

The Visions of Elias

Recorded & edited by Tom Veitch
~ Opening Chapters ~

~ 1 ~

“Here’s a good one,” Elias said, opening his journal to a page marked with a yellow post-it.

We were in a sunny hospice room, he was propped up on a hospital bed, and I was sitting in a comfortable chair, notebook in hand, tape recorder running.

His face was bright and full of life, even though he was dying. From time to time, as he talked, he would get a distressed look and then grimace from pain. I watched as he pressed a button he held in his hand and administered himself a little morphine sulphate. Almost immediately his expression relaxed. The dosage was controlled by a machine — he could release only what he needed.

It was late in our recording sessions, which had begun three weeks before.

“In this dream a holy man in the garb of ancient Palestine appeared out of a stairwell and entered the room where I sat with Davida, my wife, in our house by the ocean. I noticed he had dark skin and his brown hair was greasy and divided into braids. He sat down on the floor and began talking. He talked to us about death. For a long time he talked about death. He gave us instructions on how to

prepare for death, and he answered all our questions about death.

“I asked him if God was going to meet us here, in this room. ‘No,’ he said, confidently, ‘we will go to another world to meet Him. Tonight the enemy will come and destroy our bodies.’

“Davida and I were amazed, although we sort of knew this already. As he left us, he passed in front of an open window. Machine gun bullets came flashing through the window from the sea outside. The bullets pierced the man’s robe, but passed through him without hurting him. ‘Did you see that?’ I said to Davida. ‘The bullets went right through him as if he wasn’t there!’

“The dream shifted. I was teaching religion to four children, asking them what they knew about God. They were bright students, and they knew their catechism. But they confessed they didn’t feel the presence of God. ‘I wish I could know if God is real,’ said one.

“I recited the Lord’s Prayer to them:

*Our Father who art in heaven
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven...*

“As I recited the words of the Lord’s Prayer, all my anxieties about dying and meeting God face-to-face vanished. I felt my mind healed of its life-long split, and I began filling up with light and happiness. I was drawn up-ward, rising easily out of my body. There was some sadness for the world I was leaving

behind, but this was more than compensated by a great expanding joy.

“Then Davida tugged at my arms and pulled me back into my body. ‘Just a minute,’ she said. ‘I’m going with you when it’s time to go!’ I looked around, and the four children had disappeared.

“The dream shifted again, and Davida and I were sitting by a window, watching the eastern night sky. Above was the starry sky, and below we could see the lights of a town — all the houses where people were having dinner, or watching television, or just living their peaceful lives. ‘They are going on as if nothing is going to happen,’ I said. ‘For them, the coming of the bombs is more difficult to believe in than God. They are feeling a little uneasy perhaps, although they are not sure why. They put away these anxieties and reassure each other that life will go on just as always...nothing is going to happen.’

“Suddenly the sky in the East filled with first one, then a million falling stars. ‘Are these the flares of the enemy?’ I thought. Then a single gold nugget of light, neither beautiful nor ominous, appeared suspended in the center of the sky, about to unleash its terrible power — *the bomb!*

“‘*Goodnight,*’ said a voice. ...And I woke up.”

Elias put down his journal and looked at me.

“It wasn’t really a bomb was it,” I said.

“No,” he said. “It was the coming of the Presence of God.”

My friend Elias is dead now, and I miss him greatly. I first met him in 1967, when I was a

Benedictine monk for a time. Then he disappeared from view for three decades, until late 1994, when I saw him browsing the Buddhism section of Fields Bookstore in San Francisco.

I had moved to S.F. for a couple of years to work on Star Wars comic books in collaboration with another writer and with people at Lucasfilm. When I asked George Lucas about the spirituality of the Jedi Knights, he said, quite simply, "Look to Buddha." So I launched into a serious study of Buddhism — which, as it happened, I had been wanting to do for a long time. I was happy to have the opportunity to fulfill my wish and earn some money doing it.

