had from his crib. It was unmistakable. He was home.

Light

Spiritual truth, when we hear it, can ring as clearly and recognizably as the bell. Because we are spiritual beings we have spiritual memories, memories that are dim but not gone, veiled but not blocked. Thus spiritual truths resonate; they *feel* right. They ring true, they have about them a spiritual logic and light.

In contrast, lies and spiritual deceptions carry a dissonant, unfamiliar ring and seem to project a kind of darkness.

We can learn to trust spiritual ideas and messages that fill our souls with light and love, with hope and joy . . . and to turn away from spiritual notions which cloud our thoughts or carry a sense of confusion or delusion.

Ways of Knowing

“Seeing is believing” the old saying goes, and indeed it is our five senses that give us most of our knowledge about the things around us. We see and hear our world -- we taste it and touch it and smell it. We begin to equate reality with the things our physical senses can perceive and we sometimes tend to categorize everything else as illusion.

In other moments, though -- actually in our finest moments -- we know that there are other ways of knowing. It is not our five senses that tell us we love someone, or that tell us when we feel truly loved. And it is not our senses, though they may supply some of the input, that tell us that we have a soul and that there is a God who gave us our senses to help us perceive and experience His other gifts. This kind of knowing is more pure and more sure than anything that can come through our senses -- and it is less subject to confusion or to delusion.

The sources of our senses -- which we often think of as the most reliable realizers of reality -- are actually the least trustworthy. How many times have you heard (or said), “I thought I saw something.” Our eyes and our ears are easily fooled. Magicians make a living on sensory illusion. The things we most truly know come from a place deeper inside us and from a source higher above us.

The emotional knowledge that I love my wife and children is deeper and surer than any physical knowledge. Closely linked and another step beyond emotional knowledge is the spiritual knowledge of God and of who we really are and who we always have been.

While emotional knowledge is stronger than physical knowledge, it is also harder to come by. It’s effortless to look at or listen to something and know that it’s there. To truly love someone or to fully accept another’s love for you takes more effort and more time.

Spiritual knowledge, the third and highest form of knowing, is still deeper and still harder. It's two levels harder than seeing or hearing and it's one level beyond (and fully incorporates) loving.

The reason it is harder is that it involves and is built on faith -- on accepting and trusting in things that are above and beyond the common, physical, everyday experience of this world.

But here is the irony: While faith is hard, its absence may well be harder. To believe in what we cannot see or touch is sometimes difficult, but to not believe is at times -- at very good times -- virtually impossible. In those moments of exquisite beauty -- or profound love -- or quiet inspiration we cannot give ourselves credit, nor can we deny credit to some higher, brighter, fuller source.

This is why most people believe in God -- because, in balance, it is easier and more natural and ultimately more logical to believe than not to believe. And once we believe in God, we must believe in our own souls. And once we believe in the immortality of our souls, we must believe that they came from somewhere.

There is a wonderful binary quality about spiritual knowledge. Either there is a God or there isn't. Either our soul continues after death or it doesn't. Either our spirits lived before their birth or they didn't. This yes or no, on or off, true or false reality can nourish our faith. When we ponder something and wish to know if it is true, we can "try" both sides spiritually. We can assume and believe a thing and see if that belief generates light or darkness in our minds.

A belief that spawns enlightenment and further insight can be invited to linger and grow while a notion that prompts darkness or fear, confusion or repulsion can be rejected and dismissed.

Our Spiritual Compass

Useful as this spiritual toggle switch is -- the one that responds with light or dark to spiritual questions -- we have another built in “spiritual instrument” that may help us even more.

It is a kind of spiritual compass that will, if we let it, point us in the direction of our individual spiritual destiny.

God’s commitment to our agency does not lessen His interest in us or His desire that we find truth and discover and develop the best that is within us. Providing us with a road map would supersede our need for the very faith and independence we came to earth to gain. But a compass, a pointing in the right direction in response to our request, preserves our initiative and allows the thrill of discovery.

Our spiritual compass works in a clear and simple way, but only according to our needs and our requests. It works as a conscience when we face right and wrong decisions or moral dilemmas. It works like a magnetic pole in prayer about big life-choices. And it turns us toward beacons of light as we ponder and pray about spiritual purpose and the reasons for life.

Yet, like some kind of battery-powered direction finder, our spiritual compass can spin at random until it is plugged into the current of faith. We must strive to believe in it and in the source of its power. The moment we take it for granted it will fail us.

Recognize and apply your spiritual compass as you think about a life before life. Hold the concept up in your heart and see if it reflects spiritual light. Pray and ask about your eternity and your soul and let your compass point you toward the peace and purpose of believing.

I hate to hear people say, “Spirituality is a crutch. Believing is for people who are too weak to accept reality.” Spirit *is* reality, as is God; the strongest, surest reality of all. And

believing takes strength and faith and mental and spiritual effort. The weak, easy thing is not to know if you believe, to default the whole question because seeking and finding answers is hard. The crutch is agnosticism, the cop-out of marking the “I don’t know” or “None of the above” box.

Be open to spiritual truth. Ask and activate your spiritual compass. Then trust it. Allow yourself to believe things that feel right, that ring true, that add light.

My Spiritual Compass

It is my own spiritual compass that prompted both my belief in a life before life and my desire to write about it. These promptings came in a number of different ways, from a number of different sources. The whole next chapter is a review of these sources. The most personal of them, though -- the one that locked my spiritual compass firmly and surely on the reality of premortal life -- came as a spiritual prompting and as a direct answer to personal prayer.

We were living in England during a particularly busy and challenging time of our lives. Both Linda and I were involved in projects that required extensive travel and that were taxing emotionally as well as physically. We were desperately trying to juggle the demands of our work with the needs of our young family. The last thing that would have occurred to us at that juncture was having another child.

Yet it did occur to us. It kept occurring to both of us that we should try to become pregnant again and to have another child. At first I tried to ignore it; Linda did too. It was just incongruous with reality. It didn't fit with where we were in our lives. I couldn't imagine where the feeling was coming from. Certainly not from within me -- there was nothing logical or practical about it, no one had suggested it, we didn't even know any one else who was pregnant or who would put the thought into our minds. But the thought that we should have another baby -- now -- wouldn't go away, and the thought felt like it was coming from outside of us, from some intelligence or presence that was not our own. It troubled Linda even more than it did me. The thought of another child -- a new baby -- on top of everything else she was dealing with right then -- simply overwhelmed her.

We had asked God for each of our other children, prayed and asked that we could

conceive when it seemed that the timing and the situation was right. This time we found ourselves doing just the opposite, essentially explaining to God that the timing and situation was wrong and asking Him to remove this feeling, or at least to allow us to conclude that it was nonsense. When that didn't happen, we felt we had to become more open and more sincere in our prayers, trying to summon our faith and to ask God to let us know His will. We fasted one Sunday in an effort to enhance our humility. That afternoon we isolated ourselves and prayed for an answer.

The answer that came was unexpected and remarkable. It completely removed our anxiety and replaced it with calm. There was a light and a clarity within that calm, and we understood that the promptings we had been feeling came from God *and* (now the insight to pre-life began) *from the spirit who would come to our family*. Within the answer to that singular prayer God told us through an unmistakable feeling deep within our souls, that there was an existing spirit in a spiritual place awaiting entry into mortality and into our family, and that the entry should happen now. Furthermore, he told us *about* that spirit -- that he was a spirit of remarkable peace and calm, that he would be an easy baby, that the nature of his comfortable and serene spirit would actually ease our burdens rather than increase them and would draw our family (and our priorities) closer as we came together to care for and love this new child.

I'll never forget the feeling as we got up off our knees after that prayer -- nor will Linda. We had knelt down feeling troubled, concerned, confused about a prompting that we couldn't understand or accept. We got up feeling completely at peace, reassured as to what to do, and certain in our souls that there was a spiritual place and that in that spiritual place was a particular, unique person who was preparing to join us, a person whose nature we already knew.

There is a brief postscript to this story about still another level of assurance we received that Sunday afternoon. We had asked Saren, our oldest who was seven, to play with her younger brother and sister upstairs so Linda and I could be alone for our prayer. She wanted to know what we were praying about, so we simplified, "About whether to have another baby." After our prayer and within the peaceful aura of our answer we called up the stairs for Saren to come down so we could thank her -- she'd kept everything relatively quiet for nearly two hours. She came down with a twinkle in her eye and three pieces of paper in her hand and a grinning little brother and sister behind her. "We prayed too," she said, "and we marked our votes on these papers." She handed me three home-made ballots, each with two crayon-drawn squares, one labeled "Yes" and one "No." Each of them had an "X" in the yes box.

The longer-range postscript is that Talmadge joined our family ten months later and was (and is) all that he and God had promised us he would be.

Chapter Three

Our Spiritual Sense

*What most people already know
(kind of)*

Chapter 3: Our Spiritual Sense

*What most people already know
(kind of)*

Prompters of a Belief in the Before

Some thoughts seem new and yet old at the same time. The concept of a life before this life is new to most people . . . yet somehow familiar.

As we ponder the possibility, we feel simultaneously disturbed and comforted. The concept gives us a whole other realm to wonder and worry about. . . . Yet there is a reassuring resonance in the notion that there is more to us than a brand-new cluster of physical cells.

It turns out that people have been wondering about (and concluding about) a pre-earth existence since this present existence began. And testimonials, if not evidence of a life before life exist all around us. Most people have experienced various parts of this evidence but have not consciously made all the connections. There are, in other words, things we know but do not quite know that we know.

This chapter shares a number of different things that most of us have either experienced or been exposed to -- things ranging from personal feelings to universal conscience, and from poetry and proverbs to mythology and movies -- things that point us toward a life before life.

I've included each one because I have experienced or felt it. You, too, will have experienced many of them and will recognize as you read.

Deja Vu . . .

“The place just seemed so familiar to me.” “I’m sure I’ve met you somewhere, sometime.” “I swear this has happened before.”

What the French named *deja vu* comes in many forms and ranges from a faint glimmer of familiarity in a new situation to an extensive, unexplainable knowledge of something you’ve never learned or experienced before -- even of things that happened in an earlier age.

Temporal, physical thinking tries to brush it off: “Just looks like someone else.” “Must have been there once and forgotten.” “Probably read it in a book or saw a picture of it sometime.” Yet these explanations don’t seem quite adequate or accurate -- especially right while the *deja vu* is taking place. At the moment we actually feel it, there is a sense of distance and mystery, and a feeling that we’ve been around longer than we know.

Deja vu is a favorite concept of reincarnationists who explain it simply: “It happened to the person you were in an earlier life.” But it fits equally well to one who believes in a spirit that originated elsewhere -- a spirit that had experiences and met others in a pre-earth place, and perhaps, from there, saw brief preview glimpses of his life here or even of the life of one who would be his ancestor. These glimpses, which lie deep within our spirits, are what trigger our most profound moments of *deja vu*.

“P.B.E.s”

While not nearly as common as *deja vu*, many people, particularly parents, have had the experience of some type of contact or communication with a spirit not yet born. Enough of these experiences have been reported in recent years that researchers have given them a name (PBEs or Pre-Birth Experiences as opposed to NDEs or Near Death Experiences) and have concluded that this type of spiritual experience has been occurring in all cultures throughout human history.

One such researcher, Harold Widdison, a Ph.D. professor of medical sociology, indicates that he has, over a twenty-five year span, interviewed hundreds of people who have experienced NDEs or PBEs. Widdison says, “I am absolutely convinced that these are authentic descriptions of actual events.”* He compares NDEs and PBEs as follows:

“NDEs suggest the existence of a *post*-Earth life where we go to *after* physical life ends. The soul crosses over from the Earth realm to a nonmaterial realm. In contrast, PBEs suggest the existence of a *pre*mortal realm where souls reside *before* they come down to Earth. In PBEs, the not-yet-born soul crosses over into this *Earth* realm from the realm of pre-Earth life and makes some form of contact with people living on Earth.”

He goes on to categorize seven types of message or communication from unborn spirits: “1) The unborn soul gives a message that the time for conception is near; 2) the unborn soul shares that he or she has a special mission to accomplish on Earth; 3) a radiation of love emanates from the unborn soul; 4) gratitude is expressed by the unborn soul for bringing him or her to Earth; 5) the unborn soul predicts a significant future event that affects the mission of the

unborn soul and/or the family that the unborn soul will be born into; 6) the unborn soul expresses

*Quoted in *Experiencing the Soul*, p. 52, Eliot Jay Rosen. Hay House, 1999.

excitement or reluctance about entering Earth life; 7) a message of warning or protection is given by the unborn soul regarding an impending danger, especially if this danger may jeopardize the unborn soul's arrival on Earth. . . .”

The infrequency of PBEs may have more to do with our inability to receive impressions than with the ability of unborn spirits to send them.

Poetry . . .

Wordsworth is not the only one. Many poets and other sensitive, spiritually inclined people have talked and written about a life before life. Masterlinck's *Blue Bird* says, in part:

The poet and lyricist, Eliza R. Snow, writes of times when

“a secret something
whispers ‘you’re a stranger here.’
And we feel that we have wandered
from a more exalted sphere.”

The final stanza of T. S. Eliot's "*Little Gidding*" *In Four Quarters* can be interpreted as a reference to pre-life from which we were sent for further exploration, a probe for origin with Adam and Eve represented as “the children of the apple tree.” In that view, Eliot even suggests *why* we don't know more about our origins -- “because not looked for.”

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.”

This earth as part of eternal exploration? Ending back where we started? Having come through the unknown but remembered gate? The hardest thing to discover is our beginning, our source? Half heard in the stillness between two eternities?

Within the work of Eichendorff we read:

If the job of a poet is to put words to feelings we all partially share, to highlight and articulate the vague impressions in our souls . . . then these verses and others like them can kindle glowing embers already within us.

“The War in Heaven” and “The Dark Prince”

The idea of a prior or mystical life in which there was a polarizing conflict persists through tales and stories old and new -- battles waged for the hearts of men where the loser breaks away and becomes a dark and evil opposing force.

