The background of the cover is a photograph of a vast, misty landscape. In the foreground, there is a dark, calm body of water. The middle ground shows a wide, flat expanse, possibly a field or a plain, shrouded in a thick, low-lying mist. In the distance, a bright light source, likely the sun or moon, is positioned on the horizon, creating a strong glow and casting long, soft rays of light across the scene. The overall color palette is muted, consisting of greys, blues, and soft whites, contributing to a serene and contemplative mood.

On Being Real

by Suzette Boulais



On Being Real

The word *real* has always held a strong attraction to me. After all, it implies everything that is genuine, honest, and true. My philosophy isn't about the beautiful, physical, real world we see with our eyes, but rather, about the world of relationships and how we perceive ourselves in relation to the significant others around us. Despite the fact we are all born into innocence, with wonder and non-judgment, it has always bothered me that by the time we start school, some of us have already begun to compare ourselves with others and by doing so, have felt awkwardly inadequate.

It's a sad commentary that we come into life as unique, marvelous creations, yet over time, by paying so much attention to how we fare in comparison to others, we forget to appreciate our unique gifts and personalities. The angst we experience when we don't think we're as good as others is anything but positive or life affirming.

Phase I - **The Punitive Phase** *We See The World*

It's when we begin to compare ourselves negatively to and compete with others that we experience our first "ers." Whether consciously or unconsciously, we think:

- I need to be smarter.
- I need to be thinner.
- I need to be stronger.
- I need to be richer.
- I need to be prettier.
- I need to be handsomer.

In so many ways, we conclude, "I don't value myself just the way I am."

Because these types of thoughts attack our self-worth, I call this the Punitive Phase. It is punitive because our own negative thoughts punish us and undermine our happiness.

Our punitive thoughts hurt us any time we move from self-love to self-judgment. Even if we overcompensate by trying to be more special, more perfect, more accomplished, more attractive, more successful, or more popular, (the list is endless), we still believe we're lacking.

The result is that over time we can become depressed. Discouraged. Angry. Closed off. Disconnected from our own hearts. Ashamed. Guilty. Less than. Even though we may put on a happy face and hide our feelings from others, deep down, we can't shake off our discontent.

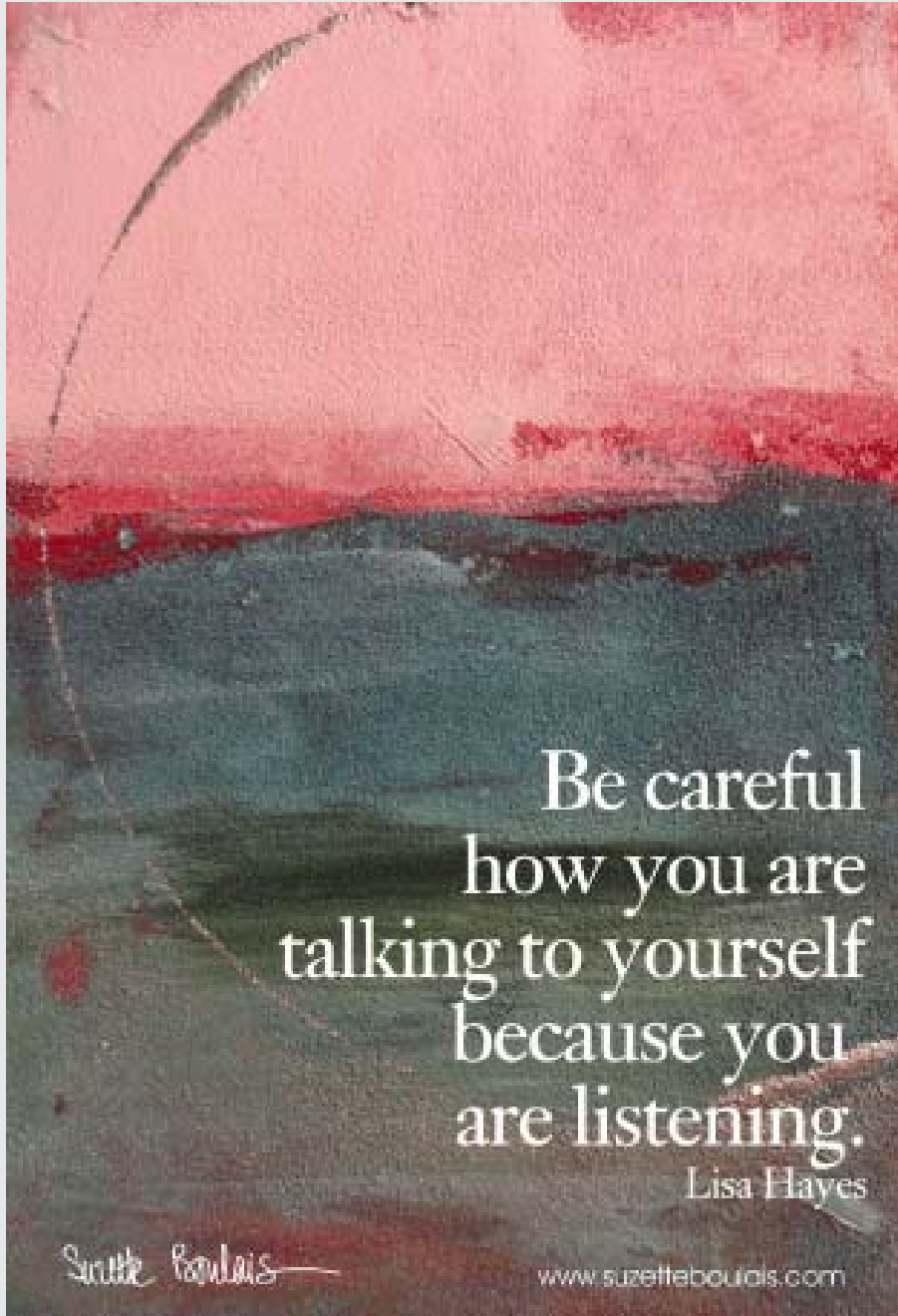
**When we don't know who to hate,
we hate ourselves.**



