

Supplement II - Discovering the Meaning of Life

What do we need to survive? The list of obvious answers includes air, food, and shelter. We can never deny the inescapable fact that we have physical bodies, and survival depends on meeting their basic requirements.

However something else distinguishes us from other creatures who have physical needs. That extra ingredient is an individual soul, and like the physical body it must be nurtured to survive. The human soul may be invisible to scientific instruments, but each of us experiences its reality daily. Each time we say "I" to ourselves, we feel the presence of the soul. Every instance of aspiration, enthusiasm, or free will is an expression of our own soul nature. And yet, as real and immediate as the soul may be, it still needs nourishment and sustenance each day.

What is the air, food, and shelter of the soul? What keeps it alive and active? The answer is **meaning**. The human soul grows and develops as it experiences reasons and sets goals for living.

The Edgar Cayce readings returned to this point time and again as they advised people how to find happiness. The hundreds of people who received his psychic guidance were given a promise: everything about life is meaningful. That promise was extended to each of us. We are assured there is a rhyme and reason to what happens to us.

When we stop to think about it, this is an amazing promise. So much goes on in our world that seems senseless. It's easy to be cynical because every day we are likely to learn about or directly encounter cruelty, dishonesty, and injustice. Not only do things often appear to be unfair, it's easy to conclude that nothing is really in charge, that life is random and pointless.

In almost every century of human history, some individuals have made a special effort to point out the signs of despair and chaos. They voice an ancient cry of hopelessness. However other people have been able to look at the same events and conditions with a different perspective. They have spoken and written about the meaning of life. They have seen how both pleasant and unpleasant experiences are purposeful.

If we look at our own twentieth century, we can see both sides of the debate. For example, the first fifty years included great tragedies and disasters, including two world wars and a global economic depression. There were ample reasons to despair. Yet during those same fifty years, there lived pioneers of a renewed sense of meaning for our own post-industrial society. In the second half of the century we have built on the creativity of these key individuals. Let's look

briefly at three of them - Carl Jung, Edgar Cayce, and Viktor Frankl - and the new ideas they presented about the meaning of life.

CARL JUNG AND THE PROCESS OF INDIVIDUATION

Carl Jung was the founder of analytical psychology. A contemporary of Cayce, Jung was born in 1875, just two years before the clairvoyant whose work parallels his so closely. The son of a Swiss clergyman, Jung trained as a psychiatrist. In his early professional years he was a supporter and protégé of Sigmund Freud. A rift, however, developed between the two, primarily over the question of the unconscious mind. Freud viewed the hidden side of the psyche as driven by repressed sexuality. And while Jung did not deny the findings of his teacher, colleague, and friend, he felt that something more lay within the unconscious aspect of every person. Research with his patients and the study of his own dreams convinced him that the unconscious also contains innate impulses to wholeness and mental health.

Out of Jung's long career as a psychiatrist, teacher, and writer developed a psychology of the human soul. Rather than seeing spirituality and religion as an evasion from mental health, he recognized the need for psychiatry and faith to find a common ground. For him the answer lay in a synthesis of Eastern and Western religious traditions. He recognized that each of these two great streams of spirituality had something vital to offer humanity in its search for meaning.

The West has emphasized our physical existence as individual beings and the historical fact of the Christ. Jung felt that Christians are most likely to look outside of themselves for a divine Presence who can bestow grace. In contrast, the East has featured universality, timelessness, and the inner life. Jung put it this way: "*The Oriental knows that redemption depends on the work he does on himself. The Tao grows out of the individual.*" (*Collected Works*, 13:53)

What is this mysterious Tao? Some have translated it as God or Providence. However, Jung believed that the best interpretation is *meaning*. In other words, those of us who live in the West must learn to appreciate that meaning grows out of our own individuality and the work that we do within ourselves. For Jung there was a great disadvantage in the Western approach to imitate Christ. Even though the Christ may have "*embodied the deepest meaning of life . . . we forget to make real our own deepest meaning*" (p. 53). We can easily forget the task of self-realization. In fact it's often convenient to avoid what would be most meaningful to us as individuals and to take the path of least resistance. Jung imagines that if Jesus evaded self-realization, he would have become a respectable carpenter.

One of Jung's books, a collection of essays on the quest for meaning in life, is appropriately titled *Modern Man in Search of A Soul*. He came to believe

that the deepest part of the mind is transpersonal—extending beyond the bounds of one individual. This level of the "collective unconscious" is a common possession of all humanity. Within these deep strata of the mind are universal patterns that can shape and direct the development of our lives. He called them "archetypes," the most important of which is the Self.

What is this curious component called the Self? What role does it play in the search for a meaningful life? According to Jung, this universal pattern of wholeness, the Self, lives within each one of us. We might be tempted to say that it is sleeping inside us, but perhaps it is we who are asleep in our daily, familiar consciousness.

Even though the Self is universal, it is expressed within every one of us in a different way. Each soul has its own special potentials and gifts. However, the discovery process takes considerable time and allows no shortcuts. By working diligently throughout our lives, we can respond to and receive this inner wholeness into our conscious awareness. For Jung this is the essential purpose and meaning of life: to fulfill the potentials of our own authentic being.

Even though all of this may sound vague, one of Jung's greatest contributions was to provide a map of the journey to wholeness. He called this adventure the process of individuation. It is a path to self-realization and meaning that it is available to everyone, but few people walk it to the end.

Generally speaking the process of individuation takes place over two phases of life that are divided at roughly age forty. The so-called "mid-life crisis" marks the opportunity to move into the second and more difficult aspect of individuation, and most people get bogged down or diverted at this point. Success in phase two requires something in addition to courage and wisdom. During the years preceding forty, there must have also been the development of a healthy "persona."