Wagner wrote operas with this theme, and Goethe used it as a story line. C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien wrote stories where the greatest evil came from one who was once favored of God. Even current movie sagas like “Star Wars” or best-selling books like Harry Potter theme around a Darth Vader or a Voldemort -- a prince turned bad and now locked in conflict for the possession of our souls.

Revelation, the last book of the Bible, tells in its twelfth chapter of a war in Heaven where the great dragon was cast out with his followers and became the evil opponent of Christ.

Did these story lines just spring one from another or come by coincidence or happenstance? Or are they all based on a true story that each of us vaguely remembers from our dim spiritual past?

Scripture . . .

Those who believe the Bible have particular and specific reasons to believe in a life before life. God himself says to the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee and before thou camest forth from the womb I sanctified thee and ordained thee to be a prophet.”³ God is referred to in the Old Testament as “the God of the spirits of the flesh”⁴ and we are told that when we die the body returns to the earth and “the spirit returns to the God who gave it.”⁵ God implies that Job was alive when He (God) “laid the foundation of the earth . . . when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”⁶

In the New Testament Paul speaks of “the fathers of our flesh . . .” and “the Father of our spirits (God)”⁷ and indicates that he and other followers were chosen by Christ “before the foundation of the world.”⁸ Jude writes of a spiritual “first estate”⁹ which happened before this world. The apostles who accompanied Christ indicate that He had taught them of a life before life. They ask Jesus if a particular man who was blind from birth was cursed because of

³Jeremiah 1:5.

⁴ Numbers 27:16.

⁵ Ecclesiastes 12:7.

⁶ Job 38:4, 7.

⁷ Hebrews 12:9.

⁸ Ephesians 1:4.

⁹ Jude 1:6.

something he'd done before.¹⁰

¹⁰ John 9:17.

Christ himself clearly had a pre-mortal existence. We are taught by John that Jesus “was in the beginning with God before he was made flesh”¹¹ and that Christ will later “ascend up where He was before.”¹² Jesus helped create this earth,¹³ and He speaks of His own life before life when He tells His apostles that He lived before Abraham¹⁴ and later that He “came forth from the Father and would leave the world to go again to the Father.”¹⁵ In His last prayer in Gethsemane Christ asks God to glorify Him “with the glory I had with thee before the world was.”¹⁶ In perhaps the most direct statement of all, John says, in the New Testament, “No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven.”¹⁷

Holy writings of other faiths, including the Koran and Islamic doctrine, also suggest a premortal existence of spirits.¹⁸

Why aren't scriptures about life before life even more prevalent and more specific and definitive? Perhaps for the same reason that scriptures about afterlife are often general and vague. Those who wrote were inspired and prophetic in glimpsing both the pre-life and the afterlife but did not have complete memory or complete detail of either.

¹¹ John 1:2, 14.

¹² John 6:62.

¹³ John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17.

¹⁴ John 8:58.

¹⁵ John 16:28.

¹⁶ John 17:5

¹⁷ John 3:13

¹⁸ See *Apocryhal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, p. 174 (on “Gospel Link”).

Early Christianity

There is substantial evidence that the concept of a premortal existence endured for some time in Christianity after the time of Paul. Clement in the *Clementine Regognitions*, one of the earliest Christian writings after the New Testament, says: “Well, if I live after, I must have lived before. Doesn’t that follow?”¹⁹

Clement also wrote of questions he had which he thought only Peter could answer. Among those questions were, “Why don’t we remember the premortal existence,” “When was the world created,” and “What existed before that?”²⁰

The doctrine of a life before life was debated in the early Christian church in the centuries following the death of Christ’s original apostles. Belief in a premortal existence of the soul was officially dropped from Roman Christianity in A.D. 553 by an edict known as the Anathemas against Origen, promulgated by the Roman emperor Justinian. The pope consented under duress. Thereafter these doctrines quietly slipped from the attention and interest of most of the Christian world.²¹ The doctrine of pre-life continued to prevail in Judaism, however, and is still taught today by the Hasidic Jews.²²

It could be said that the concept and belief in a pre-life did not leave Christianity, Christianity left it.

¹⁹*Temple and Cosmos*, p. 367.

²⁰ *Temple and Cosmos*, ppg. 523-524.

²¹ *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Sains*, p. 174 (Gospel Link under preexistence).

²² *Temple and Cosmos*, p. 367.

Reincarnation Appeal/Aversion

Immortality via reincarnation has an undeniable attraction and seems to match the lessons the very earth teaches us. Plants die, decompose and re-grow in similar or different forms. Deja vu, our own and what we hear from others, seems to fit the reincarnation paradigm. And there is a long-range equality or fairness suggested by passing through several lives, some rich and some poor, some privileged and some oppressed.

Yet at the same time, something tells us we have always been who we are. The idea of cycling through completely different personalities, even different species, feels foreign and unlikely, even frightening and dark.

I met a famous British T.V. personality once during a sailing trip in the Caribbean. Over dinner one night he told me that he had “converted” from Christianity to Hinduism. I asked for his reasons. “Just one,” he said. “Life has always seemed extremely unfair and arbitrary to me. Some are born healthy and rich, others crippled and poor. I was having a hard time believing in a God who would allow it, until I found the Hindu explanation of reincarnation -- many lives, some hard and some easy -- all balancing out over time.” His only regret he said, was that he still had a feeling for the divinity of Christ.

I asked him if his hope for fairness could also be met by an eternal spirit in man that came from an earlier place, a spirit which didn’t change species or identities but did go through multiple phases of existence, with one phase perhaps determining what circumstances were needed in the next. He said he supposed so, but that he had never found a church or a philosophy that taught that.

We do move through eternity from life to life, but we don't have to change species or personalities or bodies to do so. We stay ourselves and move through different realms. Our progress is not up and down or cyclical and unending. Rather, it is linear and progressively upward with each individual retaining and becoming who he is through a spiritual phase, a physical phase, and finally a culminating resurrected phase when we are eternally and perfectly both spiritual and physical.

Popular Modern Writers

Gary Zukov in his best seller, *The Seat of the Soul*, says that “The personality can be loving, compassionate, and wise in its relations with others. But love, compassion, and wisdom do not come from the personality. They are experiences of the soul,” and that “The perspective of the soul is immense” having “chosen the physical experience of life as a path of (spiritual) evolution.” He talks of the soul coming “into the physical arena, into our Earth School” and says, “A conscious lifetime, therefore, is a treasure beyond value.” While Zukov believes that the soul experiences these lifetimes time after time through reincarnation, the point is that he, like so many other contemporary spiritual writers, believes in an eternal soul that pre-dates this life and this world and that is progressing through mortal experience.

James Redfield, author of one of the most popular books of the ‘90s, *The Celestine Prophecy*, speaks of our time as one in which mankind feels a greater “urge to explore the age-old questions of life: Why are we really here? Is there a spiritual purpose underlying the struggles of human history?” In this time of spiritual awakening he claims that “each month we know more (feel more?) about the spiritual life we were living before birth and the one to which we will return after death.” He says, “we came to this earth first to find the greater part of ourselves” and “we *planned* to come into this life with certain interests and momentum so that we could eventually understand and accomplish a special purpose. We came here wishing to follow a certain path . . . “Our life is not just about survival but also about spiritual evolution.”

Both of these writers, like many current spiritual thinkers, conclude that there is a spiritual evolution underway among mankind, and that we live in a new age where more spiritual

questions are being asked than ever before. Answers come in a variety of forms and from a variety of sources, but they are best discerned and best believed in the context that we each are eternal spirits who did not originate on this earth.

Inspiration, Intuition, Inclination

“The answer just came out of nowhere.” “I don’t know how I knew, but I did.” “I just felt a nudge.” “I was prompted.” “Something inspired me.” “It was just a strong intuition.” “Right then I just knew it was true.”

Where do the nudgers, the promptings, the little glimpses of guidance we all occasionally feel come from? Are they old, semi-forgotten memories? Are they nonverbal communication from someone else? Perhaps, but most of us associate them with spirit.

When a religious person says, “I feel the spirit,” what does he mean? Does he mean I feel the spirit of God -- the Holy Spirit? Or does he mean that he feels his own spirit, that he is aware of something spiritual going on inside himself. Or does he mean both -- that his own spirit is feeling something that is coming from or being transmitted by the Holy Spirit.

It is indeed a transmission-reception kind of feeling. We’re feeling a different part of ourselves -- the most real and eternal part. Not of our body and not of our brain. Yet what is coming to us -- the inspiration or the conviction -- is coming into us from outside of us -- from above and beyond us.

We can feel it and receive it because of who we are and where we came from.

Conscience and Universal Ethics

Why, in virtually every society of every age, are there such common standards and notions about what is “good” and what is “bad”?

Answers to most other “either-or” categories have to be learned by real or vicarious experience or study. We learn much of the true-false of things in school. We learn many safe-unsafe things by trial and error. Is it possible that the right-wrong judgments that seem so obvious were also learned by experience . . . but in a life before this life?

It’s not only the fact that we know right and wrong that is interesting, it’s the *method* by which we know or are reminded. It is something that we call a conscience -- a predictable, dependable prompting that often warns us before we make wrong choices and injects us with at least a little guilt afterwards.

What exactly is that “conscience” and where did it come from? No one programmed us. We don’t have some “conscience chip” implanted surgically into our brains. Conscience isn’t part of our physiology or our grey matter. It is part of our spirit. Its existence and operation is an evidence of the reality of our spirits. And it is an indication that those spirits had developed and learned much before they came to inhabit these bodies or this earth.

Our Tendency to feel “Moved”

“What a weird, emotional mood I must be in,” I thought. Tears were welling up in my eyes, and a lump in my throat and I was watching gymnastics on T.V. It was the ‘76 Olympics and Nadia Comanich had just performed a perfect “10” on the uneven parallel bars. There was something so beautiful, so exquisite about it that I was moved. Her performance was not just fractionally or proportionately better than others, it was different in kind. It had crossed some invisible threshold and become almost unearthly.

Another day, walking through a park and noticing a young family, two parents, two children, walking and laughing hand in hand, I’m suddenly moved to tears, touched in some deep unexpected way.

A spectacular symphony performance, a sunset of almost impossible beauty. You can’t predict when it will happen nor can you plan it or will it to occur. But I wish it would happen more often. I love to feel moved.

What is it that actually happens when we are moved? Is it a physiological reaction of some kind, like crying when we slice onions? Is it an emotional response like when we’re startled or scared? No, it’s so completely different. It feels more like spirit than like body or mind.

Some things, some places, some moments -- in their beauty or their perfection or their tenderness -- seem to transcend what our senses can compute or comprehend. We are overcome, we use the term “moved,” which is a good word because it takes us to some place else, to another time and another place where a higher realm of beauty and perfection existed.

It's hard to explain or even to understand this place to which we are moved, but it lifts us. It is a kind of longing that reminds us of something or someone, and we sense that the wonder we feel is a wonder we once knew.

Our Affinity for the Earth

I sat on a deserted Hawaiian beach, at first light one morning. Awakened early by the mainland time difference, I had walked along the dark sand asking silently for the spirit's renewal of the pre-life insight that comes only when there is peace and faith. I wanted again the warming clarity that can be recalled by remembering but only recreated by recurrence. Under my arm was this manuscript, and I wanted to write by the light of the spirit, not just the memory of it.

That morning the spirit came not from beyond the earth but from within it. As I sat looking East over the primordial sea, the bright dome of the sun bulged the horizon, swathing the underside billows of the clouds with yellow light and tipping the waves with gold. My heart responded to the warmth and my mind to the light, and I knew again that the earth itself is part of the answer.

We are drawn to and calmed and renewed by the beauty of the earth because it was made for us (perhaps partially *by us*). Its power and majesty as well as its beauty speaks to us of God and testifies to us of His love as well as His glory. The crashing music of these waves and the new morning light on the green mountain across the bay are more than the joy of the present; they are a witness of the past. Our affinity for them and for the exhaustless variety of all the natural beauty of the physical earth is an ever-present sign of an eternal past and of a powerful and artistic creator who is also a wise and giving Father.

Why is it so much easier to feel doubt in the noise and squalor of a city than in the silence and serenity of a seascape or a mountain top? Because as a great building testifies of those who

built it, so this earth testifies of Him who made it and of us who are His children. The spiritual emotion of faith is as natural here as the physical/mental emotion of doubt is there.

Spiritual Longing

That first-day-of-vacation Hawaiian sunrise was so glorious that I resolved to sit on that same beach every morning of my holidays at the same hour, becoming a self-taught expert on sunrises. The second morning a grey cloud bank lay low on the ocean, hiding the sun but allowing it to perform a pink, green, and gold miracle on the mackerel patterned clouds above. I thought of our old home in England where at this same hour this same sun was setting.

My mind was again with Wordsworth's words, "The soul that *rises* with us . . . hath had elsewhere its *setting*." The sunrise of this mortal life was the sunset of our preexistent life. And when we die here, the setting of our physical lives will be the rising of our spiritual lives. And then sometime, in the most magnificent new day of all, our physical and spiritual selves will rise together in a miracle called the resurrection.

Despite our affinity for the earth and its beauty, there is something in us that tells us we are strangers here, that this is not our first or most natural home.

As I sit on this beach, sand crabs scurry and burrow into their holes, tiny needle-nosed birds dart across the wave-polished sand and pluck up tiny food morsels, and an occasional school of tiny silver flying fish bursts briefly up and across the water's surface. All are perfectly adapted to where they live on the earth, as much a natural part of this planet as the sand or the sea. They don't need coats or air conditioning to be comfortable here -- or wristwatches strapped on their appendages.

We, on the other hand, have a spiritual intuition that sometimes whispers that we are strangers here on this marvelous orbiting school of nature and experience and time -- that we are

spiritual, eternal beings in a physical, temporary place -- adapting ourselves to the illuminating new beauty that is here but longing deeply at times for the spiritual home we recall not with our memories but with our hearts.

The Logical Need for an Origin for the Spirit in Which We Believe

I've mentioned it before, but I'll mention it again in this context of a list of evidences or prompts that suggest a life before life.