We aren't punished for our sins.
We are punished by our sins.

Suzette Boulais

I'd once read an interesting definition of sin: *Self-Imposed Nonsense*. Our "sins" are our love-negating thoughts and behaviors. We don't have to worry about God punishing us for our "sins." In the Punitive Phase we're already doing a good job of that ourselves. When we are not being loving and fall prey to negative feelings such as fear, jealousy, envy, resentment, anger, hatred, etc. I call this being "*unreal*."




We are what we think and what we say to ourselves.



The Punitive Phase can last indefinitely. For some, it lasts a lifetime. Driven by the ego's standard of success, we think that "keeping up with the Joneses" will increase our self-worth. But we find out sooner or later that keeping up with external standards puts us on a never-ending treadmill. Nothing we do is quite good enough. Happiness is elusive.

The good news is that when we are sick and tired of being sick and tired, there is hope. By taking an honest look at our unhappiness and admitting to ourselves we are broken and wounded by our fearful, self-sabotaging thoughts; when we know it's time to give up the ghost, even if we have to go kicking and screaming; when something tells us there has to be a better way, we are ready to advance toward the next phase of personal development.

We are ready to see the light.



And suddenly you know;
It's time to start something new
and trust the magic of beginnings.

Meister Eckhart

Phase II - **The Illuminative Phase** *We See The Light*

Who knows exactly when we see the light, but it is often linked to our determination and willingness to live life differently. As poet Anais Nin wrote, “And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” Any number of life circumstances, whether it’s a loss or setback, or even some seemingly undeserved blessing or good fortune, can drive us to illumination.