In Jungian terms the persona is a mask, or a series of masks, we wear in life. It is a way of adapting to the demands of society. No doubt this facade can become dishonest and inauthentic, but Jung proposed that it's possible to develop a healthy persona. It is a marvelous accomplishment to move through the challenges we face between puberty and age forty and come out with a sound, balanced self-image. It means steering a course between many conflicting demands. This period of approximately twenty-five years is full of conflicting life choices: freedom versus commitment, planning versus spontaneity, privacy versus intimacy, just to name a few. According to Jung, it's probably not best to strive for wholeness during this first phase of the individuation process. That important work comes in phase two. Instead the young adult develops a healthy persona by temporarily focusing on just a few qualities, picking one side of a pair of opposites over the other side. During phase one we adopt an orientation toward life—choosing between what he

called introversion or extroversion. And we begin to strengthen and sharpen certain talents and skills, even if it means that other sides of ourselves must be temporarily ignored. The result can be a reasonably healthy, productive individual who has positive ego-strength and is prepared for the more difficult tasks that come after age forty.

During the second phase of life we have the chance to discover a deeper and more personal meaning to life. This is the time in which we strive for wholeness and begin to complement our obvious talents and strengths with their forgotten opposites. The accomplished organizer discovers a richer meaning to life by experiencing spontaneity. The emotional, feeling-oriented person explores the kind of meaning that comes from logic and analysis.

How prepared are we for this difficult venture? How many people know how to find their personal meaning in life after the turning point that is likely to come around age forty? Jung wrote: *"Wholly unprepared, they embark upon the second half of life. Or are there perhaps colleges for forty-year-olds which prepare them for their coming life and its demands as the ordinary colleges introduce our young people to a knowledge of the world? No, thoroughly unprepared we take the step into the afternoon of life."* (Collected Works, 8:399)

Jung's life work was to create a map to guide modern men and women through those uncharted waters. His spiritual psychology largely concerns the process of individuation. His system teaches how to find one's personal meaning in life. That task of individuation has two steps to be taken after age forty. First we must become more and more aware of those sides of ourselves that have been ignored. It requires courage to look at parts of the soul that we have disregarded for many years. However scary it may be, those hidden aspects have a great gift to offer.

The second step of individuation is the quest for wholeness. In step one we recognize the forgotten parts of ourselves; in step two we embrace them and find a place for them. They will enrich us and bring us to new revelations about the meaning of life. That meaning comes from the realization of uniqueness and individuality. This is the highest goal in Jungian psychology: the development and awakening of one's own distinctive, special personhood.

EDGAR CAYCE AND THE MISSION IN LIFE

As great and helpful as Jungian contributions undoubtedly are, the ideas and philosophy of the Cayce readings add extra dimensions. Remember these two great men worked during the same years, an ocean apart and apparently unaware of each other. Both dedicated their lives to assisting people to find meaning and purpose. Both understood the significance of the spiritual side of humanity. How then can their contributions be merged to give us the clearest and most valuable guidance for finding our own meaning in life? No evidence

suggests that Cayce was consciously aware of Jung's ideas. Nevertheless, Jung's own model of the collective unconscious implies that the clairvoyant Cayce might have drawn from the same source as Jung's inspiration.

Certain marked differences in the lives of these two men make it all the more astonishing that their philosophies of life contain so many close parallels. Where Jung completed rigorous academic programs, including a medical degree, Cayce's formal education only went as far as eighth grade. Where Jung's colleagues and associates were among the most influential in Europe, Cayce's friends and supporters were most frequently common folk. And yet both of them made use of their remarkable talents to help other people find meaning in life. Their systems of thought and insights about human nature complement each other. Let's examine some of the ways that Cayce's readings added ingredients that enrich Jung's concept of personal individuation.

The Cayce readings agreed that each soul should strive for self-realization, but didn't give as many details as did Jung about the inner map of that journey. The readings defined particular spiritual disciplines that are crucial—prayer, meditation, dream study, and techniques to enrich physical health—but we don't find in the readings as many in-depth case studies of self-realization as we do in Jung's *Collected Works*.

However, the Cayce readings added a special flavor to the theory of individuation. They described how each soul is born with a unique mission in life—every one of us is specially equipped with talents and abilities that give us the potential to make a needed contribution to the world. In other words, individuation is not the goal in itself. It prepares us for the task of living a specific mission for which we as souls came into this world. One familiar adage from the readings told many people, "*Be not only good but be good for something!*" (2868-2). Quite easily we can restate this principle: "Don't be just self-realized—be self-realized for something."

What did the Cayce readings mean by a mission? Various synonyms were used from time to time. Sometimes it was called the person's purpose in life. In other cases it was referred to as a personal destiny. In this sense the word "destiny" did not indicate a fate that was unavoidable, but rather an optimal potential for which the soul had all the necessary elements. Wise choices and determination are needed for anyone to successfully achieve his or her destiny.

We might just as readily think of the mission as the fulfillment of one's Gift. Do you imagine yourself to be gifted? If you are like most people, you are probably reluctant to assume this label. Great musicians, athletes, or painters are gifted. And a very small minority of children may qualify for the gifted program at their schools. However, the Cayce readings proposed that you and everyone you know is gifted in a particular way. Each individual has a Gift—a kind of sensitivity

or talent. The very essence of a soul's mission is to discover that Gift and then present it to the world.

Another synonym for mission is calling. In fact the Latin root of the word vocation means, "to call." A career in religion is one of the few areas where people still speak directly of this deepest sense of vocation. For example, someone might say that he or she is called to the ministry or a religious order. Most often the term vocation is used interchangeably with occupation or profession. Cayce urged us to think of our life journeys as true vocations. We are called to be something and to do something. That calling comes from God and our own most authentic selves.