Most people are comfortable with a belief that there is a spirit within man that continues to live after the body dies. But most are uncomfortable with the question of where that spirit originated or came from. They are even more uncomfortable with certain specific "possibilities."

1. The union of a physical sperm and egg created a spirit as well as a body.
2. A spirit somehow evolves and grows out of our minds or our brains.
3. God generated an instantaneous new spirit and put it in each body as it was born.
4. God existed alone in the universe and made people with eternal spirits to keep himself company.

It is far more logical and "light" to believe that the spirits which postdate our bodies also predate them.

Perhaps the choice lies not in whether or not we had a preexistence but in whether or not spirits exist at all. If they do, they have both a spiritual future and a spiritual past.

The even more fundamental question of the origin of life itself, in any form, also suggests an earlier existence. The weakest link and the hardest question in all atheistic, circumstantial "No God, no soul" theories of existence is, "Where did *life* come from?"

Novels, Movies, Entertainment

Themes of ghosts, angels, and spirits from afar have always been popular. Of even more specific relevance here are themes involving the limitations of a disembodied spirit and the desires or longings of a spirit to have a temporal existence or a physical body which can feel, experience, love, and even die.

In Dickens' classic *Christmas Carol*, the ghosts of Christmas Past and Christmas Future were frustrated by their inability to touch and affect people or physical circumstances and events.

Popular movies like "Ghost," "City of Angels," and "Bicentennial Man" present variations on the theme of the desirability and the joy of mortal, physical, temporal experience.

In "Ghost," the Patrick Swasey character, who has been killed, longs for his body as the vehicle with which to express his love to his wife. In "City of Angels," Nicholas Cage plays an angel who would give up his immortality and his ability to fly "just to touch and smell her hair."

And "Bicentennial Man," adapted from an Isaac Asimov novel, is about a robot (Robin Williams) who, over the course of 200 years, gradually becomes a human, fulfilling his deep desire to be able to eat and sleep, to take in and appreciate beauty, to experience and express emotions, to feel love and passion, to have real choices, and ultimately to be able to die.

Perhaps the frequency and the appeal of notions about the wonder and joy of accessing and possessing the physical stem from a time long ago when our spirits had yet to experience mortality and all that goes with it.

Spiritual Differences Between Siblings and
The Feeling that Some Children Have “Older Souls”

I was doing some television work in a New York studio one day which involved satellite links to other locations. We would broadcast for a few minutes and then sit and wait for the link to the next location. During these breaks I had an ongoing discussion with one of the camera men -- a worldly, somewhat crude man -- who essentially told me that he didn't believe in anything except himself, yet who showed a tender affection when I asked about his young daughter.

“What can I tell you,” he said after relating some of her accomplishments, “she's just a special spirit. I've always had the impression that she has an ‘older soul.’”

It struck me as interesting how this self-proclaimed nonbeliever used words like “spirit” and “impression” and “soul.” Even more, it struck me that he sensed, in his beloved little daughter, an “older soul,” a part that knew things, that had deep feelings, a part that seemed older than her body - even older than himself.

I've experienced children like that, some of them my own. I've looked into the eyes of infants and felt not only that they had just come from another place, but that their spirits were as old or older than mine. I've watched my own children, with identical genetic and environmental inputs exhibit completely different personalities and propensities.

There is something missing in the ongoing debate about whether it is genetics or environment that shapes a child. (I'm reminded of the cartoon showing a red-faced father glaring at a bad report card and the little boy asking him, “What do you think it is Dad, environment or heredity?”) What's missing is the third variable, bigger and more determining

than either -- the variable of who we were before we came -- or who and what our spirits had become before they were born into mortality. This factor stands as the strongest explanation for why individual children in the same family -- with the same genetics and the same environment -- are so deeply and profoundly different from each other.

Antiquity and Greek Philosophy

Philosophers large and small have concluded throughout time that it is equally logical -- if not *more* logical -- to believe in a pre-life as to believe in an after life.

In *Phaedo*, Simmias, speaking to Socrates, says:

“Yes, Socrates, I am convinced that there is precisely the same necessity for the existence of the soul before birth, and of the essence of which you are speaking; and the argument arrives at a result which happily agrees with my own notion. For there is nothing which to my mind is so evident as that beauty, goodness and other notions of which you were just now speaking have a real and absolute existence; and I am satisfied with the proof.”

Socrates replies, “But is Cebes equally satisfied? I must convince him also.”

Simmias answers, “Cebes is satisfied, although he is the most incredulous of mortals. . . . I believe he is convinced of the existence of the soul before birth. But that after death the soul will continue to exist is not yet proven.”²³

A premortal life is an idea older than Jesus and Christians, an ongoing belief from very early times. Iamblichus, commenting on Pythagoras, notes that it was the story of Euphorbus and the Phrygian in *Homer* which offered a key to the recollection of one’s premortal existence; and even finds the genius of Homer to lie in his power to stir such intimations of immortality -- a sense of another world, in all of us.²⁴

²³ *Psouetic Dialogues of Plato*, 347 BC (Gospel Link - listed as PHAEDO).

²⁴ *Temple & Cosmos*, p. 367 (on Gospel Link under preexistence).

The substance of Greek philosophy, according to Walter Wili, was the preexistence, the present existence and the future existence of things -- the full and complete plot, the drama of the universe. Without that story the ancient Greek paradigm life lost its meaning. Walter Otto writes that when Christianity put an end to these beliefs, "Greek life seemed to have sunk into the grave with them."²⁵

²⁵ *The Ancient State*, p. 320-322 (on Gospel Link under preexistence).

Note: Also see David Winston, "Pre Existence in Hellenic, Judaic and Mormon Sources," in Truman G. Madsen, ed. *Reflections on Mormonism*, Provo, UT, Religion Studies Center, B.Y.U. 1978, pp. 26-29.

Fundamentals of Unique Humanness

I watched an award winning television show in which a videographer through his internal body-probe micro photography was attempting to support the happenstantial cross-species theory of evolution. It showed the similarities of skeletal structure, of neuron networks and of organ and reproductive function between humans and virtually every other creature -- from shark to elephant. Conclusion: Man is just another animal -- out on one branch of the evolutionary tree -- more advanced from other animals in some ways, less in others.

I always wonder, when I see or read things like this, how someone manages to dwell on such unremarkable similarities, and ignore completely the profound and utterly remarkable differences.

Of course there are physical similarities between the bodies of animals and humans. Why wouldn't God use similar, proven, well-designed skeletal structures in the physical vehicles He created to house His spirit children during the physical learning stage of their eternal education? And why wouldn't He who lives in eternity rather than time, use whatever time He needed to perfect and evolve and fine tune the nature of those physical bodies before He sent our spirits to inhabit them? Does the fact that a car has wheels prove that it evolved from an ox cart which also has wheels? Or does it just show that the same kind of intelligence created both?

But why make it a physical question anyway? Don't all real believers stress that it is the soul or the spirit that came from God?

All animals can "think" to some degree, but only man can think about his thoughts. Don't dismiss that as a cute or simple cliché'. The ability to think about our thoughts is true

human (and divine) *consciousness*. It is this consciousness of thoughts, of self, of options, of time, of plans and of progress that makes us human. And in that context, “human” means “spiritual” and spiritual means “of and from God.”

I left this notion (the stronger logic of creation over the chaotic illogic of chance) to the end of this chapter because I was having a hard time figuring out how to handle it -- how to make an interesting section out of something that often seems so clear to one who trusts his own spirit.

A sarcastic approach occurred to me one day as I listened on the radio to a song by David Wilcox:

Big Mistake²⁶

Verse:

They taught us kids in school
between the recess breaks
that the universe just sort of fell together
in a big mistake.
It started with a bang
That sent the pieces flyin
Then it cooled and twirled
Into dinosaurs and dandelions.

Chorus:

It was a big mistake to have eyes that see
to have love like this inside of me
to have lips that smile as I swim your kiss
to have minds that will forever every part of this.
Oh, the moonlight shrouded in the clouds above
and the autumn leaves and the falling love
the still reflection in the moonlit lake.
Oh, they said, it was a big mistake.

Verse:

²⁶ Big Horizon, A&M Records, ©1994, Hollywood, CA.

Now back in science class
through the looking glass
We were magnifying little ancestors
of our ancient past.
Watch 'em break a couple chromosomes,
Wait a zillion years or so
and get an ostrich, a jellyfish,
a kangaroo, and a Romeo.

Chapter Four

Our Spiritual Past

*What most people don't yet know
(but can).*

Chapter 4: Our Spiritual Past

*What most people don't yet know
(but can)*

Asking

Questions are powerful things. Real questions that you ask because you really want an answer are anything but passive. They focus the attention of the asker. They demand the attention of the “askee.” They motivate action and searching.

When we ask any of the big three questions mentioned earlier (Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?) *who* are we asking, either directly or by implication? We are asking God! Whether we realize it or not, we are asking God. That we even ask the questions or that they even come to our minds is a small but pure evidence that we believe in Him who is the only one that could give us an answer.

Some feel compelled to ask these questions even though they think the answers are beyond reach. Tolstoy wrote one sentence that speaks at once of the importance of knowing, the frustration of not knowing, and the connection of knowing to real life.

“I cannot live without knowing what
I am and why I am here. And that
I can't know, therefore I can't live.”

But we can know! And thus we can more fully live. Asking enough (and hard enough) yields answers. Not casual asking or hypothetical asking; not asking an encyclopedia or the Internet. Asking God and asking the deepest part of ourselves.

The most frequent, oft repeated, and reiterated admonition in all of scripture is *to ask*. Then, we are promised again and again, *we will receive*. A God who loves us yet who is

committed to our *agency* and freedom of choice (who in fact made this earth to give us that agency, freedom, and independence) would not interfere or intervene in ways that would remove that freedom or undermine our initiative. But when we *ask*, it is our initiative and a loving God can *answer* and *bless* without interfering or compromising our agency.

Receiving Answers

The question of where I came from has intrigued if not obsessed me since childhood, partly because of the sense that its answer would so enlighten the other two questions of why we're here and where we're going. So perhaps I've asked it harder and longer than most. And maybe the ever-present question became a frame within which I could see answers that others miss.

Whatever the reasons or the process, the spiritual past has opened itself to me enough that I dare write of it. The openings have come . . . sometimes as I read and feel the words of those I revere, from the verse of poets to the scripture of prophets . . . sometimes in solitary answers to meditation or prayer . . . and sometimes completely unexpectedly, out of the blue, when some beautiful or perfect moment touches or moves something deep inside. Some of these "openings" felt almost like dreams. But dreams seem less real and less logical as we think of them after we're awake. These openings seem more and more real.

As I attempt to write about these openings, help me by reading about them with an open heart. It is hard to write in words that which comes in feelings. But I believe if both of us try, my spirit can code feelings into words as I write, and your spirit can encode them back into feelings as you read.

The Premortal Realm

I lived, as did you, long before being born on this earth. In fact, we lived before there was an earth. We are not products of this earth, nor did we evolve from it, nor were we made to live on it. Rather, it was made for us to live on. This earth is God's handiwork, but we are God's offspring.

I remember, or at moments have remembered, with a dim, partial spiritual memory, our spiritual home. In that memory, in that place, there were other spirits that were far greater, far more advanced than I, and there was one there who was greater than they all, next to God.

It was a vast spiritual place with a kind of macro beauty indescribable in words, unthinkable now, in our micro physical minds. A beauty and scale far beyond. There is nothing here to compare it with, though I felt a haunting familiarity the first time I saw our bright green and blue jewel-like earth in the black of space in the photo taken from the moon. I feel a similar personal awe when I look at the Hubble telegraph photos of vast swirling galaxies or brilliant exploding novae.

More important than how things looked from there is how I felt -- how we all felt. We were something akin to children or to students. We were a different kind of beings in a different level of reality. We were not independent or self-determining in the ways we think of those words now. Options were more limited, we did not completely control our destiny. But we were separate and unique individuals, with opinions and preferences.

We were spirits, and our spirits had form and identity. We, and the environment in which we lived, were composed of spiritual matter -- a brighter, different, more refined type of substance and energy than what we now know. We were surrounded by the physical matter of

the universe as it then existed, but we could not handle or control or interact with it -- somewhat the reverse of here and now where we, as physical matter, can sense spiritual elements around us but can't interact or relate directly to them.

There, as spirits, our thoughts were the main reality. We were a little like science pupils in the theory- and idea-dominated classroom, yet to attend or experience the laboratory -- yet to handle the elements or try the experiments.

Within the narrow opening of my spirit's memory, I can only get to feelings and glimpses -- the positive sure reality of some of the perceptions and some of the limits of premortal life, but few of the details of it. And with it comes a sense of warning . . . do not seek more than that. There is a reason for spiritual forgetfulness while in mortality. Our purpose, God's purpose in sending us here, has to do with our development of faith and independence. We must find ourselves here rather than remembering ourselves there. But knowing we *were* there, and knowing some of the purpose and plan in coming here . . . can help us find our truest selves.

In that spiritual, pre-physical existence, I lived, and grew, and progressed -- over a time span too vast for us to grasp from here. I was an individual, I have always been separate, unique, and distinct from other spirits, developing my own character and characteristics, my own personality and propensities through my own circumstances and choices.

I knew and associated with other spirits and with God. Indeed, I was part of God's family. I, all of us, referred to Him as father because He *is* the father of our spirits. Despite the number of spirits involved, there was an intimacy in our relationship. Nothing was limited by time, because time did not exist. I had relationships with other spirits, some of whom were especially close and dear, who loved me as I loved them.

The Plan

At a pivotal point in this life before life, God, our Father, aided by His eldest spirit son and our eldest spirit brother, presented to us a plan for the next phase of our eternal progression -- a masterful, comprehensive plan that both thrilled and terrified us.