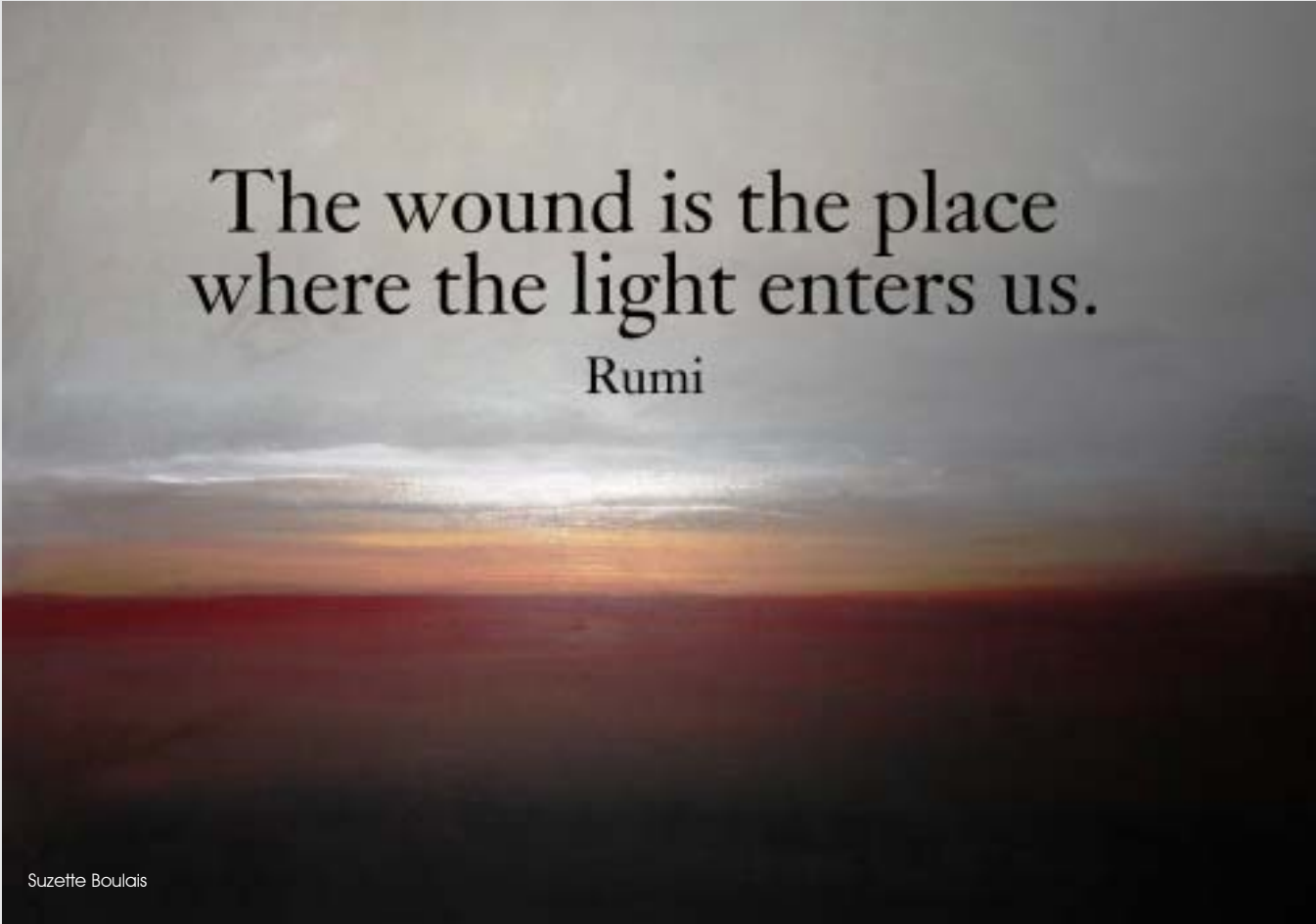
Regardless of how we become enlightened, the result is we are more aware of how our thoughts affect us. The Buddhists call this becoming awakened. In this more conscious, awakened state, we no longer blame our sorry state on our parents, teachers, partners, or circumstances. When we become illuminated, we realize we are our own happiness and we are responsible for our own healing.

Now guided by an inner light, we are willing to give up destructive thoughts and behaviors in order to lead more meaningful lives. The emphasis on our competitive, comparative nature in the Punitive Phase gives way to a kinder, gentler focus where we choose to be more authentic, more true. In this second, Illuminative Phase, we choose to be who we truly are and give up who we truly aren’t.

We are on the way to becoming real.

**Be pure, simple and truthful.
Light will shine from within you.**

Swami Amar Jyoti



The wound is the place
where the light enters us.