Fields Bookstore was the premiere source in the San Francisco Bay Area for books on occultism, new age spirituality, psychology, philosophy, healing arts, ancient civilizations, astrology, magic, Buddhism, Taoism, Tantrism, alchemy, Gnosticism, Thomas Merton, C.G. Jung, Swedenborg, and every kind of arcana, both ancient and modern. Tucked into a long narrow cavity on Polk Street, with floor to ceiling shelves and a continually changing stock, it was a browsers' paradise.

I first discovered it in the 1960s, and returned to it every time I visited San Francisco. Invariably I would come away with a pile of books on subjects I knew well, and subjects I knew nothing about.

On that day in 1994, as I approached the Buddhism section, I spotted a long-haired man who was deeply absorbed in a book of photographs of Buddhist temples. He seemed vaguely familiar, but I couldn't place him. Suddenly he turned abruptly and

looked me square in the eyes. “Tom!” he said. “I had a dream I was going to see you today!”

“...Elias? Hey, man, how are you?” We hugged like long lost brothers, which in fact we were, since both of us had been monks in the 1960s.

We talked about our lives for awhile and then Elias bought the book of photographs and we went for lunch and talked some more. Eating avocado salad we reminisced about those distant days when I was a Benedictine novice in Weston, Vermont, and Elias was an ex-Trappist, who had come to Weston to visit with his mentor Hugh McKiernan. Father Hugh, a Roman Catholic visionary, had been Elias’ Abbot at Holy Cross Abbey in Berryville, Virginia. After he resigned as Abbot, Hugh joined the Benedictines in Elmira, New York. From there he moved to Weston Priory in Vermont, for about two years.

As we talked, it turned out that in the intervening decades Elias had become a student of all religions and a follower of no religions. And in the far ranging context of our discussion that day, he shared a few stories of his religious experiences with me.

I was both impressed and fascinated. But after a few more friendly meetups and dinners, I realized that here was a man wrestling with a God who had touched him directly and in so doing had upset all his plans for a normal life.

When we renewed our friendship in San Francisco in 1994 Elias preferred energetic philosophical discussion to divulging the deepest secrets of his religious introversion. I sensed this was, for the most part, a walled off area, and I didn't press him. I just

enjoyed being with him and discussing "man, God and the cosmos" as he liked to say. As I later found out, he really only told me a little – the proverbial "tip of the iceberg"— of what had befallen him beginning in the early 1960s.

After the Star Wars work finished, I returned to Vermont, where I reside to this day. Although Elias was 3000 miles away in California, we remained friends, and our friendship deepened through telephone conversations and letters. Meanwhile the "world wide web" exploded and I found Elias holding forth on internet discussion groups, including some of his own creation.

Twenty years after our San Francisco reunion, in early 2014, Elias passed away following a long illness. During the time he was sickening and dying we talked many times, and I made a special trip to the West Coast in 2013 to see him.

One day, as I sat by his bed in a hospice facility where he was cared for by his wife Davida and others, I brought up the question of his visionary life. He had only touched on it before. Now I asked him straight out if he would share more of it with me. "After all," I argued, "you don't want all your secrets to die with you, do you?"

"Actually, I do," said. "My inner life is my own business, not yours or anybody else's. Besides, I've learned that nobody understands that stuff. Or almost nobody. Hugh McKiernan understood it. My Jungian analyst understood it a little. I have never met anybody else that did except Davida and a woman from India."

An uncomfortable silence followed. He was clearly mulling something over. Indeed, he began muttering to himself, as if he was having an argument with an invisible somebody. So I waited and looked out the window at San Francisco Bay and the Oakland Hills beyond. It was a bright and beautiful day.

After a little while Elias coughed and took a sip of ginger ale through a straw. He sighed and cleared his throat. "O.k.," he said, "we need to do this. And we need to do it right. Davida will give you the key to my apartment. Everything in the apartment should be just as I left it, when she moved me here. In the living room you will find a bookcase with about a hundred notebooks and journals in it. Most of them have numbers on the spines. Some have names. Go there and bring me numbers 23 to 25...no, better make that 20 to 26. And bring my little tape recorder. It's in the desk drawer in the office. There's a box of blank tapes there as well. Bring those. I am going to make this as easy for you as possible."