Another way in which the Cayce readings added to Jung's notion of individuation concerns service. Studying Jung, one never gets the idea that the fully individuated person will necessarily feel compelled to reach out to others. In the Cayce readings the message is definite: each soul has a mission that includes the dimension of service. Spiritual evolution for humanity is a collective proposition. One reading put it bluntly: *"You'll not be in heaven if you're not leaning on the arm of someone you have helped"* (3352-1).

This polarity is a key to Cayce theory of the meaning of life: the inner work of self-realization on one side and compassionate service on the other side. An aspect of your soul's mission is the inner discovery process of finding your genuine, spiritual identity. And equally important, your mission and calling is to share your gifts and talents with others so that they too can fulfill their purposes.

Another contemporary of Edgar Cayce's wrote eloquently about these same two ingredients of life's meaning: the inner search for a personal mission and our responsibilities of service. Let's consider the school of psychotherapy established by Viktor Frankl. Like Jungian psychology, Frankl's "logotherapy" provides another line of parallel study for understanding the Cayce readings.

VIKTOR FRANKL AND LOGOTHERAPY

The biography of Viktor Frankl is one of the most inspiring of the twentieth century. A successful and respected psychiatrist in Vienna, Frankl was thrown into a concentration camp by the Nazis during World War II. No one who has read his detailed and insightful account of life in Auschwitz and Dachau is likely to forget its impact. It was first published as *From Death-Camp to Existentialism* and then as part one of *Man's Search for Meaning*. During these years of dehumanizing imprisonment, Frankl made important discoveries about human nature and the essence of meaning itself. When the war ended and he gained his freedom, he began to incorporate his new understanding into the way he treated his patients. Out of this work came an entire system of psychiatry, which he called logotherapy.

Frankl's assumption was that each person lives in three spheres: physical, mental, and spiritual. It is the third ingredient that makes us truly human. It is within the realm of the spiritual (as opposed to the "religious") that we encounter our need for meaning. Commenting on the psychiatric approach of two colleagues, he admitted that we have a "will-to-pleasure" (that is, the Freudian position) and a "will-to-power" (the Adlerian position), but he proposed a third drive that is even more significant: the "will-to-meaning." In other words, there is an innate, human impulse to discover what is purposeful about life, and when that drive is thwarted, we are likely to become sick in some form. Frankl cited statistical research that concluded that as much as twenty percent of illness in the modern world is directly attributable to the patient's failure to find meaning in life.

It is within our power to be successful in our exploration. We are equipped with the tools to do the job. According to Frankl, three components are at the core of every human being. First is spirituality: our very substance and soul-nature contains profound meaning. Second is freedom: we are beings of will who often try to avoid the freedom of choice. Yet in spite of hereditary or environmental obstacles, each of us ultimately makes the decisions that shape the quality of our lives. This point is vividly driven home by Frankl's stories of concentration camp inmates who maintained their sense of integrity and inner freedom in spite of the most horrible conditions. And third is responsibility—but responsibility to whom? First, Frankl stated, to ourselves and our own conscience. But just as clearly, he believed we are responsible to our Creator to make the best possible use of what we have been given.

Meaning was so central to Frankl's therapeutic approach that he chose the term logotherapy. For him logos signified the spiritual element—that which is meaningful. However, Frankl's system is not an easy one. It demands a fundamental change in how we view life. He concluded that we must begin to question ourselves in a new way. Here is his most fundamental and succinct statement about how we start to find meaning. (The reader should keep in mind that his generic use of the word "man" is intended by Frankl to denote all people—men and women.)

I have said that man should not ask what he may expect from life, but should rather understand that life expects something from him. It may also be put this way: in the last resort man should not ask "What is the meaning of my life?" but should realize that he himself is being questioned. Life is putting its problems to him, and it is up to him to respond to these questions by being responsible; he can only answer to his life by answering for his life. (The Doctor and the Soul, xiii)

This way of thinking may not have been popular in Frankl's time nor is it now. Something in us prefers to believe that life owes us something. However,

Frankl's teaching is essentially the message of love. We can expect to find fulfillment not so much from what we get but from what we give.

Perhaps it shouldn't be surprising that Frankl is more or less forgotten by contemporary New Age circles. It is more fashionable and marketable to talk about what seekers can get rather than what they need to give. In times that promise, "You can have it all!" not many people want to hear the quiet, intense voice of a psychiatrist who survived Nazi concentration camps. Something about Frankl's central idea is apt to make us nervous. We already feel pressured by expectations from children, spouses, bosses, and the government. Who wants to imagine that life itself expects things of us?

However in a paradoxical way maybe Frankl (and Cayce who expressed the same themes) had the solution to our restless search for meaning in life. By giving we receive. By gladly accepting more responsibility we feel greater power. By making honest commitments we experience inner freedom.

For Frankl all of this came down to a basic truth about each individual life: everyone is called to be and to do something unique. This fundamental premise is not an invitation to a messianic complex. That special calling is not to straighten out other people or the world. However, it is a promise that each one of us really counts, and it suggests that something deep within us will always remain uneasy until we discover and live what we were born to do. In what was perhaps his most concise statement of this idea, Frankl wrote:

One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it. (Man's Search for Meaning, 172)

The language and terminology may differ, but all three of these men presented a common message. Life is essentially meaningful for any individual who will make the effort to explore his or her unique abilities. We are similar enough that certain steps along that pathway are universal. Yet each of us is also distinct and special in what we have to offer the world. These three men masterfully pointed the way and helped thousands of people to fulfill their inner potentials.

GETTING ORIENTED IN THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

Where do you start in finding your own mission? What is the first step in discovering your purposes in life? Because your mission is special and customized to fit you, it may sound like a lonesome journey, one that is hard to begin.