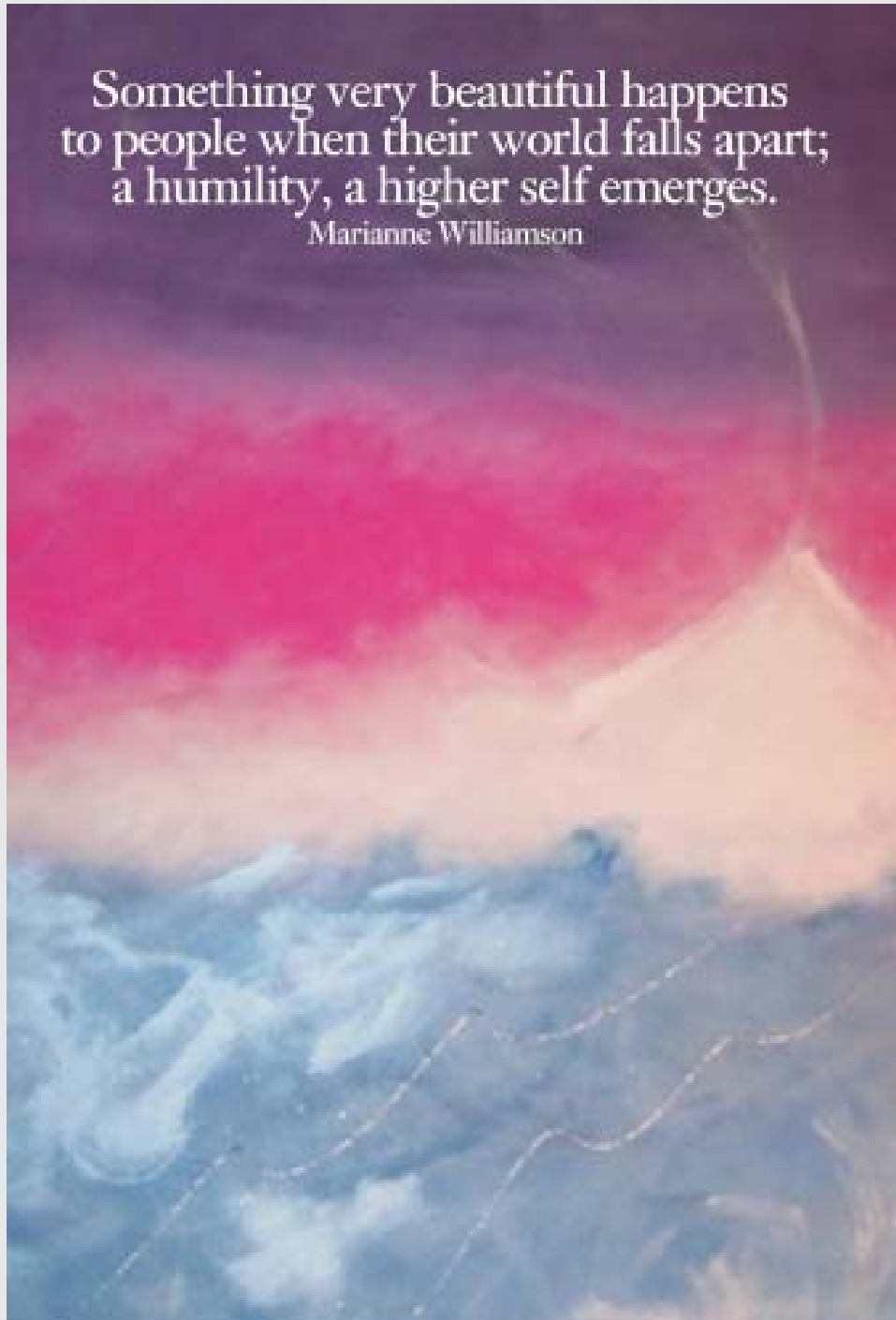
Rumi

Suzette Boulais

Our pain and self-doubt often drive us to the light.

Something very beautiful happens
to people when their world falls apart;
a humility, a higher self emerges.