"I have a brand new digital recorder we can use," I said.

"That's o.k. I like tapes. I already have a collection of tapes I've made — these will round it out."

Then he sighed again, closed his eyes, and leaned back on the pillows. I could tell he had just lost an argument, with whom I didn't know, but he was somehow relieved not to have won.

As I already mentioned, his wife Davida was a caregiver at the hospice where Elias was dying. In addition to regular nursing duties, she did laying-on-of-hands for the patients. She was very good at that —

patients were always asking for her. And I know she was good, because she gave me a session for a swollen knee. Her hands radiated a warmth that went all through my knee, accompanied with a sense of great peace and relaxation. The swelling went down in mere minutes, and to date the knee has given me no more trouble.

I got the key from her and went to the apartment. It was not a shared apartment. Elias and Davida owned two apartments on the same floor in the same building. Partly this was for convenience — the apartments were small. But mostly it was because Elias liked to stay up all night working and playing his jazz records.

He was also very messy. When I opened the door of the apartment, I found the place just as he left it when he entered hospice — total chaos such as only a complete introvert can create.

His office was the largest room. Books were piled on the floor and bursting out of bookcases, with yellow post-its and slips of paper sticking out of them. There were heaps of old newspapers, not as bad as you read about in stories of aging recluses, but bad enough. The wastebaskets had been emptied by somebody, and several black garbage bags were full and tied up, ready to be put out on the sidewalk. But the cleanup had only just begun.

His desk was strewn with letters and loose papers, some covered with colored drawings and diagrams. And there was his precious computer, a Dell desktop with a 21-inch monitor and an ergonomic keyboard sticky with bits of food and pipe

tobacco and dandruff, and years worth of hair and dust collected between the keys.

Curiously the kitchen was spotlessly neat — clean dishes sitting in a drainer, scrubbed countertops, cans of soup, tunafish and Beefaroni in orderly stacks on the shelves. The refrigerator was well-stocked. The milk had gone sour, and some of the dinners he had cooked for himself sat half-consumed in their serving dishes. But there was plenty of broccoli and carrots in the vegetable bin, still looking fresh and edible.

Had his wife cleaned up the kitchen? I think not. These were the two worlds of Elias — the chaos of his office and the fastidious order of his kitchen.

There was one other room, in the back — a combination bedroom and living room with a fold-out couch, a coffee table, more bookcases, a television set and a stereo system with massive speakers. I looked over his CDs and long-playing records. They were mostly vintage jazz, some classical, and a smattering of popular rock albums. He also had a large selection of Ravi Shankar.

I found the bookcase where he kept his journals, and extracted numbers 20-26, as instructed. They were leatherbound artist's sketchbooks about 6 inches by 9 inches, filled from cover-to-cover with hand-written notes and drawings. Each notebook was well-thumbed and falling apart.

It was early afternoon when I finished. I knew he wasn't sleeping a lot, so I took the notebooks and headed back to the hospice, stopping at McDonalds on the way to grab a chicken sandwich and fries.

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“O.k., did you bring the tape recorder?” Elias was sitting up, and Davida appeared to be serving him the last of a lunch of tomato soup and sourdough bread.

“Yeah, it’s right here,” I said, holding up my knapsack. “How are you today, Davida?”

“I’m just fine, Tom. How’s your knee?” She was tall, with reddish-brown hair and blue eyes, still in her fifties and beautiful as always.

“It feels great. I don’t know how you do it.”

“Ask Elias, he knows.” She laughed. The way he looked at her, I knew they were a couple that cherished many secrets.

“I’ll leave you two to your work,” she said. “Elias has been hiding in his room far too long. I urged him to publish this stuff years ago, but he always said ‘yes, Davida, some day but not today.’”