Take heart—you aren't alone. Even though your purposes in life are distinctive, many common elements of your search are shared with everyone. Consider this analogy: the purpose of life is like a two-sided coin. One face of the coin is the same for everyone; the other side is unique to each individual. On the one hand, every soul has the same purpose. Together we are on an adventure in spiritual development that is more or less identical for every soul. Humanity is evolving in consciousness, and the process has been going on for thousands of years. That immense stream of development includes you.

However at the same time you find yourself in the world with particular opportunities and challenges. You are not merely a bit player in some cosmic drama. Your life matters, and it has its own distinctive meaning. It is both natural and fitting for you to feel the impulse to know and live your own calling. The trick is to see how two sides of a coin work together. The two aspects, commonality and uniqueness, do not describe competing purposes; they are two facets of the same meaning for life. To state the issue in philosophical terms: universality and individuality don't have to be contradictions; they can complement each other like positive and negative poles of a magnet.

This sounds like an unsolvable paradox. You may find yourself wondering: "Am I really free to create my own destiny, or am I just a little cog in some inevitable process for all humanity?" The answer is you don't have to choose one or the other. As a spiritual being you have the freedom to shape your future and give meaning to your life. And at the same time, your personal destiny is a part of a greater plan. A general outline for soul development guides you, but there is also room for individuality and creativity.

As an analogy, imagine a class of twenty-five art students taking a sculpture course. The general requirement for all students is a final project—some kind of original sculpture that represents what the student has learned during the semester. But even this universal rule leaves considerable room for individuality. One student may choose clay as a medium for her project; another student, wood. One student may sculpt a bust; another student, an abstract object. All twenty-five students must exhibit the techniques that have been demonstrated by the studio teacher, and yet there is flexibility that allows individual differences to shine through.

For some people the word universality creates a problem. They confuse it with conformity. In so many ways modern society stifles creativity and originality by forcing people to accommodate themselves to a general pattern. We are expected to dress in certain ways, to eat particular kinds of food, to meet specific standards of success. It's no wonder that the spiritual core of who we are rebels at this kind of compliance. Conformity demands that we shed our distinctiveness and reduce ourselves to some "least common denominator" of human nature. In

sharp contrast, universality invites us to reach more deeply into our unique selves and find the very best of who we are.

And so there is good reason to appreciate both sides of the coin in our search for meaning and purpose. We must recognize that personal meaning in life requires a context. Purpose does not live in a vacuum; it needs to be part of something larger. For this reason there was a pattern in the way the Cayce readings advised people about their unique missions. The theory of this clairvoyant counselor was that personal meaning lives within the framework of many additional factors. To really understand what you are called to be and to do in this lifetime, Cayce encouraged you to see it in the context of three ingredients:

1. Your mission for this lifetime has a background of many previous missions in many other lifetimes. Your soul reincarnates, coming into bodily expression with a specialized purpose each time. In some incarnations you have been successful in fulfilling your mission; in other lifetimes you have probably allowed yourself to be diverted from your real calling. And so, based on accomplishments and failures from the past, there is a context for your current mission. (Belief in reincarnation is not a requirement in order to work with Cayce's system for finding your purposes in life. Later in this section we will look further at the implications of this theory. However the readings themselves told people to work with the idea only if the evidence made sense to them.)

2. Your mission for this lifetime is part of a network of missions. Family members, neighbors, professional colleagues, and friends have their own purposes in life. You are drawn together because of the way you can help each other toward success. Your own unique purposes exist in the context of your social setting. What you are called to be in life fits remarkably with the purposes of other souls around you. Although it doesn't always work out in the optimal way, there is the potential for you to fulfill your mission so that it interweaves with those of other key people in your life.

3. Your mission for this lifetime has been chosen against the backdrop of God's plan for all souls. There is a grand design for the evolution of human consciousness and your soul has been a part of that blueprint for many ages. This is the truly universal context in which you can begin to see clearly the special meaning of your own life.

However, in order to appreciate the cosmic framework in which you and everyone else live, you must be willing to study and speculate about the most distant times in human history. Quite naturally you may puzzle, "Must I really be concerned with things from thousands of years ago if all I want to understand is my life right now?" Cayce's response to this sort of doubt was, "Yes, it is vital." As he said in one reading, "*There is as much reason to dwell upon the thought from whence the soul came, as it is upon whence the soul goeth*" (3003-1). In other

words, even though destiny sounds like it concerns tomorrow alone, it is actually a future that lives in the context of the past. Of special significance, according to Cayce, is the far distant past when we were created by God. The initial purposes and meaning of life at creation still provide the pattern for finding meaning in the modern world.

CAYCE'S STORY OF CREATION

One of the oldest religious questions asks, "How were we created? What brought humanity into being?" For centuries the greatest minds of theology and philosophy have proposed explanations. The Edgar Cayce readings suggested an answer that is yet another attempt to give greater meaning to our lives today by describing the original purposes for humanity.

Ultimately the problem of creation cannot be solved. Our analytical minds, functioning in the familiar framework of time and space, probably cannot grasp the complexities and higher states of consciousness that were involved in the authentic story. The source of the Cayce readings recognized that limitation. It appreciated the restrictions of our logical thinking but still found a way to present the essential themes of creation. For example, even though God is not a superperson, we may be able to gain an approximate understanding of certain divine qualities by referring to the best human qualities.

The readings presented the saga of creation and the evolution of souls as a myth. Remember that the deepest meaning of myth is not misconception or falsehood. Unfortunately in colloquial language of recent times, that is what the word has come to connote. Actually myth communicates a truth that is so profound and important that it can't be captured in logical terms. Myth makes use of images, metaphors, and symbols in a story line that teaches your head as well as your heart. Whenever you encounter a myth, pay attention to both the new thoughts and the new feelings it awakens in you. It's a powerful way to learn, and many people best understand the meaning of life through this approach.