The plan called for a new kind of existence in a new and very different kind of place. We would leave our Father and our spiritual home and take on physical bodies to populate a physical world. The world would be a remarkable place, filled with exquisite beauty and joy but also full of ugliness and pain. We would have unprecedented agency and a virtually unlimited number and combination of options from which to choose. We would descend into a realm of time and of maturation, deterioration, and renewal, none of which we had yet experienced. And perhaps most remarkable of all, we would become parents, participating with God in the creation of physical bodies for others of our spirit siblings who would come to earth as our children. We would then have stewardship over the growth and progress of those other spirits -- just as our parents did for us. Prior, parenthood was God's exclusive prerogative and we were awed by the prospect of mirroring and experiencing His role.

I experienced that awe, and the overwhelming anticipation and excitement of an entire new sphere of experience. But I also felt the keen apprehension of unprecedented risk. I stretched to grasp the reality of going so far away in space and in time, of taking on a make up and mind so different that my spirit home -- and my own spirit self -- would scarcely be remembered, only in vague brief glimpses if at all. In fact I was told, we were all told, that a veil of spiritual forgetfulness was a necessary and integral part of this physical laboratory -- that the mortal experience (or experiment) would not serve its growth and independence-creating

purpose if we could remember the details of our origin and rely on past spiritual experience. Eternal apron strings would have to be cut if we were to find and learn to rely on our deeper selves. I worried whether I would remember those I loved, whether we would find each other during our mortal lifespans, whether we would overlap in the new elements of time and geography between the spiritual realm and the physical.

Despite the trepidation, I shouted for joy at mortality's prospect. I felt, as did you, a keen anticipation. We would live among and experience physical matter. We would go out of the classroom's theory and into the laboratory's reality. We would experience more and feel more than ever before! We would face risk and chance and daily choice. We would learn to live and to love in ways we had never known. We would live within a realm of time, and we would die.

The best earthly analogy for what I felt (though it falls far short) is that of a grown child going off to college or university. He has lived with his parents for many years, loving and learning in the protected environment of the home and the guiding presence of parents. But the time comes when living there longer is counterproductive to growth. So the child, feeling more trepidation than he shows, leaves for school -- moves to a riskier, freer environment -- where he is much more on his own. Choices are his, and parents hope from afar that what he has become, what he has taken with him from them, will help him choose wisely. He can call home -- the phone is there -- and parents encourage him to do so -- wanting him still to need them even as he learns to rely ever more on himself. As time passes, the child becomes more like his parents -- experiencing more and more of the same things they have experienced, so that when he sees them again their relationship has changed. He knows them better, having done some of what

they have done. Ironically, it is only by leaving someone that we can ultimately become closer to them. So away the child goes to school, hoping to return as more than he was when he left.

Similarly, you and I and everyone else in their turn, got ready to go away to this incredible orbiting school -- this world of contrasts and conflicts, of opposites and options.

The joy I felt was tempered, even undercut, by a sense of ominous danger and risk. I felt strongly, as we all must have, the worry and the threat of not returning. I knew that God's realm was one of perfection, and I saw and understood how the imperfection inherent in the physicality and freedom of this place could disqualify me to come back, could taint me in ways that would make me inconsistent, incompatible, or incapable of a return. Still, the predominant feeling was excitement.

Purpose

Part of the excitement I felt as I anticipated mortality came from the clarity with which I (and each of us) understood *why* we were going to earth.

Excitement is always heightened when purpose or mission is crystal clear and specific. Astronauts, for example, talk of how keen their anticipation is as they make preparations for a space mission and know the precise reasons for going and the exact things they are expected to accomplish. Elements of danger and difficulty also enhance the “high” as they get ready to blast up out of this world and into space.

Magnified a million times, that is the sort of keen, joyful anticipation my spirit felt as I came to understand the awesome purposes of blasting down, out of eternity and into this world. I would form new kinds of relationships, based on mutual *needs*, and feel new kinds of love involving interdependency, service, and physical attraction -- love we would be able to express with completely new kinds of personal intimacy.

The contrast of these temporal possibilities with our spiritual existence was so sharp that it took the equivalent of my spiritual breath away. Relationships on a whole new scale. Experience on a whole new scale. Independence on a whole new scale.

I felt this purpose (and a gratitude for it) far more deeply and far more clearly there as a spirit than I can ever recreate or relate here as a physical being. Earth life was to be a mission so intense, so varied, so eternity-changing that it completely overwhelmed us. Part of the purpose was to “link” us to each other in ways far more intimate than we had yet experienced. We would come as helpless babies, completely dependent on our parents -- parents who would then, through this remarkable new concept of time and aging, eventually become dependent on

us. At death, each of us (including those who died without having all of the experiences, all of the relationships, all of the choices and commitments they needed) would pass on to a new kind of spiritual place where, with the memory of our physical lives intact, much of the learning could continue. From there, through our own ongoing experience, through observing this earth, and through the vicarious experience of those still on earth (particularly our descendants), we would continue to make choices as we awaited the resurrection when spirit and perfected body reunite as a more completed and more joyful soul.

The scope and wonder and beauty of God's plan and our purpose overwhelmed my spirit. A level of growth and life had been opened to me that manifested the completeness and immensity of God's love. He was willing to literally give me everything He had -- to let me try to experience and become all that He had. I realized, there in the remarkable light of that plan, that there were no limits to God's love.

The Risk

In the narrow opening of my spirit memory I glimpsed a great and vast council where we received a full preview of this mortal stage -- God's plan involving a physical life that was necessary for us all in our progression. I could tell that all who were there felt the same awed wonder that I did. But I knew my worry and apprehension was also shared by all who were there. If we left, how could we return? Agency encompassed the possibility of failure -- indeed, the guarantee of wrong choices in some things. Would those choices, those failures, those errors prevent us from making it back to God's presence and God's family? I understood that the price for the knowledge of mortal experience would be the loss of the very innocence that allowed us to live with God.

During that great council, a leader in that preexistent realm, one with his own agenda and his own following, stepped forward to propose a solution. Give him the power and the position, the reign, and the recognition, he said, and he would guarantee our return. He would intervene and intercede as necessary, preventing our mistakes, removing the risk, insuring us against failure.

Many were intrigued and tempted by this guarantee. In fact, one-third of the spirits followed the dark and demanding prince, persuaded by his personality and his presentation. But I held back, partly because I sensed the self-serving undercurrent of his comforting half truths, but mostly because I felt drawn to the tone of full and frightening truth I felt as our eldest spirit brother reiterated the Father's plan where agency dictates risk and the possibility of failure, yet where the powerful purposes of mortality can be fully realized, the Godlike rewards fully obtained.

The openings in my spirit memory are particularly strong here. I have felt within myself a clear loyalty and allegiance to the plan of risk and agency, and I have felt spirit memory traces of my aversion and strong opposition to the alternative. I believe these feelings are clear in my spirit because they were part of the most pivotal personal decision of eternity -- the decision to come here, to take this risk, to live this uncontrollable life.

The Answer and the Ransom

There in that great premortal council, the most magnificent moment and the deepest emotion were yet to come. Both came as the missing piece in the puzzle of the plan -- as the overwhelming answer to our fearful question about how we could return. They came when the one greater than us all, the champion and presenter of God's plan of agency made a condescension beyond my imagination, offering to sacrifice himself in a way that would bridge the chasm between where God is and where we would find ourselves after our plunge into mortality. Using His own perfection as the ultimate collateral, He offered to pay our debts, to undergo the collective pain of all and to somehow absorb and atone for all error and sin, making it possible for each of us to return. He offered to use His bounty to pay for our folly, His infinite perfection to compensate for our countless mistakes. He offered to do so at a price of pain beyond calculation or imagination.

The feelings that condescension unlocked in me went beyond anything I had ever known. There, as here, the generosity and power of the atonement filled me with awe. This eldest and purest of brothers, who owed us nothing, would give us everything. At the cost of unimaginable personal suffering, He would use His endless credits to balance our endless debits. He would give Himself as a ransom in the ultimate act of love.

Unable to match or even to comprehend the selflessness of Jehovah²⁷ or Christ, Lucifer or Satan took away his third, cast out by his own power lust, and became the dark that opposes

²⁷For those interested in the implied contention that Jehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus of the New Testament, compare Isaiah 44:6 with Revelation 1:8, Isaiah 48:16 with John 8:56-58, and Isaiah 58:13-14 with Mark 2:28.

all light.

You and I and the other two-thirds who remained, witnessed and participated in the unfolding and the implementation of God's plan -- a plan sometimes called the plan of exaltation or the plan of salvation because its objective is to bring us ultimately closer to who God is and to where God is.

The Creation

This earth was created not out of nothing, but by organizing matter which already existed. The time it took or the methods used are not comprehensible to us here, but it was a natural process, governed by higher laws, some known only to God. The earth was formed and organized and beautified and populated with a vast array of life. There, then, I was aware of and somehow involved in the framing of this incredible earth. Here, now, the details of this creation are above and far beyond our finite minds. There, we lived in a realm of eternity, where time was not relevant, and we lived with God whose ways and powers were infinite. Here, we live in finite, time-bound mortality where the *how* and *when* questions are too far beyond us to be relevant.

What is relevant is the *why* question. The *reason* for the earth was *us*, the spirit children of God. The earth was made for us -- and everything in it -- a gift of incomprehensible proportions. Some of us participated in its creation, and when it was ready, we began taking our turns in mortality.

When those turns came, and what they consisted of, was part of God's plan. Just as different children in our families today may need different schools according to their unique, individual abilities and needs (and their own unique weaknesses), so each of us needed different circumstances and challenges during our physical lives to maximize our opportunity for growth and progression. Thus what may look arbitrary and unfair in terms of where and how people come into the world, is, to God with His ultimate perspective, exactly what is potentially and ultimately best for each of us.

So down to earth I came, taking my turn, coming into the body and the time and the

circumstances that God willed for me. My physical body was conceived by my parents and I was born on earth. The veil of spiritual forgetfulness dropped across my mind and I grew from a baby. Within me is my spirit, the essence of who I am and have always been. Beyond me lies the potential and possibility of returning to God and bringing with me all I have learned and all I have become while here. I am alone but not alone. God is accessible by prayer and my spirit is accessible simply by the acknowledgment that it is there.

Thus I am related to every person on this earth who lives, who has lived, who will yet live. Physically you might be my distant cousin, one hundred or one thousand times removed, but spiritually you are my sibling. There is purpose in this earth and in everything that happens here -- purpose and plan. I am part of that plan, as are you, and the plan is of and from a real and personal God who sent us here from a life before life.

Waiting and Watching

As I waited for my turn on earth, I was not unaware of mortality or of those who descended into it before I did. On the contrary, I was vitally interested in those who's turn preceded me, particularly in those I had known and associated with and in those who would be my ancestors on earth.

I do not have any spiritual memory of whether we were able (or even inclined) to see all that went on on this earth from our spiritual existence. I do know there were some times and there were some people in which and in whom I had particular personal interest. I was aware of certain individual spirits -- of their lives on earth and of some particular experiences they were having.

I know that though my interest and anticipation was high, I was happy to wait for my mortal turn. I knew that the time I would come -- a later time -- would be filled with exceptional opportunity, options, and possibility. I was content to continue with life as we knew it there and to wait for life as I would come to know it here.

Read It Again in Your First Person

I wish I could have read those last sections to you -- my feelings and veiled recollections of a premortal world -- rather than you reading it. Then you might have heard the conviction in my voice, and I might have been able to tell, by your reaction, how close you are to believing.

Whether you believe what I have just told you about me is one thing. Another more important question is whether you believe that your own spirit experienced similar things. If the opened part of my spiritual memory is accurate and true of me, then it is also true of you.

I believe you will have more spiritual discernment, more claim to inspiration and guidance in thinking and asking about your own soul and your own story, than in reading about mine. So I ask you to read this account once again, starting on page 85. This time, don't think of it as my experience -- think of it as yours. Read it in the first person so that the "I's" and "me's" are you.

Before, you may have been asking, "Did this happen to him?" This time, ask the question, of yourself and of God, "Did this happen to me?"

Natural Faith

There is, within you as within me, so much that is unique, so much about how you think and how you feel that cannot be explained merely by heredity or environment. You are who you are because you have *become* that way, little by little, over eternity. The gifts and talents you have were developed and earned, as were your weaknesses and faults.

With you, within your spirit, is a conscience, an innate sense of right and wrong and of spiritual light and dark, a propensity to believe and to acknowledge the spiritual. This conscience and these spiritual propensities can be blunted and dulled by inattention or denial, or they can be sharpened and fine-tuned, even magnified, by belief and by faith.

Faith, in that context, is a fascinating concept. It is not a belief in something completely beyond us. It is a belief in something *within* us. As one learns and believes spiritual truth it feels rather more like remembering than like discovering. The veil becomes thin, there is a familiarity about spiritual things.

Thus believing and faith are partially a product of *wanting* or *desiring*. We each have spiritual capacity since our essence *is* spirit. But here, clothed in our physicality, our spirit selves can be denied and diminished if we do not allow ourselves to believe, if we do not want to believe.

Allowing Yourself to Believe

Believe in God, believe in your own spirit, believe there is more to you than physical genetics, believe that you came from a spiritual premortal existence. Believing is the conscious act of will that is the beginning of faith. Spiritual believing is a natural thing for a spiritual being. It feels easier and more natural (and more *light*) than not believing.

Indeed it is harder not to believe that we have within us some divine spark, some God-sent spirit that separates us from animals and from the rest of the physical world. Animals become all they can be by following their instincts and obeying their appetites. Humans become all they can be by disciplining and mastering and controlling their appetites.

There is no weakness in wanting to believe. In fact, that desire is the source of our greatest strength. The inclination of your spirit self to believe is as natural as the inclination of your physical self to eat. The spiritual *light* that brings faith and truth comes from Christ, the same source that enlightened and emboldened us in the premortal existence to choose to experience mortality. The spiritual darkness and denial that tries to undermine faith and to ridicule the desire to believe comes from Lucifer, the same source that tried coercion and deception to enslave us and empower himself in the premortal existence.

Allow yourself to believe -- not just in the possibility of some vaguely defined superior being and of an occasional spiritual inclination within yourself. Believe in the real God who is our Heavenly Father and in an earth with a purpose and in your own eternal spirit which came from and can return to God.