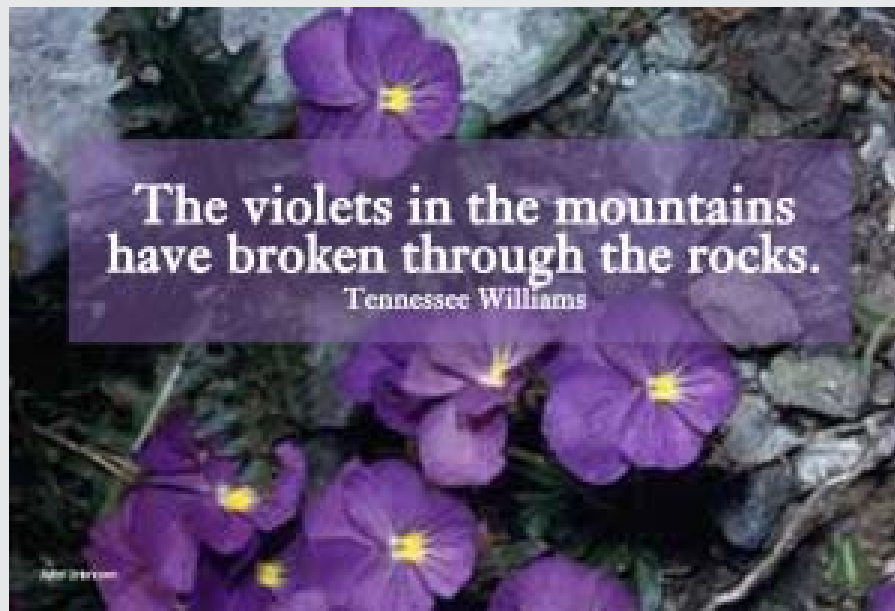
Marianne Williamson



Author and mythologist Joseph Campbell has written many books about the enlightened path, which he calls the hero's journey. Because the call to enlightenment can be so frightening, many initially refuse to even answer it, since it requires a series of changes, however big or small. It may mean embarking on a new career, ending a bad marriage, downsizing from that showstopper of a home, going to rehab, moving to a new city, and facing any number of addictions, including the addiction to our own negative thinking.

Once we do answer the call, we come face to face with our self-doubt. It is by being true to our new, enlightened path that Campbell says we are given the hero strength to overcome our doubts.

One historic figure who embarked on this heroic path was St. Paul the Apostle. Before his conversion, Paul, then known as Saul, was a zealous Pharisee who intensely persecuted the followers of Jesus. Knocked off his horse on the road to Damascus after having been blinded by the light, Paul was told by Jesus to stop persecuting the early Christians and devote his life to preaching the gospel of love and peace, which he did with great zeal. Paul was so completely dedicated to the enlightened way, he later became known as Christianity's "greatest disciple."



Phase III - **The Unitive Phase**
We See The Unity



A flower does not think to compete with
the flower next to it. It just blooms.