The Bible influenced Cayce's thinking and helped to shape the mythic account of our origins that he gave. Anyone who studies transcripts of his psychic readings notices that the language is stylistically similar to the King James Bible and that the readings frequently refer to scriptural stories. What may not be as well known is that in his normal, conscious life, Edgar Cayce was an avid reader of both the Old and New Testaments. Fulfilling a promise that he made as a boy, he read the entire Bible once for every year of his life—every word sixty-seven times before his death!

The Cayce readings built upon the basic account in Genesis but gave additional facts and interpreted many Biblical passages in their broader and more symbolic intent. According to the readings, there is no doubt that we were

created by God. Physical evolution of the human body is a fact as well, but it can't explain our inner, spiritual nature.

The readings began with a question that is most fundamental: why did God create us? The problems of "how" and "when" are not nearly so crucial as the purpose for which the Creator brought us into being. The meaning of our lives today is shaped by this primal intention. The initial purpose was companionship. God desired companionship.

This makes God sound like a lonely old man in the sky, but remember that the Cayce readings presented this explanation as a myth. The desire for companionship is another way of saying that the spiritual forces of the universe are motivated toward loving relationship. Something about the nature of God has an impulse toward connections. And we were created to be a step toward relationship, connections, companionship, and love. This gives us a first clue about the meaning of life in our modern world. Purpose and fulfillment are most likely to be found by making loving connections with other living things around us.

After addressing that fundamental question, the Cayce readings tackled the more complex issues of how we as souls have evolved over the centuries and how we came to be here on the earth. Our creation as souls was in the spiritual realm and only later did we come into physical bodies. Cayce's mythic account of souls and their journey in consciousness is complicated and often enigmatic. Many long-time students of this material believe that the readings given on this subject are the most difficult to interpret and understand. Briefly, however, here is the story that we might extract from a careful probe. It revolves around three great themes: two kinds of perfection; the problem of good and evil; and the struggle between freedom and destiny.

In the beginning——not a certain number of years ago, but beyond the realm of time as we understand it—God created us as souls. Each of us was given three attributes: spirit, mind, and free will. The spirit is the very essence of the life force that animates us. It is that core of our being that is immortal. Mind is the creative power within us. With the mind we are co-creators with God and able to shape our own realities. The saying "thoughts are things" signifies that fact. Finally, free will makes us independent. How could God ever have hoped for companions if we were merely robots who were blindly obedient to his every wish? Genuine relationship demands autonomy. And so, at creation we were given our independence: free will.

In our initial state we were perfect and experienced oneness with God. It might be said that God looked upon us and was pleased. However, mingled with that pleasure was a desire for something more. What more could there be? Perfect is perfect, right? And if we were already one with God, what further development was possible?

Perhaps we can best look at these questions with an analogy. A newborn baby might be called perfect. With its innocence, openness, and spontaneity, a newborn is a wonder to behold. And if we speculate about its state of consciousness, we might conclude that it still experiences a sense of oneness with its mother. Even after the physical umbilical cord has been severed, it often appears that the newborn is still psychologically connected with its mother.

The point of this analogy is the relative meaning of two words: perfection and oneness. The kind of perfection seen in a newborn is not the ultimate human perfection. Obviously the newborn lacks experience and has not even begun to express some of the highest human qualities such as kindness, self-sacrifice, or creativity. Later as an adult, that child may strive for a mature ideal of perfection.

In a similar way the oneness that fills the mind of a newborn is not the same kind of oneness as that experienced by a spiritually enlightened adult. The difference is the infant does not yet know its own individuality. The newborn feels an oneness unconscious of itself. On the other hand, the enlightened adult is filled with a conscious oneness that knows universality and individuality at the same time.

This distinction helps us understand how Cayce defined the purpose and plan God had for our growth and development: to know ourselves to be ourselves yet also one with the universe. At creation we were perfect in one way, but God desired that we would attain a more mature perfection. Real companionship and relationship would be possible only after that development. At creation we had a kind of oneness, but it was unconscious—a sort of oceanic oneness in which we did not know consciously our own unique individuality. It was the plan of our Creator that we would evolve in consciousness to experience a higher order of oneness.

Of course the issue of individuality sounds paradoxical. If initially we were given the gift of free will, then it could be argued a sense of our independence was available all along. The catch is even though we were given free will; we didn't at first make full use of it. Metaphorically we might say at creation the will was still "sleeping within the soul" and only later did it begin to awaken.

Consider this analogy. Suppose a friend gives you a beautifully gift-wrapped birthday present. From the moment it's in your possession the gift is fully yours, even though you haven't yet unwrapped it. At the appropriate time you'll untie the ribbon and remove the colorful paper, revealing the exact nature of the present. The gift was yours from the moment it came into your hands, but now that its precise identity is known, you can do something with it.

The same themes were at work in our spiritual creation. God gave each of us freedom of will. From the beginning we have been individual souls, but at first

we were not able to make use of our autonomy and specialness. We were unconscious: our free will was like a present waiting to be unwrapped and used.

However God had a plan to change this. Continuing Cayce's mythic account of our origins, souls began a long journey to become conscious companions with the Creator. Something was required if we were to develop and unfold spiritually. We needed to experience more directly our own individuality, and that could happen only if we separated ourselves from the sense of oneness and universality.

In God's plan we were led into more limited dimensions of consciousness, places in awareness where our immature individuality would not be overwhelmed by infinite states of mind. Many kinds of experience in many different dimensions were prepared for us, only one of which was the three-dimensional consciousness we know now as the material life of the earth. In other words, physical experience was one place that God had in mind for us because of the opportunities for growth it can provide.