The Process of Believing

Reading about and thinking for the first time about our life before life is a little like walking on deep, crusted snow. In some places the footing is strong and sure, other spots are slippery, and in some places the crust is thin and we break through and fall. But with a little time, and with the snowshoes of faith and prayer the journey to belief and reassurance can be made. It is a worthy destination because we arrive with a deeper self-worth and a wider love than we have ever known.

I would like to tell you more details about our premortal life -- what it looked like and sounded like, what we tasted and smelled. But sights and sounds and senses are of this world and are part of our temporal memories. If there are corresponding spiritual counterparts, I know or remember nothing of them. They are blocked by the agency-insuring veil that is part of the very plan we are participating in.

I believe that the *feelings* and spiritual *impressions* that do get through the veil are *permitted by God* because they enhance the plan, they increase our sense of who we are, our self-worth, and our chances of making good decisions and thus returning to God. These feelings are limited to what God will allow us to know, and what I feel and know cannot surpass what He has given to His prophets -- insights that have the power to change our lives and transform our world. As I continue to try to relate these insights, I will say “we” rather than “me” because if you are still reading, I hope by now you are thinking of this ancient story as ours rather than mine.

The process of believing, of spiritual knowing, for you and for me, is the same. As I have searched, and read, and thought and prayed, I have believed what has *fit with what I feel*.

That fit, of information with inclination, of feeling with faith, is the key to spiritual knowing -- a knowing that is more sure than any sight or any sound.

Relationships and Love

While romantic love and parental love and other kinds of family and personal relationships are new to us in mortality and are part of the reason for our physical lives, love was certainly not unknown to us in our premortal life. We loved God with a love that combined deep personal feelings toward a father with worshipful awe toward a Creator.

And we felt a spiritual version of sibling love for each other -- particularly for those we knew and associated with. The spiritual relationships we had there carried over to here. The people we find it so natural and so easy to love are people we already loved. The people we love and marry and bring into this world as children are spirits we knew and loved before. Our own parents are connected to us not only by physical genetics but by spiritual bonds of love that had their beginning before this earth.

Most people who have faith in an afterlife believe that their deepest loves, their fondest relationships, can endure death -- that they will still love, and be with those they love -- in the next life.

The same comforting conviction, the same spiritual ring of truth, can come concerning our life before. Love, we somehow all knew, is bigger than time, and more boundless than this earth. True love does not die either when we leave this life or when we enter it. Sometimes the "love at first sight" that we may experience with our spouse or with our children is really "love at next sight," and those whom we find easy and natural to know are often those we have known for a very long time.

Plan and Purpose

Any loving parent wants one ultimate thing for his children -- happiness. We may have all kinds of other hopes and dreams for our offspring -- a good education, a happy marriage, sound health, a productive career -- but all are means-to-an-end objectives. The ultimate goal is happiness.

It is the same, only vastly and perfectly complete, with God. His purpose is our happiness. In the premortal life, we understood this purpose with a clarity and surety that is beyond us here, and thus we were awed and overwhelmed by God's wondrous mortal plan to bring this purpose about. We know this plan, we understood it, we even voted for it in the sense that we opposed the counter plan which sought to remove the independence, the agency, and the risk that made the deeper happiness possible.

God's "Mortality Plan" for the salvation and progression of us, His children, was perfect and complete . . . and *new*. It involved a host of elements never before experienced: earth and bodies, families and family love, service and joy, time and progression, agency and atonement.

Earth and Bodies

The ferns in the forests, the evening hues and shadows of deep canyons, the black, starry desert sky, the thundering ocean surf . . . the earth surrounds us with beauty and also teaches of God. Our bodies interact with the earth -- sensing it, using it, learning from it. Our bodies themselves educate our spirits through experiences and encounters with pain and pleasure, with exhilaration and exhaustion, with sensation and suffering. God's plan called for leaving the controlled, predictable greenhouse environment of a spirit world and plunging into the chaotic unpredictability of physical mortality.

Scripture tells us that we were created in the image of God and there is a double meaning. Spiritually, we are God's children and, as all children, in the image of our Father. In our premortal life, one profound way we differed from God is that He, although a spirit and our Spiritual Father, had a wondrous and perfect physical body. His omnipotence was related to His completeness. With perfect spirit and perfect body, nothing was beyond His reach or His control. His experience and His joy, as well as His power, was unlimited and complete. God's physical self does not limit His spiritual self; it un-limits it, allowing both the joy and the control of all things physical and spiritual.

Our bodies afford us the joys of passion and of discipline. Our appetites, from food to sex, offer us experience and pleasure our spirits had never known, and the agency that allows appetites to destroy some allows others to learn the discipline that upgrades pleasure to joy.

The mortal bodies promised us in premortal life and given to us here are the beginning step of the completion of our souls, since spirit and body constitute the soul. Never mind that our bodies now are subject to all manner of problem and pain. They are in the image of the

complete God, and they will ultimately, after teaching us through their imperfections, become perfected in the resurrection and allow us to begin to know what God knows. The bodies we each have, with their particular infirmities and frailties are the very bodies each of us needs to maximize our individual opportunities to overcome, to experience, and to grow.

Babies, capable of infusing us with a uniquely tender form of love, are the creation and design of God who prepared a way for an adult spirit to develop a body to complete his soul. In the purity of little children, we see God.

In life before life, we participated in the design of our own mortality -- of our circumstances, our opportunities, even our bodies. Thus, when we say, as we all do, "I didn't choose this," we are wrong. We did.

Love and Families

Before I was a parent, the idea of being willing to give my life for someone was beyond my comprehension. One night, looking at our first-born toddler as she slept, I realized how quickly and how easily I would die for her if the choice were her or me.

As parents, we reach levels of unconditional love that are otherwise impossible. And other kinds of new levels through romantic and marital love. These levels of love and interdependence were and are a part of the plan we knew and rejoiced in during our premortal life.

Family is the organization of God -- one of generations rather than governments, and of patriarchy and parenthood rather than parliaments and politics.

The joy we felt in the life before life was not an isolated or individualistic happiness. It was communal. We were to become linked and interdependent in a most remarkable and real way. We were to be children and descendants of some of our spiritual siblings -- and parents and progenitors of others.

The worship of ancestors was not a part of this plan, but the respect and reverence of them was, and the cherishing and stewardship of children. This sentiment is stated in the words of the last verse of the Old Testament: "The turning of the heart of children to fathers and of the heart of fathers to children. This turning, collectively, can save our society. Individually, it can save our souls.

Service and Joy

In our life before life we had none of the physical needs or problems that we have now. First, because we were spirits; second, because we were with God. When there are no needs, there is no service and when there is no service, a great and particular type of joy cannot exist.

The joy of serving, of helping, of recognizing and meeting the needs of others was part of the plan for our mortality. Here, we realized, there would be endless needs. The problems, challenges, and difficulties of a physical life would cause us to need each other and would give us countless chances to give. Giving, a god-like process, would produce joy both for the giver and the receiver.

We usually love those who serve us, and we always, over time, love those whom we serve. In our life before life we realized that love itself, the greatest god-like quality, would be fostered and expanded by our mortal lives on earth.

Time and Progression

We've all experienced having the intention to do something but having no time frame in which to do it -- no deadline. It never gets done. On a much vaster scale, we can try to imagine making progress and accomplishing change in an eternal environment where there literally was no time. Within an existence completely open-ended, certain types of growth and progress were extremely difficult and limited. By giving us a finite lifetime in a structured physical world with measurable years, days, and hours, God's plan gave us opportunities for a new kind of progress.

As we stood there, in our pre-mortality, on the brink of time, we understood far more than we can now about the *gift* of time. On earth, we would learn to work and function within time, to do mental and physical work within time frames, to set deadlines and to bring things to pass. It would be a new, accelerated kind of progression, like a focal point on an endless, blurred line or a tiny knot in an endless thread.

We can enhance the joy of this tiny knot or focal point of time by being aware of the endless thread going forever forward and forever backward. We can know there is a life after and a life before, but we can also remember what the Sanskrit poet said: "Today, well lived makes every yesterday a dream of joy and every tomorrow a vision of hope."

As each of us were assigned a time in the sequence of mortality -- a turn on earth -- those of us who are here now received the blessing of coming late in that sequence, at a time when options and awareness are far greater than in earlier times. Whatever it was that qualified us for this, we should be profoundly grateful.

Agency and Atonement

The story of Adam and Eve is the perfect metaphor for what each of us did in leaving our spiritual pre-life. In the account of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve made a choice to partake of mortality and were thus cast out of their “garden” of immortality. Essentially, the price of the experience and knowledge they would gain by becoming mortal was death and the loss of their innocence.

It is the same for all of us. The cost of coming *here* to gain the perspective of mortality was the loss of our protected innocence *there*. We chose, as did Adam and Eve, to take the risk in order to have the experience -- to take our spiritual capital out of guaranteed eternal savings and to invest it in higher risk stock of mortality.

The problem is that the risks of mortality are so great that none of us escape them. Mortality and learning is so intertwined with trial and error that we all lose enough of our spiritual capital that we become debtors who need a ransom paid to allow our return. We understood this in our premortal life and knew that the plan was neither workable nor complete without that ransom, that Savior, that atonement. Our allegiance and our indebtedness to Him became complete there in that vast counsel where the only one who could said that He would.

The poet Wordsworth, when criticized for his suggestion of a premortal existence, defended it by saying, “There is nothing to contradict it, and the fall of man presents an analogy in its favor.”²⁸ If man fell, where did he fall from? From the protected spiritual premortal existence into an atonement-requiring agency.

Incidentally, the story of Adam and Eve is more than a metaphor. Irrespective of how

²⁸ *Deposition of a Disciple*, Neal A. Maxwell, p. 42.

long or by what methods God created this earth, there came an actual moment when the creation was complete and when God sent the first two of His spirit children to inhabit the physical bodies He had made. Those first two were Adam and Eve, and on that day mortality began. These first two spirits facilitated the physical lives and experiences of each of us by making the difficult choice that made them mortal and allowed the beginning of the procreation of the human race. Adam and Eve consciously gave up their innocence and their immortality in order that they, and all the rest of us, might experience mortality.

Chapter Five

Answers for Mortality

*Why it helps to know
(what changes when we do).*

Chapter 5: Answers for Mortality

*Why it helps to know
(what changes when we do)*

If . . . then

“Mortality” is the pivotally important physical place between spiritual past and spiritual future. How it is designed was determined by our past existence. Knowledge of that past influences how we live our present, which in turn determines our future eternity.

Focus on the first part of that last sentence. How does knowledge of or belief in a pre-life impact and influence how we live here and now? What difference does it make in terms of who we are and where we are going with our lives? Answer these question by imagining an orphan without home or heritage. There are no expectations and no encouragement, he lives only for and only with himself. Then one day he finds his parents, his family and his past (or they find him). Suddenly he knows he was not a product of chance or of abandonment as he had assumed. He learns that he was taken from his family as a tiny child and had no memory of his birth or infancy with them. But now he has found them and they are a strong and honorable family, they have missed him, longed for him, and they love him deeply.

What changes? Everything changes. His perspective, his self-image, his confidence. He gains hope and home and heritage. He loses loneliness and the listless lethargy of the lost. Knowing his past, where he came from and who he truly is, dramatically alters his present and his future.

Belief in our spiritual past can have an even more profound effect.

Ponder first a list of the insights offered in the previous chapters, then contemplate a second list -- of how we (and our lives) are changed by these insights. Please read the second list slowly, pondering and focusing on the significance of each potential life change.

If we can believe that we are . . .

1. Spiritual beings who came from and will return to a spiritual place.
2. Somewhat chosen or favored spirits to live in this late time of maximal options and opportunities.
3. Offspring of God with the mortal purpose of experience and expansion.
4. Spirits who were loyal to God's plan of physical agency and who observed and possibly participated in the creation of this earth to fulfill that plan.
5. Spiritual children who become physical parents to spiritual siblings, learning through families the deepest lessons of love.
6. Benefactors of an atonement that allows us to overcome mistakes and return to God.

Then, because of these beliefs . . .

1. We can live within a longer-term framework with broader goals and perspectives.
2. We can make better decisions, basing them on the longest term (lifetime) goal of *returning*.
3. We can accept illness, accident and crisis as temporary challenges and opportunities for learning.
4. We can have deeper faith that God, in His eternal perspective, is loving, wise, and fair rather than arbitrary or capricious.
5. We can see marriage in a completely new and respectful way -- even as an eternal partnership.
6. We can understand our children much better and grasp why they are so different from

us (and from their brothers or sisters). We can respect our children more and understand the generations could have been reversed and that, except for birth order, they could be our *parents*.

7. We can prioritize and balance our lives more effectively, with more emphasis on what lasts longest -- the relationships and self worth that predate and postdate this world.

8. We can have a paradigm of stewardship which breeds appreciation and awareness rather than a paradigm of ownership which breeds either envy and jealousy or pride and conceit.

9. We can hope more for spiritual guidance in the events of our lives and less for physical control over all of them.

10. We can accept our dependence on God and interdependence with people rather than seeking independence from both.

11. We can have better, deeper reasons for day-to-day goodness and day-to-day joy.

12. We can develop and feel a new and more real kind of gratitude which enhances happiness regardless of our circumstances.

13. We can develop a unique combination of humility and confidence, with both stemming from our eternal relationship to a loving and perfect Heavenly Father.

14. We can learn to see our talents, gifts, and favorable circumstances not as privileges but as responsibilities -- as opportunities and obligations to help others and serve the God who gave them all to us.

15. We can love our spiritual brothers and sisters (everyone) more and eliminate prejudice, intolerance, nationalism, and other related poisons from our lives.

16. We can find deeper appreciation for nature and for the beauty of the earth as literal gifts from God.

17. We can form a more real relationship with God and Christ and thus pray more insightfully and appreciate the atonement more knowledgably.

18. We can deal with questions of creation, realizing that understanding God's motives is more important and more possible than understanding His methods.

19. We can view ourselves with greater respect and higher regard, realizing that our physical weaknesses and appetites can ultimately be overcome by our spiritual potential.