“And today it is some day,” Elias said. “I don’t know how long this will take, but I hope we can get it all on tape before I croak.” He took a final sip of soup and pushed the serving table away. “Here, set the tape recorder on this cabinet next to the bed, and move your chair over here. When we both talk the recorder will pick up everything.”

While Davida piled the dishes on a tray, I did as Elias instructed. I also took out a notepad and pen for jotting down thoughts that might not reach my lips.

“Let’s get right to it,” he said. “This is going to be a book — not a big book, but a little book — for

everybody to read. I'll try to keep the philosophy and metaphysics and Gnostic blah-blah to a minimum."

"Don't do that. I love to hear that stuff," I said.

"Yes, please don't hold anything back, E," said his wife. (She sometimes called him "E", as did others who knew him.) We all smiled, because of the tone of her voice, humor laced with gentle sarcasm. They kissed, then she left the room carrying the tray of dishes.

Elias began:

"What I want to do here is open my little treasure box and pull out some of the precious jewels and amulets. I could die tomorrow, or maybe next week. I probably won't, but that's the prognosis. So getting this story on tape might be a close thing. Let's strip the memories down to the essentials."

"Elias, why don't you just say everything that comes to mind, and I'll edit out the excess later?"

"Well, there's no way I can tell you everything. But yeah, I'll do that. And you should be free to ask me any question that comes to your mind. I'll try to give short answers."

"Long ones are fine with me. There's plenty of tape. Besides, I'm sure with Davida's help you will hang on for months and months."

"Good point. She's already pumping me full of energy every day. I'll ask her to turn it up to eleven."

A different nurse, a woman about twenty-eight, entered with a can of soda for me and a glass of juice for Elias. For some reason she felt it was her duty to remind me that I shouldn't overtire my friend. "He needs to get plenty of rest, you know."

“Get out of here,” said Elias, scowling at the nurse. “You are breaking my concentration.”

“Oh, sorry,” she said, clearly embarrassed. She bustled quickly out of the room.

I said I didn’t want to get into a fight with the nursing staff, so Elias and I agreed that I would stay up to an hour-and-a-half, no more. “That will be fine for today,” he said. “But some days we will need to do more, maybe as much as four or five hours. How long can you stay in town?”

“Three weeks, tops,” I said.

“That should be more than sufficient. In fact I expect we will be finished in about two weeks. ...Now let’s get started.”

I turned on the tape recorder and Elias started flipping through the journals, looking for something.

“Ah, here it is,” he said. “Before I start I want to read you something by a dear dear friend of mine, a Hindu wise man named Ramana Maharshi.”

“I know about him. I have a book of his dialogues. Didn’t he die in the 1940s?”

“He died in April, 1950. ...When I say he is my friend, I didn’t mean I knew him when he was alive. People like him have a way of staying with you long after they leave the planet. Know what I mean?”

“Like Jesus?”

“Yeah, that’ll do. The point of reading this quotation from Maharshi is that it’s important to put everything in the right context, and not get carried away by all the wonderful visions and dreams and glittering images. So this will be a guiding dictum, by wise old Ramana, near the beginning of the book. It’s a bit obscure, and maybe nobody but me and two

other guys will know what he's talking about. But it has to be in there."

"No problem. Fire away. The tape is running."
And he read, quoting the Indian sage:

Mind — what is it? It is a mixture of intelligence, thoughts, images, and intention. Mind forms the mirror and the reflections.

Just at the moment of rising up, before it is self-aware, the mind is pure light. Only afterwards the thought "I am this" rises up. This "I" thought forms the individual and his world.

The first light, or pure mind, is what we call the Self.

The "I" thought goes outward into objects, filling itself with the world. Then one day it begins to inquire, "Who am I?" After great searching, finding itself utterly insubstantial, the "I" dissolves back into pure mind, the Self.

Once realized, the Self begins to give way to Unconditioned Knowledge — the Truth of Reality Itself. There are no objects contained in this Truth. Reality in its purity remains all alone, One, unique, transcendent.

He looked up from the journal, caught my questioning look, and grinned. "Got that?"

"Uh...wow, that's very heavy. Like, I kind of understand it but I don't understand it at the same time."