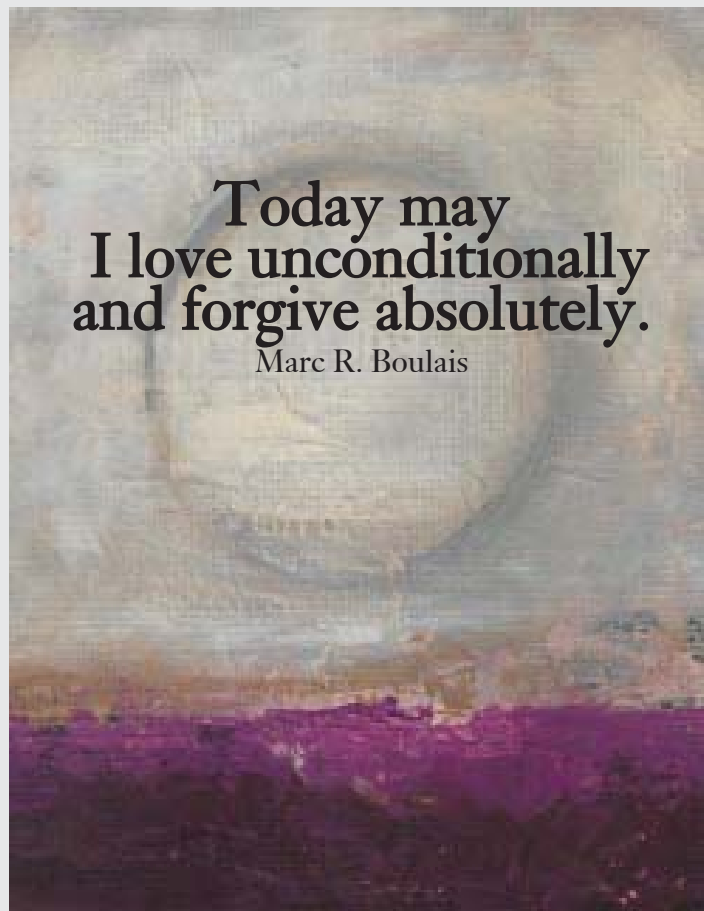
by Chloé Shadow, goodchild

When we stay true to our authentic life call, we enter the last and final phase of the hero journey, The Unitive Phase. During this deeply insightful period we begin to feel a universal connection with all of humanity. We come to understand that the hero journey isn't just our journey, but everyone's journey. Each of us has unique talents that surface when we answer our true call and each of us has individual dragons to slay along the way.



Several life masters who lived life from the Unitive Phase include spiritual leaders such as Jesus, Buddha, and Gandhi. Through their writings, it is clear that the mystic poets such as Rumi, Kahlil Gibran, and Oshi also experienced this phase.

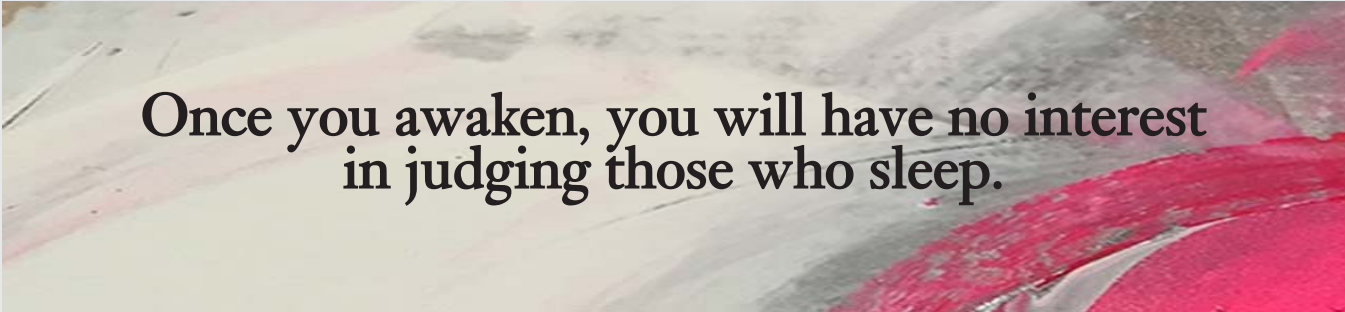
We know we're making progress toward the Unitive Phase when we begin to love unconditionally and forgive absolutely; when we live fully in the present, with no perceived hurts left over from yesterday; when we are so mindful about improving our own lives that we have no time to criticize others; when compassion is our companion, when we trust we'll receive whatever guidance and grace are necessary to face our inevitable trials.



It is during this last, most enlightened phase, where we have the potential to become the Don Quixotes of our own lives. Like the fictional character, we dream seemingly impossible dreams and reach for seemingly unreachable stars in our quest for truth, meaning, peace, serenity, integrity, and authenticity.

Finally, in our ever-evolving state of consciousness, we take to heart these words of St. Paul, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

No longer gripped by our fears or by what others think of us, we come full-circle with a sense of wonder and non-judgment. Having learned the meaning of "to thine own self be true," we value the words of Friedrich Nietzsche in ways that we never did before, "At bottom every man knows well enough that he is a unique being, only once on this earth; and by no extraordinary chance will such a marvelously picturesque piece of diversity in unity as he is, ever be put together a second time."



**Once you awaken, you will have no interest
in judging those who sleep.**



The path isn't a straight line.
It's a spiral.
You continually come back to things
you thought you understood
and see deeper truths.

The only real failure in life
is not to be true to the best one knows.