20. We can look at the hereafter not as a vague or mythical place of eternal rest but as continuing phases of eternal progress.

Benefits of a Belief in a Before

Note that each of the twenty benefits just listed begins with “we can.” Belief in a life before life is an *enabler*. It allows us to understand things and to do things that are beyond the capacity of one who thinks back only to birth. Each of the twenty deserves a deeper look. They have not been listed (or now explained) in any particular order of importance because, when we think of them, each one is of ultimate importance.

1. *Broader Framework*

Time management and goal setting experts tell us that the best short-term goals are derived and divided from clear long-term goals. Someone who has planned his month is more clear on what he wants to do each week or each day. Likewise, setting goals and priorities for life works better when we know something of eternity and its purposes.

As a management consultant, I’ve sat with business people as they try to carve out their mission statements, their pro forma projections, their short- and long-term corporate goals. I find they can always be far more insightful in looking at their future if they remember their past. I encourage them to think a little about where they have come from and why they formed a company in the first place. Within that perspective, goals for the future become more meaningful and more clear.

We came to this earth to progress, to learn to control the physical, to make choices and face challenges, to love, to have families and deepen relationships. If we set goals based on where we came from and why we are here, we will find more joy in this “physical present” and more connection to our spiritual future.

2. *Better Decisions*

Not only the goals we set but the *decisions we make* are strengthened and simplified by a knowledge of where we came from. The word *return* can become a one-word mission statement which incorporates an understanding of our spiritual past and future, and of what our purpose is here in between. A deep desire to fulfill mortality's purpose, to live and learn and love in such a way that we are worthy to return to God . . . such a desire and a mind set can influence every decision we make, large or small.

In our family, each child has a chart in the privacy of the last page of his diary or journal. It is labeled "Decisions in Advance." The idea is, if we know where we came from and why we are here, many decisions, even ones we are years away from implementing, become more simple and clear. They have made entries like, "I will not do drugs," "I will be honest," "I will save sex for real commitment and love," "I will graduate from college." The best long-term future decisions are made with a view toward our long-term past and our long-term purpose.

3. *Crisis as Opportunity*

I met a blind man years ago on a street corner in Southampton on the south coast of England. He and his seeing eye dog were selling baskets. In our brief conversation he taught me much about humor and about perspective.

"Did you make the baskets?" I asked.

"All but the dog baskets. The dog made those."

As we talked, he detected a trace of pity in my voice and he didn't like it. "See here," he said in his perfect English syntax, "you've got one sense that works better than mine, but I've got four that work better than yours." He then proved it by telling me of sounds I could not hear and smells I could not smell. He said he thought of his blindness as an opportunity that had

opened whole worlds to him.

That perspective would come more easily to all of us if we could accept that we came from and will return to a place without physical infirmity and that such challenges (indeed all challenges) are part of the purpose and part of the reason for our being here. Faith in both our spiritual past and our spiritual future won't take the pain out of illness, injury, and personal loss, but it will lend a degree of faith and scope to our hardest times and allow us to accept them as part of what we chose long ago.

4. *A Wise and Fair God*

If you had walked into a stadium in the middle of a race, you wouldn't declare the race was unfair because some runners were ahead of others. You wouldn't call the race organizer unfeeling or arbitrary and refuse to support or believe in him. You would assume the runners who were ahead got there by their earlier efforts and, if you were a knowledgeable race fan, you would also assume that some of the runners now behind would end up ahead.

If we walk into a school and see pupils sitting in a particular grade, we assume that they got there by working their way through earlier grades.

Perhaps an even better metaphor is an Australian aborigine going on an extended walkabout from his primitive tribe and by chance returning on the day that a medical missionary, who had arrived in his absence, was performing an appendectomy on his wife. What the aborigine sees is a white man using a sharp knife to cut into his wife. All of the conclusions that jump to his mind are wrong.

Just as wrong are the judgments people make in viewing this world. They see some rich and some poor, some crippled and some healthy, some living long and well in wickedness and

others, good and earnest, dying young . . . and they conclude either that there is no God or that God is either uninterested or unfair.

If the aborigine knew the full story he would thank the doctor. If we know the full spectrum of opportunity we thank God for giving each of us the circumstances and the challenges that maximize our opportunity for growth, learning, and progress.

5. *Eternal Partners*

“A partnership of convenience,” “Something we’ll try to see if it works,” “A conditional commitment,” “A good thing until one or both of us changes and moves on.” . . . So many of today’s definitions or perceptions of marriage are so shallow and so temporary. Marriages become flighty and fragile and when they break they leave behind so much hurt and often so much damage to children.

What could fix them? What could make them stronger? In simple terms, *a longer-term perspective*: Knowing we were sent here as members of God’s family to form eternal families of our own, understanding that the commitments and deeper levels of love involved in marriage are central and critical to our purpose in being here. Realizing that working through marital difficulties and adjusting together constitutes the very kind of emotional and spiritual maturing that God expects of us here -- that He sent us here to gain.

Agency and freedom of choice are what allow us to grow and progress while we are here. But we must remember that our physical lives are short, and if we make convenient little short-term choices, moving in and out of relationships rather than staying committed and working through problems, we will have little to take with us when we leave this life.

Two people who believe that they may have met and been soul mates before this life . . .

and that they can remain together and committed after this life . . . can develop a depth or “oneness” that is otherwise impossible. They can help to spiritually create each other and interact with a spiritual synergy that can change their world.

6. *Brothers, Sisters and Parents*

My five-year-old daughter said something unconsciously profound one lazy Sunday afternoon. She marched up to me, looked me straight in the eye, and said, “You’re not really my Daddy.” With my instant, full attention she explained, “In Sunday School my teacher said that God is our Father and we’re all brothers and sisters.”

I relaxed for a minute, but she wasn’t finished. “And I’ve been thinking about it, Dad, and I think I’m really your big sister.”

In her mind it might have been a child’s demand for more respect. But to me, knowing the specialness of her spirit and believing in a life before, it was a statement of probability.

Whatever the case, I know that my belief that we both lived before in a spiritual place makes me respect her more, makes me more aware of the trust she put in me by coming to me as a helpless infant, makes me try harder to repay her trust by being the best Dad I can be.

Knowing of a life before life helps us see that our children are who they are -- that they are each unique and need unique, individually tailored parenting from us. Children are not “lumps of clay” that “parent sculpturers” can mold into whatever they wish. They are more like seedlings, looking similar to each other in their infancy but each programmed to become its own unique kind of tree. Parents are gardeners, and do best if they *observe* what “kind of tree” they are and nurture accordingly.

Knowing of a life before life also helps parents understand why their children are so different from each other and to blame themselves less for some of their children’s tendencies even as they try harder to help them overcome.

As parenting writers and lecturers, Linda and I have always said that the most important

thing parents can do is *watch* and *observe* their children to strive to know who they truly are -- what their unique and inherent gifts, inclinations, talents, and personalities really consist of. One of the worst things parents can do, on the other hand, is to try to force kids into being something the parents wish for, without regard to who and what the child already is.

Some children have gifts and propensities so obvious and so profound that it is only natural to help them develop (and only natural to believe that they developed these talents before this life -- how *unnatural* to believe Mozart's virtuosity was just a product of chance). But most children's gifts and natures are more subtle and take longer to flower and longer to recognize. Still, any parent who stares into an infant's eyes begins to sense that that child came from somewhere else and that he brought a lot with him. Focusing on and responding to that feeling can make one into a better parent.

7. *Priorities and Balance*

"You can't take it with you."

The old cliché is supposed to motivate us *away* from materialism and things without eternal significance. How about a positive corollary that can motivate us *toward* the things of real value.

"You brought it with you to build on and take back with you."

We brought with us, within our spirits, our character, our personalities, our talents and gifts, our relationships with others and with God. Mortality, with its enhanced experience and options, allows us to build on all of these eternal things and to return with them in tact -- deeper and expanded.

Knowing this can have powerful impact on our priorities, causing us to take more time

for family, for friends, and for self-development and helping us avoid the obsessions with career and material things that destroy our balance and accumulate things we cannot take with us.

8. *Stewardship Paradigm*

If you think of an “ownership attitude” metaphorically as a tree trunk, what are the branches growing out? When we see someone who owns more, we grow limbs of envy or jealousy or resentment. When we see those with less, we sprout branches of conceit or pride.

Ownership is certainly a viable economic concept, but as a spiritual paradigm it is poison. “All I want is the property next to mine,” is an insatiable appetite that takes our time and energy away from more important things.

Belief in a Creator who made this earth for us to live on and enjoy changes our paradigm to “stewardship.” The earth and everything in it and on it belongs to God, and the best parts are free for us to use. On the attitude trunk of stewardship grows branches of sharing, consecration, tolerance, and charity. Ownership’s pressure is replaced by stewardship’s pleasure; stress yields to serenity, competition to cooperation.

9. *Guidance Rather Than Control*

I had a professor at the Harvard Business School whose mantra was, “Act don’t react! Always be in control. If you lose control it is because you didn’t do sufficient contingency planning.”

I found, in the real world, that his approach led to more frustration than fulfillment. I learned how preposterous (and how presumptuous) it is to think we can (or should) control all circumstances, situations, and other people.

Control of self and of appetites *is* possible, and is a big part of why we are here, but in this interactive, spontaneous, and surprising world, reacting well is as important as acting, and most everything *but* ourselves is largely beyond our control.

When we realize that we came from God and that we, and everything around us is His, we get a release from the compulsion to control. We work to be our best selves, but we also accept and trust what comes to us -- either as opportunity or as challenge. We look for answers through prayer, and we understand that promptings and guidance from Him who knows all are worth more than pseudo attempts at control by ourselves who know next to nothing.

10. *Dependence and Interdependence*

If you take a stroll through the self-help section of a book store, you will be overwhelmed by the titles on financial independence, emotional independence, and the “freedom” of not needing others.

Again, the notions of rugged individualism, self-reliance, and independence are great economic principles, but inappropriate spiritual ones. The ideal of not needing anyone doesn't work when dealing with God and with our spirits. It is not independence but acknowledged dependence on God that brings true peace and strength. And happiness has more to do with our interdependence on other people than with our independence from them.

All of this becomes far easier to understand in the light of a pre-life where all of us were God's family. We came here to learn to think and act with a degree of self-reliance and independence, but not to *not need* God or others. Knowing our ultimate complete dependence on God makes “self-help” an oxymoron. And knowing where we came from can help us to appreciate the eternal lives and connections between us all . . . and to seek synergy rather than independence.

11. *Day-to-Day Goodness and Day-to-Day Joy*

“Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die” is all too descriptive of how too many of

us live our lives. The “no tomorrow” paradigm produces a hedonistic mentality that leads to all sorts of bad short-term decisions that affect the long term and the very long term which is reality whether we like it or not.

What a different life we lead if the phrase is, “Become all you can be and give all you can give for tomorrow we *return* to the God who sent us here.” This believing mentality not only changes our “eating and drinking” (how we approach and handle every appetite), it evolves “being merry” from the grasping of short-term pleasure to the building of long-term joy.

The two ways of thinking are polar opposites. In the “no tomorrow” mindset we satisfy our appetites. In the “return” mindset, we control our appetites. With “no tomorrow” the law of the jungle makes sense; with “return” the laws of God make sense.

It amounts to pleasure vs. joy (with pleasure defined as “if it feels good, do it” and joy defined as long-term relationships and commitments and a genuine caring for the needs and feelings of others). Actually, in the spiritual “return” paradigm, even the hedonistic law can turn good. “If it feels good *to your spirit*, do it.” Spiritually it feels good to discipline ourselves, to sacrifice for others, to be honest and committed and true.

Remember that while mortality and its agency is a test, the goal or purpose of the test is joy. In the context of the “return” paradigm, God’s commandments are *loving counsel from a wise father*. He knows the ingredients and the makeup of true and lasting joy and He gives us that formula through His laws and commandments. He gives us this along with a world that is filled with opportunities for the joy he sent us here to find.

I have a wonderful old friend who is a rural country doctor who shares my convictions about a life before life. I love to go on road trips with him and talk about life and ideas and

philosophy. On one such drive he asked me, “What do you think will be God’s first question to you on judgment day?” I surmised that it would have something to do with how well we’d done on God’s commandments. “I doubt it,” he said. “I think the first question will be about the goal, not about the plan. The commandments are His plan, His way. The goal -- His goal for us -- is *joy*. I think He’ll want to know how much joy we found down here. He’ll say, “How much did you enjoy those mountains I made for you -- or those seacoasts or those sunsets. How much joy did you have in your marriage and your family? How much joy did you give others? . . .”

If God made the world for our joy then the most important measurement is how much real joy we found here. Did we figure out that His commandments were a plan for maximizing our joy? Did we live that plan? Did we find the joy?

12. *Happiness-Enhancing Gratitude*

It has been said that the amount of happiness a person feels is exactly and directly proportionate to how much gratitude he feels.

The problem then, with taking too much credit yourself, for what you have, is that it cuts down on the gratitude you feel to someone else, and thus cuts down happiness.

True gratitude can’t exist in the abstract. It needs a *receiver* -- someone to give the gratitude to. Our greatest gifts come from God, and when we recognize Him as our spiritual Father who sent us here, our gratitude becomes real and specific and meaningful.

We have a Thanksgiving Day tradition in our extended family of sitting down as the turkey cooks and making lists of what we are especially thankful for that year. This past Thanksgiving, twenty-three of us -- children, cousins, uncles and aunts, each made a personal

“thankful list” of fifty things and then read them to each other. As I listened, two things amazed me: 1. How few duplications there were. With twenty-three of us each listing fifty there were 1,150 “thankful things,” and except for a few predictable overlaps like “family,” “faith,” and “friends,” almost every one was thought of and mentioned by only one person. Conclusion: There are an unbelievable number of things to be thankful for. 2. How many of the thankful things were gifts of this earth, this mortality. Mountains, oceans, eyes, ears, experiences of all kinds, trials to overcome, challenges met, places visited . . . hundreds of things that brought happiness, all part of our unique mortal experience on this earth, all impossible without it. Conclusion: This earth, this mortality truly was created for our joy.