"Right. It's the riddle beyond all riddles. Even if you don't get it, it has to be there, because it's always there whether we like it or not. Know what I mean?"

"Uh...no." I laughed. He laughed too, and took a sip of his special juice.

“O.k.,” he said, “let’s cut to the chase. Give me number 20.”

I handed him notebook number 20. He flipped it open to a place he had marked some time ago with a post-it note, and then he handed the book to me. “Just read this entry. It’s called ‘Letter to the Catholic Churches’. Read it out loud into the tape recorder. Then tell me your reaction.”

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Editor’s note: Because this chapter is one continuous piece, I have left off quotes, to make it easier to read. I will do this wherever convenient throughout the book.

Letter to the Catholic Churches:

I was raised in your religion, the Church of Rome, and so I was trained to your way of thinking and seeing, your way of devotion, and your belief in eternal salvation and eternal damnation.

But for some reason all this training and all my devotion and belief left me at age nineteen, and I found myself in a dark and empty place.

I knew the catechism, the theological teachings, and the words of the sacred gospels. But I did not know God. I definitely did not know God.

I believed, but my belief was a scaffold hung with dead flowers.

I recited the Apostles’ Creed with sincere faith in what it told me to say:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son,
our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
Jesus descended into hell
And on the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven, where
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and
the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic and apostolic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

From about age six I believed all those things, but I did not know God the Father and I did not know His Only Begotten Son and I did not know the Holy Spirit. And strangely enough, I had never met anybody else who knew them either, except as religious nostrums and beliefs.

I knew the words about God but not the touch of God. I knew something constructed in the mind but not God's Love or the feeling of God's Presence. I knew what the Church authorities said and what was written in their books (ancient and modern), but I did not know the Truth that Christ promised would be taught to me in the Spirit:

John 14:16-17 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

John 14:26-27 These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

John 16:13-14 I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.

So it was, that full of catechism and belief, yet ignorant of the Spirit, I came during my first year in college to a dark and empty place, and gazed for a time into the inevitability of death — my own death and everyone's death.

Each man and woman has their moment of awakening to the inevitability and profundity of death. I am sure many who read this have had the same experience — the shock of clearly perceiving the reality of their own death for the first time.

This was mine, age nineteen, walking around the Columbia University campus for two days in the spring of 1958 looking right into death, unable to see anything else, the whole world seeming like fool-

ishness and an idiot's game. Eating lunch in a local restaurant, two kind girls asked me if I was feeling alright. I told them I was o.k.

I *was* o.k. Nothing was physically wrong with me. But I was swamped by doom. "This is reality," I thought. "This is what I have been unable to look at every day of my life."

As children and then young adults we grew up encased in protective illusions, living in a Disney or Norman Rockwell dream, carried from day to day and year to year by the habits of daily life, the protection of our elders, the good companionship of friends, the commands of society, and the news "full of sound and fury". The greatest of these illusions called itself the religion of Jesus Christ.

When it is all taken away in a moment, you find yourself gazing upon an abyss into which you are destined to fall and you know that nothing will prevent or save you from this fall, even your belief in Jesus.

The vision of my own death seemed to join its terror to an impending apocalypse looming over the world — the threat of nuclear annihilation. I slept fitfully, dreamlessly. After a few weeks of this I went from earnest involvement in school and the life around me to an uninterrupted state of dread and despair.

I visited an elderly Catholic Priest for help and counseling in this matter. He frowned and nodded and expressed concern for my psychological welfare. Then instead of consoling me with grandfatherly wisdom or even with the usual religious pieties, he confessed his own doubts and inner struggles: "I can't

really help you," he said. "I know just what you are going through ... but I don't have the answers."

Later, during summer vacation, when I talked to my parents about death they asked me to stop. "Yes, of course everybody dies — but why dwell on it? Thinking about death is not going to do you any good. You are becoming a man and soon you will take up the life and work of a man. That's what people do. They don't sit around thinking about death."