Buddha



On Being Real: How The Three Phases Relate To Your Own Life

Punitive Phase

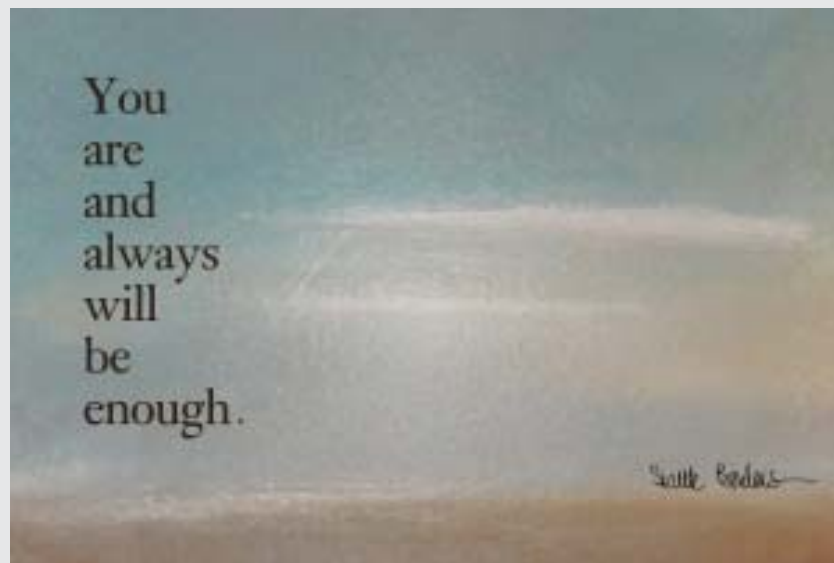
- What are some early memories in your life where you compared yourself to others and consequently felt "less than?"
- How would you describe these feelings? What did you do about them at the time? How did you behave?
- How did these feelings "punish" yourself or others?
- How, if ever, have you gotten past these feelings, grown past them? Explain.
- What issues today trigger your competitive/comparative nature where you feel either "I'm not good enough?" or "I'm upset because things are not going my way?"
- Fill in the blank: "I know I'm in trouble when....." "I know I've lost my way when....." "I know I'm punishing myself by negative thoughts, feelings and/or behaviors when....."
- What are some recent, specific situations where you feel "less than?" Do you see in any correlation to the earlier you in your childhood where you felt "less than?"
- How do you compensate when feeling "less than?"
- Give some creative expression to a time you've felt "unreal" - ... moody, self-pitying, resentful, fearful, threatened, etc. What words come to mind? Images? Sounds, etc.?

Illuminative Phase

- Have you ever "seen the light" in aspect or your life, whether it's regarding your own uniqueness or some insight into one of your punishing behaviors? If so, explain.
- What light do you see now that you didn't see before?
- How has your behavior changed toward yourself and others after seeing the light?
- How would you artistically describe this light you've seen?
- How has seeing the light helped you become happier on some level? More mature? More open? Less judgmental or critical? Give examples.
- How do you try to "keep your light" shining? Describe a mental practice, mantra, meditation or physical exercise that helps you remember "you have a right to be here and are no less than the trees and the stars?" Helps you forgive? Stay in the present?
- In what areas of your life do you find a life spiral circling back to you where you need to revisit a former obstacle?

Unitive Phase

- Do you think it's possible to experience the Unitive Phase? Why or why not?
 - Have you ever felt glimpses of Unity? If so, what was the circumstance?
 - What inspires you to feel the hope of unity? A song you've heard? A book you've read? A movie you've seen? A poem you've read? A moment in Nature? A family situation? A quotation? Describe.
 - Are there any personal heroes, either factual or fictional, who appeal to you and who characterize the values as described in the Unitive Phase? Who are these heroes? What draws you to them?
 - Imagine yourself as "unified," your self fully evolved, totally real. How do you envision yourself as being totally real?
 - How do you work on being as as real as you can throughout each day?
 - How do you see the role of forgiveness in getting through each day?
 - Looking back at some of the photos and quotations in this book, are there any particular quote(s) you relate to the most? Explain.
- Think about the concept of UNITY. How would you draw it, paint it, write about it?
In short, how would you give creative expression to the word, UNITY?





This book is dedicated to the memory of
singer/songwriter Dan Fogelberg.
Among the many insightful lyrics Fogelberg wrote
during his lifetime, these summarize well
my philosophy On Being Real:

***"Wealthy the spirit that knows its own flight.
Stealthy the hunter who slays his own fright.
Blessed the traveler who journeys the length of the light."***

The terms used in this book, *Punitive*, *Illuminative* and *Unitive*,
were inspired by St. John of the Cross who uses similar terms
to explain the soul's spiritual childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

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