Cayce's mythic story even gives a name to one soul who led us into the earthly adventure. He was called Amelius. As strange as that name may sound, it resembles another word, "ameliorate," which means to make something better, to improve upon. We might interpret this to say long, long ago we were part of a great movement of spiritual beings who came into this three-dimensional world. We entered because there was great opportunity and purpose here, and we were led by an impulse to become even better than we were when God created us.

What was the opportunity offered by physical experience? In this dimension we have a special chance to make use of free will. Something about material consciousness gives the will a possibility to awaken. However an obvious temptation stood in the way. God's plan wouldn't be fulfilled if we misused our freedom once we entered into this dimension of awareness. Independence leaves room for rebellion, and that's exactly what happened. Perhaps some measure of rebellion was inevitable. That's how any free being tests limits and boundaries. The problem came when souls continued with their rebellion and began to waste the opportunity for spiritual development.

This mythic tale narrated in the Cayce readings is very abstract and philosophical. You may wonder how it could help you find meaning for your life in today's world, but maybe the question of independence is not so far removed from your immediate experience. Do you remember what it was like to break free from your childhood family and become your own person? The analogy best fits someone whose early home life was generally harmonious and supportive. Imagine a young person, just reaching the adolescent years, who finds it hard to separate herself enough to find her own values and goals in life. However something in her knows the separation is necessary. As long as her thoughts and feelings revolve around those of her parents, she never becomes her own

person. As long as she stays in the cocoon of her childhood home, she never tests her own wings and learns to fly.

Perhaps in her teenage years this hypothetical girl will have some rebellious episodes. Hopefully they won't harm her or others. During those years she may also be successful in finding constructive ways to assert her independence and need for separation. It may be difficult for her parents because they feel rejected; but if they truly love her, they know how valuable it is for their daughter to discover her will and really come to know her own identity. God loved us that much and still does. We are given the freedom to use or misuse our independence.

Unfortunately most souls began long ago to distort the meaning of physical life, and they have continued to do so. In Cayce's saga he described how spiritual beings came into the third dimension for a clear purpose but then diverted themselves from that purpose. The mission we all shared when we entered material experience can be characterized by these words: to bring the infinite into the finite. We each bear within us the spiritual essence of our Creator: the infinite and universal. Our mission is to discover how these divine qualities can be expressed in a focused, individualized way, in a finite, physical life. It's a tremendous challenge, but when we are successful, we become conscious, co-creative companions with God.

What does all this tell us about the value of physical life? Some religious traditions teach that material existence is a tragic error or a cosmic illusion. Cayce stated the opposite in his story of creation. Our lives in the physical world are of the greatest possible value. God not only respects and honors our individuality, but God also prepared this experience in materiality for us because of its opportunity for spiritual growth. Things in human history have often gone wrong, but they don't have to continue that way.

What can we do to help things move in the direction of spiritual development? A good start is to take a closer look at how things got off-track thousands of years ago. The Cayce story provides a fascinating description of how souls chose to divert themselves from their original mission in the earth. The essential problem came from the way we decided to use the powers of mind and free will.

First we discovered the extraordinary creative power of the mind. We played with our ability to shape physical reality with our thoughts. Nowadays we hear the saying "thoughts are things," but thousands of years ago that truth was experienced vividly. By mentally focusing on a desire we could quickly make it into a physical reality. This condition is remembered today in legends about a genie who can grant any wish. This magical character symbolizes the creative power of the mind itself. But remember what always happens in such tales: the wishes are granted and they get the recipient into trouble. If the number of

wishes is limited, then invariably the last wish must be saved to undo all the problems created by the other wishes.

How did our desires lead us astray? Many of them were selfish. They focused on things that led to personal pleasure but didn't reflect our higher, spiritual nature. God planned for us to use the mind and will to bring qualities like love, beauty, and truth into physical expression. However, that required a concern for ourselves and for others. We became preoccupied with ourselves and developed a "will to private fulfillment." In other words, the great possibilities for the individual self got lost in selfishness. We forgot the work of loving and helping each other, and then we began to forget the spiritual realm to which we also belong.

In the story from the Cayce readings, God did not give up on any of us after just one lifetime. Upon the death of the physical body, each soul temporarily left the material dimension and once again entered the spiritual worlds. However the soul carried with it all its mental patterns of confusion and selfishness. Obviously none of us were yet fit to be called companions with God. Rather than judge us once and for all, God offered us additional chances. When the time was right, we were allowed to come again into the physical world - born once more in human form through a process called reincarnation.

THE THEORY OF REINCARNATION

For many people the idea of reincarnation is foreign or unattractive. In fact, when the concept first began to come through his readings, Edgar Cayce himself rejected the notion. He had never seen any reference to it in the Bible, so he was inclined to renounce it. It was only after many years of careful study and soul-searching that he came to accept the theory.

Reincarnation may or may not make sense to you. It is not a required belief in order to work with the approaches found in this book. Nevertheless, many people find the idea helpful and believe there is evidence that supports the theory. The most remarkable cases are probably those in which characteristics of the physical body seem to carry over. For example, a few cases suggest a birthmark may be related to a physical trauma in the preceding lifetime. Dr. Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia Medical School has conducted extensive research on this subject spanning more than twenty-five years. His investigations of evidence for reincarnation have focused on children who claim to have conscious memories of a past life. For several of those young people, the details of the past-life story match a birthmark on the current body. Many of Stevenson's best cases come from the Tlingit [pronounced "Klingit"] Indians of southeastern Alaska. They believe in reincarnation and this belief has a strong influence on their religious and social behaviors.

One case, taken from Dr. Stevenson's classic book, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, concerned a man named Victor Vincent who died in the spring of 1946. According to details Stevenson gathered later, Vincent had grown especially close to his niece during the last year of his life. He even told the niece, "I'm coming back as your next son. I hope I don't stutter then as much as I do now. Your son will have these scars." He proceeded to show his niece and her husband two scars from surgical operations, one on his back and one on his nose.