And yet at the age of nineteen I had fallen out of the person I thought I was, fallen out of his mental conditioning, his upbringing, his religion ... and I became an atheist. I lost my belief and my identity as a Roman Catholic follower of Jesus. I became a man without a home, a man with a name and a face but nothing beneath it, nothing except the vision of annihilation and the non-existence of God.

And then came the beginning.

On a warm summer night I looked up at the stars from the backyard of our California home. I contemplated the immensity of the Universe and my spiritual deprivation in the midst of it. The Universe was bursting with light and life, but somehow my Christianity and its theology had left me hollowed out inside. A profound question was pushing into that hollowness.

I remember clearly thinking the question, "How can anyone really know there is a God? If God exists, why doesn't he show himself to us?"

A split second later a great spiritual presence emerged from the starfield and leaned down and enveloped me, utterly revealing itself as infinite love.

Then, having got my attention, it immediately retreated, leaving me stunned and breathless.

I never again doubted the existence of God.

~ 4 ~

The passage ended there, in the journal, followed by a little colored drawing of a cross wrapped in vines. I closed the journal and looked at Elias.

“What do you think?” he asked.

“Uh...I’m not sure what I think.” (I wanted to be careful not to offend him. But I also felt a need for more information — a lot more information.)

“I know exactly what you are thinking,” he said. “There’s only one or two sentences describing the experience. You want to hear more.”

“Yeah...that’s right. I believe something happened. Something restored your belief in God. But I don’t quite understand what it was.”

“Right. One sentence describing something that happened after I asked myself ‘If God exists, why doesn’t he show himself to us?’ ...Do you think I am lying about what happened?”

“No. But I hope you don’t mind if I’m agnostic about your experiences. I accept whatever you say, or whatever you wrote in these notebooks, as your subjective experiences. Sensory and mental events that ‘happened’, and that you interpret according to your upbringing and maybe books you have read. But —”

I paused and look at him for second. I could see he was displeased and impatient.

“But what?” he said, sharply. “You think God can’t reach out and touch your understanding directly? Both of us were monks, right? Hugh was your friend too. Didn’t he ever tell you anything?”

“Yes, he did.”

“And you asked me to share my visions.”

“Yes, I certainly did.”

“Listen, agnostic is fine. Skeptical is fine. After all, these aren’t your experiences. So hang on, give it a chance. We can quit now, if you want. But if you are getting ready to dump on my confessions, I’d just as soon toss these notebooks in the fire and get on with the job of dying.”

I could see I had touched a sensitive place in him, probably related to the way he had been treated by the Church. I regretted doing that. “I’m sorry, Elias. I didn’t mean to offend. I just all of a sudden saw my role as being a skeptical observer. ...Maybe I’m a little scared of what you might say next.”

“Yeah, I get that. Look...let’s move on and see exactly what does come next. And if it gets too deep ... or weird...or whatever, you can bail. I’m under a mandate to get this stuff on the record. So let’s rock n’ roll, shall we?” He grinned, then lifted his cup and sipped some more juice through a straw. I could see he wasn’t really angry with me, just putting me on.

“Do you want me to read something?” I asked.

“I’ll read the next part. ...Hmmm. Looking at this stuff now, I see I must have been planning to do an autobiography. I don’t remember having that intention, but it reads that way.”

He flipped the pages of his journal to another post-it, and read:

“One day while perusing the shelves of the college library I found a small book about the 19th century Indian mystic, Ramakrishna. As I looked at his photographs, a recognition arose in me and I knew at once who and what he was. I also knew without any doubt that he was in me, but hidden under a mountain of mental shapes and cultural garbage. I stole that book, cut out the pictures, and hung them on my wall opposite my bed. Every night before going to sleep I would look at the pictures of Ramakrishna. He seemed to me my only real friend. And somehow he evoked Jackie Potter, my best friend when I was a boy, who had died of cancer at age eleven.”