As I listened to the thankful things -- to the joy conveyed by each, I thought back again to my narrowly reopened memory of our spiritual life before life and of our reaction to God’s plan of a physical earth experience. We *shouted for joy* at the prospect of these experiences and possibilities. We sensed, looking forward, how joyful they would be.

Now, looking back, we can focus on and enhance that gratitude.

13. “*Confident Humility*”

It sounds like another oxymoron -- a combination of two opposites. Yet, with a belief in a life before life, the words work together and complement each other.

We are confident because we come from God, as His spirit children. What could give more confidence than that lineage -- the spiritual genetics of a perfect and all knowing Father.

Our humility then has the same source. God’s perfection provides the ultimate contrast to our weakness, frailty, and dependence on Him.

Thus we are confident because of our relationship to God and we are humble because of

our relationship to God.

And the combination -- a humble confidence or a confident humility -- is perhaps the most attractive and the most desirable of all human qualities.

14. *Gifts, Opportunities, and Obligations*

The attitude of “I earned it, I own it, and I’m privileged because of it” is completely stripped away by belief in a pre-life and in a God who gave us our bodies, our earth, and our circumstances. Of course some seem to make more of their lives than others. But they are building on and with the raw materials given by God. And knowing that we each came with unique challenges designed for us by God can allow us to look at others with respect and empathy and to see our blessings not as prideful privilege but as opportune obligations to become all we can be and to give all we can give.

The attitude, in this light, changes to “I was given it, God owns it, and I’m blessed and able to share because of it.”

15. *Antidotes to the Poison of Prejudice*

Astronauts who have looked down on this earth from space say one profound impression is the absence of *boundaries*. You don’t see countries or races or religions from up there. You see one beautiful and undivided earth and you realize that we create our own boundaries and divide ourselves out of ignorance.

We can enjoy the same perspective -- perhaps even greater -- by figuratively looking down at this earth from a belief in a life before life. The fact that we all came from the same place, from the same parents, with the same purpose is far stronger as a “uniter” than any difference or prejudice can be as a “divider.” We obtain true and lasting tolerance when we

understand that our eternal spiritual commonality and sameness completely overwhelms any temporary, temporal differences.

In this light prejudice, nationalism, racism, or any notion of intolerance or superiority become foolishness -- poisons to our spirits that we avoid like plagues -- poisons for which the antidote is belief in the commonality of a life before life.

16. *Alignment with Nature*

It is one thing to recognize beauty in the earth -- to acknowledge our special affinity with nature and the natural world. But it is another thing, and deeply and richly satisfying, to see the earth as a remarkable and exhaustless gift from God and as an orbiting laboratory and school expressly created to facilitate our learning, our continued progression, and our joy.

In this perspective, nature and the earth itself become vehicles for knowing God. "All things testify of me," He says in scripture. Thus the glory of a sunrise, the perfect hues and color schemes of a landscape, the majesty of a mountain, the power of the ocean's currents and tides, the serenity of an old forest . . . become witnesses of God and indicators of His nature as well as His love for us.

While anyone who believes in God can enjoy a deep gratitude in this perspective, one with a belief in life before life with God can feel it more deeply and understand the earth's purpose more purely.

17. *Relationships with God and Christ*

At the university one of our children attended, there was a young woman from another country who was being "sponsored" by a benefactor she had never met. She wrote to this man, telling him of her progress in school and always thanking him. And he wrote back, encouraging

her. She hoped, after the completion of her education, to meet him personally.

Believers in God but who have no faith or knowledge of a life before life are in a similar situation. They are grateful to God. They may communicate with Him and thank Him through prayer, but they look forward to (or fear) meeting Him for the first time. Such a relationship can never be quite the same as an *ongoing* one, comparable to a student who is lovingly sent away to school by loving parents -- with plans and hopes of *returning*. Such a student, even if he forgets much of his home and earlier life, still can rekindle and feel the love of his parents and appreciate both their support and their wisdom in sending him here.

Knowing we lived with and came from God can intensify our love for Him and promote our acceptance of His love for us. And understanding that Christ, in our premortal presence, volunteered His own sacrifice to make possible our return, can fill our hearts with devotion and provide the strongest motivation of all to live as He asked us to live.

18. *Motives not Methods* (whys not hows)

Perhaps through all the science in this world and all that man may yet discover via exploration and experimentation, we will learn some tiny fraction of *how* this world and this universe came to be. But what we do know of the “how” will always be dwarfed by what we don’t know. Indeed, many scientists say that any small increase they gain in *knowing* geometrically increases how much they know that they *don’t know*.

And while probing the “how” will always intrigue us (and educate us). It is the “why” that will help us most and that is most accessible to our spirits.

Spirituality and religion in their truest forms always deal more with the why than with the how. God makes no effort to tell us how He created this world (other than a general sequencing

in Genesis) -- doubtless because our finite minds are incapable of understanding His infinite intelligence. But He does tell us why -- because knowledge of purpose is helpful (if not essential) to the fulfilling of purpose. "This is my work and my glory," says the Christian God, "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." The earth was created for that purpose -- to facilitate God's marvelous plan for the progress of His children..

How that creation occurred, what methods were used, how long it took, what part evolution played, how much experimentation was involved, what parts of the earth were organized from materials that existed elsewhere -- these and a million other how questions are interesting, but not as essential or as answerable as the question of why. Many of the how questions may be completely irrelevant in a creation that occurred outside the limits of time and law and space as we know them.

True faith comes when we trust that God's *methods* are beyond us but that his *motives* are for us. We can then quit worrying about the former and start wondering (as in "the wonder of it all") about the latter.

19. *Loving and Being Gentle with Yourself*

I once wrote a book called, *I Challenge You/I Promise You*, which laid out thirty spiritual challenges and gave some suggestions for meeting them. I've had more feedback (and gratitude expressed) on one of those challenges than on the other twenty-nine added together. It was the challenge to "be gentle with yourself," and it simply involved self-respect and the realization that God knows of our weaknesses, loves us completely in spite of them, and put us here on earth so we would have enhanced opportunities to overcome them. He doesn't expect our perfection, at least not here on this earth, He just expects effort and faith.

Knowing we are God's spiritual children and that we lived with Him in a life before life can increase our regard and our respect for ourselves, can give us faith that, over time, the goodness of our spirits can turn our weaknesses into strengths. That perspective can make us more patient and more gentle . . . with ourselves.

I remember hearing an apology once that deeply impressed me. It was a public apology by an elected official who had broken the public trust. With honest regret he said, "That was not my truest self."

Most of us know, in our most introspective moments, that our deepest, truest selves are noble and good. We are natural, physical people (fallen men in the religious vernacular) with countless faults, weaknesses, lusts and appetites, and we are prone toward all kinds of mistakes. Yet, deep down, our core is good.

Believing that, reminding ourselves of that, not only helps us feel better about ourselves, it helps us become better people. And when the notion is backed up and made specific by a belief in a life before life, we begin to feel a genuine self-worth that supersedes all of our self-doubt and self-weakness.

This belief in an eternal self that is inherently good and that came from God is worth infinitely more than the temporary pump-ups of self-help and pop psychology. It's one thing to try to self-motivate ourselves by looking in the mirror and repeating "Every day in every way I'm getting better and better," (something always reminds us of our failures and flaws). It's something else again to believe that, underneath our mistakes and weakness-prone physical selves is an eternal spirit from a higher, better place which has both a purpose and a destiny. In this frame, our growth, improvement, and happiness relate not so much to temporary

self-motivation about who we can become as to a deep spiritual remembering of who we already are.

20. *Loving the Here but Relishing the There and Looking Forward to the Hereafter*

Some of the general religious ideas concerning the hereafter, perhaps intended just as metaphors or symbols, can be a bit unnerving if not downright discouraging. Pictures of hell as a torturing inferno or of heaven as a harp-playing endless rest on fluffy clouds seem almost equally unrealistic and equally unappealing. And perhaps even more disturbing is some imaginary line that qualifies us for one or the other. Somewhere in the middle part of the infinite scale between the best life and the worst life there must be two people, as close to identical as you can get, where one just makes it and goes to harp heaven and the other just misses and goes to hot hell.

No one believes this symbolic simplicity literally, yet most people do believe in life after life. The concept of an after-life begins to take on a sense of reality when it is *connected* to pre-life, when we see it (as well as this life) as ongoing phases of progression and development. What we did before affects us here and now and what we do now affects us there and then. All of life is real and our spirits have a real past and a real future.

Even in the limited mortal or physical context, the happiest and most interesting people are those who have learned the balance of living in the past *and* the present *and* the future. They enjoy reflection and memory of childhood and earlier times (diaries, home movies, scrap books). They plan and anticipate and look forward to the future (goals, mission statements, DayTimers). And they appreciate the present, appreciating every experience, whether expected or a surprise.

The same three-degreed perspective and paradigm can exist spiritually. We ponder and pray and seek faith concerning a pre-life and thus gain insight that creates joy in our sense of who we are and where (and who) we came from. We believe and look forward to an afterlife in which our awareness will expand and our progress will continue. And, in between, we appreciate our marvelous physical *present* in which we are the recipients of so many marvelous gifts of God.

Conscious Application

*Using the insight to change your life
(and your world)*

Conscious Application
Using the insight to change your life
(and your world)

Subtitle Revisited

The twenty insights or perspectives that life before life opens to us are as valuable or as worthless as we choose to make them. It is what we *do* with them and about them that determines their true value. Beyond what we believe, we must consciously change *how* we think about ourselves, about others, and about our day-to-day lives. Here, at the end of the book, it is important to delve more deeply into the subtitle -- with the emphasis on the first word: “*How* knowing where you came from can change who you are and where you are going.”

How, indeed. How can the insights of a premortal life be consciously applied to daily life -- to our goals, to our relationships, to our careers, to the people we encounter and associate with, to how we live each day? Powerful as these new perspectives and insights are, they need individual implementation if they are to truly change our lives.

The world around us will not support or reinforce our eternal spiritual paradigm. The clamor and chaos of life’s everyday materialism focuses us on the shortest term, on immediate comparisons and competition. Thus, we must make conscious efforts to keep the longer term purpose and the eternal spirit in focus, to see beneath the surface and into the soul.

It is not enough to believe, our belief must be implemented. “Faith without works,” as James tells us in the Bible, “is dead.” *And even to one who is not quite sure he believes, spiritual application is the wise approach to life because it is by living things that we often come to know whether or not they are true.* Believing and living are integrated parts of a two-way street. Believing something helps us to live it because we *want* to, and living something helps

us to believe it because it works. Each supports and enhances the other. Things that are true generally work, and things that work are generally true.

Conscious application of a premortal perspective involves *striving* in day-to-day situations to do three things -- each much more difficult than they sound, and vastly more rewarding than one would guess: 1. See yourself spiritually (strive to think of yourself, of your essence, as a spirit who came from a premortal life); 2. See others spiritually (strive to think of others as spirits inhabiting bodies); and 3. See circumstances spiritually (strive to think of what happens to you and around you in a long-term, spiritual perspective).

Seeing Yourself Spiritually

Even if you deeply and thoroughly believe that you have a soul which pre- and post-dates earth life, *thinking* of yourself spiritually -- being conscious of your soul as your center and your essence -- is difficult and requires practice and effort. We are all so used to thinking of ourselves physically and mentally. We're so aware of how our bodies look -- of our weight, our physique, our grooming, our dress -- every aspect of our appearance. Advertising, in its hundreds of forms, heightens this physical awareness to the point that it threatens to become an obsession. The society around us also conditions us to be highly self-aware, if not self-conscious, mentally and socially. Our self-images are all wrapped up in what we know and who we know.

Your soul, your spirit, the deepest, truest, *longest* part of you is less apparent in a temporal world and thus most likely to be ignored, by others and by yourself.

But you can, with conscious effort, reconfigure your self-awareness and self-perception, *choosing* to think of yourself as an eternal soul, as a spirit who developed your own unique nature and gifts during a premortal existence, as one favored to come to earth in a dramatic and enlightened time, and as a spiritual son or daughter of God who thus has ultimate worth and ultimate potential. This type of spiritual self-regard is so much more credible and real than some self-induced form of confidence or esteem. "Self-help" becomes almost an oxymoron. Our mental or physical confidence will ebb and flow according to what's happened lately, but spiritual confidence (better called "faith") can be lasting and consistent.

I once heard a deeply thought-provoking speech I heard once from a wise man who asked us to consider the vastness of the known universe. He held up a textbook and asked us how

thick we thought a book would be if it had as many pages as the number of stars that exist just in the known and named galaxies. (The book he held had over a thousand pages and was about two inches thick.) The answer was, “Thick enough to go around the world 600 times.” He reminded us that each page represented a star, and that we were specks on a tiny planet that orbited one of those stars. Just when he had us feeling impossibly humble and small, he ended with one dramatic and paradigm-shifting sentence: “When I look out on the night sky, I see God’s handiwork, but when I look out on your faces, I see God’s offspring!”

Learning to view yourself spiritually can remove the stress of self-consciousness and competition. It can make you feel more comfortable with yourself and more satisfied in just being yourself.

Once we perceive ourselves spiritually, it becomes more natural to seek spiritual help -- to pray and to ask for guidance. People in true touch with their spiritual selves can be completely humble, yet remarkably intimate with God. I’ll never forget an experience when I had occasion to kneel in prayer with a very wise and elderly man. We were volunteering in a project at the New York World’s Fair and we faced some challenges that he suggested we pray about. We knelt down and he prayed verbally and then suggested that both of us pray silently -- individually. While I was doing so, I heard the scratching of a pencil writing rapidly on paper. I assumed he had finished praying and was doing some kind of writing while he waited for me to finish. When I looked up he was jotting something on a yellow pad but his head was still bowed. He finished, looked up, and said, very matter-of-factly: “Sometimes if I don’t take notes on the answers I get, I tend to forget parts of them.” I stared at him and was stirred by the realization that, to this spiritual man, prayer was as real as any other form of conversation. He

asked, he listened for answers, and he took notes.