About eighteen months after Vincent's death, the niece gave birth to a son who had two marks on his body exactly like the scars of his deceased great uncle. Although Dr. Stevenson did not learn of this case and examine the boy until he was fifteen years old, the scar on his back especially seemed to resemble the kind that comes from surgery. Stevenson also learned of some fascinating events in the boy's early childhood. When he was a toddler and just learning to talk, his mother tried to teach him to respond with his name when he was asked for it. Once he replied, "Don't you know me. I'm Kakhody," which was the tribal name of the deceased uncle, Victor.

At the ages of two and three the boy also recognized and identified family members of Victor Vincent without any coaching from his parents. Later in his early childhood he was able to tell stories about events that had happened to him in the previous life as Victor, stories that the family confirmed. However, around the age of nine he began to make fewer and fewer statements about this past life, and by the time Stevenson met him as a boy of fifteen, he had no recollection of Victor. As a scientific investigator, Stevenson is careful not to make any claims of proof for reincarnation. However the evidence is highly suggestive and illustrates how some aspects of soul memory may work.

Hundreds of readings by Edgar Cayce provide another source of evidence for reincarnation, although it's of a different variety than Stevenson's work. Cayce gave more than nineteen hundred past-life readings. Each one included a lengthy section that analyzed current personality traits in light of hypothetical past lives. In many of the cases we find convincing stories that help explain problems and positive opportunities.

But how important is reincarnation to the Cayce philosophy? The answer is paradoxical: it is simultaneously very important and it is almost inconsequential. How can we have it both ways? Only by distinguishing between the underlying principles that govern reincarnation and a personal belief in the theory. The principles - the universal laws - illustrated by reincarnation are crucial. Whether or not a soul believes in reincarnation during a particular lifetime is usually unimportant.

Three principles are vital to the world-view of the Cayce readings. Each one is demonstrated by reincarnation as it is described in that psychic material:

1. Life is continuous. Consciousness and personal identity go beyond the grave.
2. God who created and gives order to the universe is ultimately just. What may appear to be unfair looks that way only because we cannot see all the factors that are at work in the situation.
3. God loves us and offers us assistance in the long journey of spiritual development. Not only is there a law of karma but also a law of grace.

The theory of reincarnation is very significant in helping us to understand those essential principles. However, reincarnation may be merely one of many ways in which those universal truths are revealed. The spiritual laws are much bigger than any theory of rebirth.

Someone who rejects the concept of reincarnation may have found other ways in which to understand and relate to those key principles. And so in this sense, belief in reincarnation is almost inconsequential according to the Cayce readings. What matters is the here and now. Everything that is ultimately important to spiritual growth is present right now for the soul. In fact a distorted view of reincarnation could lead someone to preoccupation with the past - dwelling on useless questions like "Was I once a famous person?" or "Who is my true beloved from past lifetimes?"

This point is made most clearly by one reading Cayce gave on the subject of reincarnation. It was one of those rare readings that was not directed to a single recipient but was a general discourse given for all who might be interested in the subject. This is the finest summary of his position on the theory of rebirth. He stated unequivocally that past lives are a fact, but he also stressed that knowing about them is meaningless unless it makes us better at what we do in the present.

Only that which produces or makes . . . a citizen a better citizen, a father a better father, a mother a better mother, a neighbor a better neighbor, is constructive. And to find that [you] only lived, died, and were buried under the cherry tree in Grandmother's garden does not make [you] one whit better [a] citizen, mother or father! But to know that [you] spoke unkindly and suffered for it, and in the present may correct it by being righteous - that is worthwhile!

What is righteousness? Just being kind, just being noble, just being self-sacrificing; just being willing to be the hands for the blind, the feet for the lame - these are constructive experiences.

[You] may gain knowledge of same, for incarnations are a FACT!

How may [you] prove it? In [your] daily living! 5753-2

If we keep in mind the attitude expressed by this reading, what does the theory of reincarnation say about the meaning of life? First, it suggests that life is purposeful. Everything that happens is for a reason. Because of the choices that we have made - minutes ago or even lifetimes ago - we experience either beneficial or troublesome results. A big part of the meaning of life is that we are responsible for ourselves.

Second, reincarnation claims that the situations in which we find ourselves are uniquely suited for spiritual growth. Problems are opportunities to change something about ourselves: an attitude, a feeling, or a behavior. As the Cayce readings often put it, we can make a stumbling block into a stepping-stone.

Finally, the theory of reincarnation states that the purpose of life is ultimately two-fold: to make ourselves a little better than we were last lifetime and to make constructive use of the talents we bring with us from past lives. Each of us is born with certain positive characteristics - skills, abilities, sensitivities, and aptitudes. Some of them may require training and persistent efforts in order to blossom, but they all spring from the soul as a carryover from the distant past.

Perhaps reincarnation sounds right to you. You may find that it's a powerful help in making sense of the world around you. On the other hand, you may discover that the theory doesn't feel right or violates important beliefs you hold. If that's the case, you'll probably want to think of your innate talents as God-given rather than the product of past lives. Either way you can discover your purpose in life by working with the approaches found in the remaining chapters of this book.

No matter which side you take in the controversy over rebirth, keep this fact in mind: it is not the purpose of life to reincarnate. A series of human lifetimes may be one process that your soul follows in order to reach the goal, but reincarnation is not itself your mission. Your true purpose can be found closer to home - in the here and now. Life has meaning because it gives you the chance to discover your true nature and to grow closer to a full companionship with God.

A PARABLE OF THE MEANING OF LIFE

Stories make things easier to remember; they also touch us at levels of understanding deeper than the intellect. Perhaps that's why some of the greatest spiritual teachers used fables, myths, and parables to make their points.

Let's translate some of the abstract concepts of this chapter into images that are simple but potent. In the form of a parable we can capture the essential themes of the purpose of life and the mission we all share. It's the tale of Pinocchio, a well-known legend that has been reinterpreted by that master mythmaker of modern times, Walt Disney.

As you read the following synopsis of the plot, think of Pinocchio as a symbol of the human soul on its journey of spiritual evolution. His story is your story.

Pinocchio is created by the influence of two characters - one male and one female, just as the Cayce readings sometimes refer to "Mother-Father God." First, Pinocchio is carved by the kindly wood craftsman, Geppetto. Then the Blue

Fairy pays a visit during the night and with the tap of her magic wand bestows the gift of life. At the same time, she chooses an unsuspecting cricket named Jiminy and gives him a mission: to stay close to Pinocchio and be his conscience. This is reminiscent of something found in the Cayce readings about our creation: God placed within the unconscious mind of every soul the consciousness of truth.

When Geppetto wakes up the next morning he is overjoyed. There is a celebration to honor the new life of Pinocchio. However, the more Geppetto thinks about it, the clearer he becomes about his greatest desire. He wishes Pinocchio might become a real boy.

Knowing that his wish can be fulfilled only if Pinocchio learns and grows, Geppetto sends his son off to school. In a very significant scene, Pinocchio is led out the front door by his father. He is sent off on a purposeful journey accompanied only by his friend Jiminy Cricket. Pinocchio does not run away from home. His departure is with his father's blessing and its purpose is Pinocchio's own improvement. He is on an adventure for amelioration, to become something better—a real boy.

However, once he is "out in the world," problems begin. Using his newfound freedom, Pinocchio makes some bad choices. He confronts temptation in the form of Honest John, the evil fox. Jiminy Cricket protests but to no avail. First Pinocchio succumbs to the temptation of pride. He follows the lead of Honest John and joins a carnival troupe. He performs to great acclaim as the dancing marionette that needs no strings. Sadly the fame can be enjoyed only in small doses. Between performances he is locked in a cage, and it is only when the Blue Fairy intervenes with her powers of grace that he is set free and given another chance. Before his release, however, Pinocchio has the embarrassing experience of his nose growing longer whenever he lies to the Blue Fairy. Lying is symptomatic of the evil influencing Pinocchio. In fact, in his study of the nature of evil, *People of the Lie*, Scott Peck calls it the central feature by which we can recognize evil. Ultimately we can't hide the source of our motives; it's written in our faces. For Pinocchio this takes an exaggerated, symbolic form with the length of his nose.

Jiminy Cricket is determined to help Pinocchio stay on track this time, but before long additional temptations arise. Honest John appears again, this time

with an offer that's hard to refuse. Pinocchio is invited to Pleasure Island, a place where boys can have fun all day and indulge all their appetites. Jiminy Cricket knows nothing good can come from such a place, but Pinocchio ignores his advice. Soon he's having a great time on this island of amusements and candy.

Pleasure Island, of course, is symbolic of our own self-indulgent materialism. What happens to Pinocchio and all the other boys if they linger there too long? They begin to turn into animals - donkeys to be exact. The jackass is quite a fitting image for the state to which we as souls fell. We forgot who we were and what our mission was, just as Pinocchio lost sight of why Geppetto sent him off.

As Pinocchio notices that he is growing long ears and a tail, he turns to Jiminy Cricket and begs for help. There is still time to escape. Pinocchio's "repentance" pays off because Jiminy Cricket knows the way to get off the island. Once they are away from the immediate danger, they begin to search for Geppetto. But where is he? They return to his home and discover that he is gone - out looking for Pinocchio himself. This image is particularly important for us. It suggests that not only are we seeking God, but that God is also searching for us.

Pinocchio receives guidance indicating the whereabouts of his father. He can be found deep beneath the sea in the belly of the great whale Monstro. Geppetto's boat has been swallowed by this "great fish." Admittedly a whale is a mammal and not a fish; but if we stretch the facts slightly, it suggests an interesting interpretation. A fish is an ancient symbol for the reconciliation of spirit and matter. The sea is a symbol of the unconscious. And so where will Pinocchio find what he seeks? Where will we find the object of our spiritual longing? Within our own unconscious selves. Our true spiritual nature resides there.

As Pinocchio and Jiminy Cricket search the sea for Geppetto, they are luckily swallowed by the same whale. A joyful reunion of Pinocchio and his father takes place in the belly of Monstro. However, they soon realize their predicament. Somehow they must escape and bring their reunion back to the light of day and dry land. In other words, our spiritual journey doesn't end when we begin to re-encounter our spiritual depths in dreams, prayer, or meditation. The next step is to bring that higher state of consciousness into daily life, and that is often the most difficult task.

In the parable Pinocchio has a plan. He devises a way for them to escape, but it requires great strength and courage. At one point it appears Geppetto might drown, so Pinocchio sacrifices himself to save his father. When Geppetto regains consciousness on the beach, he sees beside him the lifeless body of his son. Deeply grieved, he takes the body home and lays it on a bed. To his surprise the Blue Fairy returns and once again touches Pinocchio with her wand. He is resurrected and thus fulfills his mission: he comes back to life as a real boy.

This parable of our own journey in spiritual development tells parts of the story that we haven't yet fulfilled. You may wonder where you are in the story. You can find yourself at many points. You probably spend some of each day in the consciousness symbolized by Pleasure Island. You may have some moments of consciously trying to get off the island or times when you are looking for your own Geppetto. No matter what part of this mythic story seems to fit you most often, the good news is the ending.

This is the meaning of life: we are in the process of becoming conscious, co-creative companions with God. The blossoming of our real nature may still be far off, but we can do things each and every day that take us a step in that direction. The purpose of life we all share is making the infinite finite - bringing spiritual qualities into individual expression.