Perceiving ourselves spiritually is primarily a matter of concentration and practice, but there are four *related* things we can do that help -- that make it easier.

1. *Respect, Appreciate, and Pay Attention to Your Spirit*

Our spirits furnish us with information all the time -- as much or more so than our senses. Just as you would not ignore the red light that your eyes see or the telephone ring that your ears hear, do not ignore the impressions or “nudges” that your spirit provides, or the warnings and messages of right and wrong that your conscience sends.

The little intuitions and feelings and promptings that come to our spirits are a bit like radio signals. If we tune them in carefully and pay attention, they become clearer. If we ignore them, they fade into static.

2. *Deny the Physical a Little More.* The more our physical appetites control us the more physically-oriented we become. The more our spirit controls appetites, the more spiritual we become. Eat less and eat more slowly. Fast periodically -- I recommend one full day of fasting once a month. There is a spiritual clarity that comes through fasting periodically and through eating less glutenously each day. Control other appetites as well. *Think of you as your spirit, appreciating your body but determining and controlling what it does.*

3. *Pray More.* You are your spirit when you are praying. We all see God spiritually so it is natural to see ourselves spiritually when we’re praying to Him. Beyond any ritualistic or habitual prayers (blessings on food, congregational prayers in church, etc.), pray personally and spontaneously. Express gratitude to God whenever you are aware of anything He has given you (from a good day to a good sunset). Improve your capacity and ability to ask for what you truly

need -- for guidance, for faith, for help in making choices, in parenting, in relationships, in strengthening your faith. We become good at praying -- at thanking, at asking, at receiving --through practice, and in the process, we are constantly reminded of who we are, of our spirit essence.

4. *Spend More Time in Nature.* Whether you're in a vast wilderness, or just walking in a park or standing alone in your own garden, or even pausing briefly to watch a sunrise, there is a spiritual quality in nature that awakens and makes us more aware of our spirits. Don't be away from nature too long, try to have some contact every day. Stop your car and get out and walk through trees, pause to watch a storm roll in or to observe the colors of a fading sunset. Pick a flower or look closely at a leaf. Be aware of the phases of the moon and the changing length of days. Relate and equate everything in nature with God and with your spirit for whom it was all created.

Seeing Others Spiritually

“We do not see things as they are,
we see things as we are.”
-- Anias Nin

I've always loved this quote because it applies so perfectly in our world. If we're optimistic and positive, we see the world as optimistic and positive. If we're angry or depressed, the world seems that way too. I believe the quote also has a deeper spiritual implication, although it requires a little rewording.

When we spiritually see ourselves as we really are,
we can spiritually see all other things (and all other people)
as they really are.

Seeing other people spiritually -- seeing them as eternal spirits, not mere temporary bodies -- is the most accurate as well as the most blessed sight we can have. It blesses those we see by giving them complete value and worth in our eyes, and it blesses us by stripping the pride and envy and judgment out of our souls.

When we look at someone physically or mentally, it is easy to be aware of his shortcomings . . . and of his superiorities. We see (and judge and compare) his assets and liabilities. We notice the ways in which he's more than we are (and whether we like it or not, feel traces of envy, or jealousy, or inadequacy). We notice ways in which he's less than we are (and whether we like it or not, we feel traces of pride, and condescension). When we view others physically, it's easier to see lust than love, easier to see competition than compassion, easier to see judgment than justice.

When we focus on seeing others spiritually, with our shared premortal existence as the context, everything changes. They are now brothers and sisters, sharing the same eternal goals

and participating with us in the same mortal plan and purpose. Instantly, in that perception, our spiritual similarities obliterate our temporal differences.

The first, and easiest place to practice the art of seeing others spiritually is with those we love most -- our families and our friends. It is a joy-enhancing exercise to “look upon their hearts,” to see the eternal nature and goodness of those we love most and to recognize as well the spiritual flaws which they were sent here to overcome. Spouses seeing each other spiritually allow both to surmise that they knew each other before. Seeing our children spiritually is both a release of guilt and a reiteration of responsibility. Knowing that who and what they are is largely a matter of who they became in premortal life prevents us from taking too much credit or too much blame. But knowing they entrusted their spirits to our spirits commits us more completely to being the best parents we can be. Seeing friends spiritually allows us to see deeper into their feelings, to know them better, and to help them more.

The second challenge is to see strangers spiritually. The world becomes a different, more interesting and more beautiful place if we can view fellow passengers on the subway, people in the supermarket, and passers-by on the street as spirit siblings rather than irrelevant, unimportant, unrelated physical strangers. All it takes is practice, and a belief in who they are and where they came from.

The perception of people as spirits from afar is the most fundamental of all paradigm shifts. It affects every interchange or interaction with every person -- from those we love most to those we don't even know. I remember sensing this one night (the middle of the night) after I had gone into the nursery to pick up our fussy, squawking, screaming toddler who had kept me awake for the past hour. He was dry, he was warm, he'd been fed, he wasn't sick, he had no

excuse for his behavior, and I was angry. As I picked him up though, I thought about his spirit, struggling to adjust to this new earth life, and I realized, but for order of birth, he could be the dad, snatching me up angrily from my crib. Instantly my feelings were deeper and warmer, and instantly he began to settle down. Another day, on a downtown street in Boston, on my lunch hour, I was confronted by a shabby homeless man. He was an interruption and an irritation until I tried to see him spiritually. I brought him into a restaurant, bought him lunch, and listened to his story, feeling strongly as it was told that, given different circumstances, it could have been my story.

As with seeing ourselves, seeing others spiritually is largely a matter of effort, concentration, and practice. Once again though, there are four approaches or “things to concentrate on” that can help.

1. See into People's Eyes. The eye really is “the window to the soul.” When you make a conscious effort to look into the eyes of another person, you see and know more about that person than you did before, and you become less conscious of yourself. Practice looking into people's eyes, trying to see their feelings, their mood, their state of spirit. Whether it is a glance and a first impression as you look into the eyes of someone you are just meeting or a deeper, longer stare into the eyes of one you love, you can see into the soul through the eyes. And with practice you can learn much through that window . . . about love and longing, about frustration and fear, about interest and intention.

2. Listen to People's Spirits. So often, it's not people's words but their *tone* that tells you something -- not what they say but how they say it. A friend once told me of moving to a different country and trying to learn a new language by just living around the people. Long

before he understood the words, he said, he could understand tones, and moods, and feelings. He could tell how people were feeling without knowing what they were saying. Since people don't always say what they mean or express what they feel, the words can almost get in the way, obscuring or confusing the real message which is in the eyes and the voice and the body language. If you try to focus on these things, you begin to hear the spirit.

3. *Take Into Account the Spiritual Purpose in People's Situations.* Instead of looking at others judgmentally, look at them with the tolerance and the accommodation of a spiritual perspective. Instead of seeing a fat person as indulgent and undisciplined or a moody person as rude or insensitive, try to see everyone as a spirit who has been given challenges and tendencies and situations here that were taylor-made to allow growth, expansion, and progress. As you do, others will begin to seem more appealing and attractive to you. Even their little faults will sometimes become endearing, and encouragement will come more naturally to your mind than criticism.

4. *Pray to See Others' Spirits.* Since prayer is spiritual language and the most direct spiritual communication, spending more time and more effort at it can help you not only to see yourself and God more spiritually, but to see the spirit in other people. Ask for this perception. Ask for the ability to see into people's spirits through their eyes, to be able to hear their hearts along with their words, to be able to love more and to judge less. And once you have asked, get ready to receive.

Seeing Circumstances Spiritually

Coincidence may be just a word we use when we're unable to see God's purpose. The circumstance and situations of our lives are not pure chance or coincidence, not in the spiritual view. While we do each have agency and freedom of choice, and while much of life seems completely random, it is important to always *remember* that there is purpose in life and that each of us was put in a particular current of mortality that would bring us into contact with the very people and situations and circumstances that would allow us to fulfill our purpose, to learn what we lacked, and to find the joy we were sent here to gain.

Believe not in a God who mettles in our daily lives -- or who predestines us to do certain things or end up a certain way. But do believe in a God who loves us now, who loved us in premortal life and who still 1. loves us, 2. answers prayers, and 3. foreordains us to do certain things and puts us in life currents and situations that bring to us the very opportunities we need.

Thinking this way can not only help us to handle crisis and big-time disappointment, but to make every day more interesting and more beautiful. An example of each:

My father died of colon cancer when I was fifteen. I was the oldest of five children and tried to help my mother hold the family together. The loss of my dad, to whom I was extremely close, seemed hopelessly random and cruel. Even then, however, I had a belief in a life before life and in a divine purpose and plan. One side of that faith allowed me to continue to feel my father's spirit. The other side gave me the perspective which gradually allowed me to see what I was becoming because of the situation I was in -- the responsibility and maturity that were developing within me because of where and who I was.

In day-to-day things there are always little reasons and answers if we look and ask for

them. Why did I get stuck in this traffic jam? Why did I get an airline seat by this interesting person? Why did your son wake up and wander into your room in the middle of the night?

There is at least the spiritual possibility of an opportunity in everything that happens. A traffic jam might allow your mind to wander to some useful thought that wouldn't have occurred to you otherwise. The person seated next to you might give you an unexpected connection or opportunity (or you might give one to him). You and your son might talk about something important as you tuck him back in bed -- something that wouldn't have come up otherwise.

This is not to say that every little thing has some profound purpose, but it is to say that life has a purpose and that many of the little things can tie in to or contribute to that purpose in some small (or occasionally large) way if we look for it and allow it.

Sometimes the currents of purpose are strong enough that we get a second chance to recognize them. A particular person comes into our life, seemingly by chance, for a second or third time and we begin to feel that he must have some message for us whether he knows it or not. Or some little thing happens that reminds us of something else that happened. We train ourselves gradually to pay more attention to coincidence that may not be coincidence.

The important thing to do is to *look* for meaning or possible connections in everything. This can be an interesting pleasure rather than an encumbering pressure. Entertain spiritual possibilities, imagine spiritual potentials. *Wonder* a little about why certain things happen to you and around you. See life as an intriguing puzzle where there is always possibility of pieces fitting together . . . rather than as a completely chaotic jumble of pure coincidence.

Trying to see things and situations more spiritually (like trying to see yourself and other people spiritually) is a change of perspective that takes time and effort. There are, once again,

four approaches that can help.

1. Cultivate “Spiritual Serendipity.” Serendipity is “the ability, through sagacity and awareness, to find something good while seeking something else.” A serendipitous attitude is not a passive “wait for good luck to happen” approach. Rather, it involves having goals and plans but being aware and open to other possibilities so that you notice opportunities and frequently “find something good while seeking something else.” Like a horse whose “blinders” are taken off, we need to see more than the row or furrow in front of us -- more than our own narrow little plan. With the blinders off, when something comes up that is not on our “to do” list, we see it as an opportunity for an interesting surprise rather than as an irritation or an interruption. With a serendipity attitude, things that can’t be put on a to-do list -- a call from an old friend, a sudden need expressed by a child, an unexpected sunset -- are noticed and appreciated, even relished. We grow more aware, more sensitive, more flexible. Often our unplanned “serendipities” are spiritual nudges or impressions. As we are responsive to these, the world around us begins to look and feel more spiritual.

2. Develop “Magnetic” Goals, Sometimes Without Plans. Sometimes our deepest hopes and fondest dreams don’t lend themselves to detailed planning. We know we want something, but there is no apparent path to get there. Visualize it, acknowledge it as a goal, and then, realizing that all things are spiritual, *watch* for a way to open up.

3. Carry the Question “Coincidence or Purpose?” Consciously in Your Mind. Every time something new or unexpected happens, just entertain the question, “Is there purpose in this?” A chance encounter, something you just happened to notice, the message or meaning of a particular movie or piece of music, a friend of a friend of a friend, some change in your day that

you can't control . . . ask, "Could this mean anything?" "Is there a reason for this?" "What could this lead to?" As you become more spiritually in tune, your spirit will furnish you with answers, and you'll become able to distinguish small happenings of chance from small happenings of destiny.

4. *Pray for Distinguishing Spiritual Discernment.* Ask God for something that logic tells us He would be anxious to give us -- this sense of spiritual awareness, recognition, and discernment. Ask to see things as they really are -- spiritually. And then be willing and recognize any answers you receive.

Postscript: Continuing the Quest

I have tried intentionally not to clutter this book with too many footnotes or cross references. For example, when I mentioned that much of what I believe about life before life came from (and built from) various things I have read, I did not give specific references to each of those readings. I had two reasons for not doing so.

1. I feel that spiritual truth carries with it its own conviction. The spirit within each of us recognizes truth about itself. I wanted your spirit, initially at least, to have a chance to focus directly on the possibility and credibility of what I was saying -- not on some series of sources.

2. I wanted a reason to hear from you -- to stay in touch with those who want to continue the quest. If you'd like to know more of what prompted me to know, e-mail me at rickrick@arosnet.com or write to me c/o The Fischer Ross Group, 249 East 48th Street, New York, NY 10017.

After Postscript

-- before “back cover copy”

About the Author

Richard Eyre, a Harvard-educated management consultant, is the nationally and internationally recognized author of twenty-six books, including a New York Times #1 best seller. He lectures throughout the world on topics of family, balance, and the spirit.

(Back Cover Ideas)

“Almost everyone I know is looking for the awareness provided by this book. Richard Eyre has written a spiritual classic.”

-- Stephen Covey

“Seven of ten Americans believe in a soul that continues to live after death -- the question is, where did that spirit come from? This book shares the boldest answer I have ever seen.”

-- George Gallup

If man has within him a spirit that continues after death, where did that spirit come from?

When the poet Wordsworth said that “our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting” and that our souls came “from God who is our home,” he was voicing a belief shared by sages through the ages -- the conviction that we each lived before this life, developing the unique and individual personalities that we came with.

In this volume, national best-selling author, Richard Eyre, probes this premortal existence of spirits. Not in removed or distant analysis but through personal conviction, he suggests that each of us is far more than a happenstantial cluster of physical cells. This is a book that can change how you feel about yourself -- and about everyone and everything else!