He paused and looked at me. “Jackie Potter was my dear friend when I was ten and eleven. I’ve never had such a friend since. He lived alone with his mother. I think his father had died in the Second World War. Then one day his mother called my mother and said they had found out Jackie had cancer. I saw him quite a few times after that. He got sicker and sicker and just died. At age eleven.”

“Poor lad,” I said.

Elias’ voice was quavering at the memory of his friend, and some of his feeling was getting to me. He cleared his throat and went on —

“O.k., let’s jump to what happened in 1959, in the spring of my second year in college. Unexpectedly, in the depths of sleep one night, I found myself dreaming that I was traveling on my back down a long tunnel whose walls were lined with scenes from my life. Still on my back, I slid faster and faster along the

tunnel, until the images became a blur and I was moving at blinding speed.

“As the end of the tunnel approached, I began to come awake inside the dream. Then, fully awake in sleep, I burst out of the tunnel into a field of light, and my mind unraveled and joined itself to this light in a rush of happiness. My body immediately woke up and I found myself lying in bed in my apartment. It was way past midnight and the streets outside were quiet, although you could hear the background noise of city traffic in the distance. I seemed to be ‘breathing water’, as if liquid light was moving in and out of my lungs. I lay there until dawn, and then got up, made breakfast, and walked to the park.”

“Wow,” I said. “That’s like a near-death experience.”

“Right. It’s the classic near-death tunnel experience. Except when I had it, I had never heard of such things and I was nowhere near death. It was a couple decades later that people who had nearly died in accidents or on the operating table began talking about that stuff on television and writing about it in books.”

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“So in the space of a year you contemplated your own death, had a direct experience of God, fell in love with Ramakrishna, and then had this near-death experience. Quite obviously something was happening,” I said.

“For sure. And the tunnel of light vision kicked off a period of very intense experiences that continued for about two months. One I still remember very clearly began as a meditation sitting on the grass in Central Park. I was pondering the history of my brief time on the earth and its purpose and meaning...or lack of purpose and meaning. Inevitably, the age-old question *‘who the heck am I’* arose to my youthful mind.”

He put the journal aside, closed his eyes, and continued reminiscing....

“I got up and walked for awhile, then lay down on the green grass away from the paths. In the distance people were walking their dogs and enjoying the bright afternoon, I fell into a reverie in which I began to ‘take myself apart’, like a medical examiner doing an autopsy of a dead man on a steel table.

“I looked at my faults, one by one, straight on and without embarrassment. I saw my rebelliousness and my shyness and stubborn independence from the world around me. Paradoxically, I saw my outer self and its need for ‘being somebody’ in the eyes of others. I saw my grasping for self-importance. I saw my selfishness, my desires, and I saw my fear. Altogether it seemed to me I was a most unworthy person, a mass of confusion and obsessions, a young man who was drifting into the future without compass or map. I kept at this for awhile, digging deeper into my character, then I saw a black seed of selfishness lying close to my heart. I knew without a doubt that this black seed was separating me from others...and it was separating me from God.

“I asked myself why this man Elias — this collection of fears and obsessions — should even exist? And assuming he does exist, why should his existence continue? *Maybe I should kill myself*, I thought.

“In the next moment, two things happened: first a great depth opened under me, a light-filled void. Then, above me, in the blue cloudless sky, I saw a spiritual light very high up, like a living sun, surrounded by a circle of smaller suns.

“I saw this not by my physical eyes, but with inner eyes. And it felt as real as anything you could see with your senses — more real in fact. And the vision flooded my senses, so that I completely forgot my surroundings.

“The overriding factor was the sensation and feeling of entering a greater reality — a subjective reality permeated with real love and wisdom of a most profound kind.

“As I gazed up at the circle of living suns, and the great sun in the middle, I saw that each had a personal presence — I could feel their joyful consciousness, expanded far beyond mine. And they addressed me in a silent way, communicating images and ideas without words. It was something like telepathy.

“As they ‘spoke’, I felt my body fade into oblivion. I became a soaring thing, a mind without a body, expanding, losing myself in the pulse of the universe. I tried to gasp a few words, but these words sank and drowned in the far depths of my mind. My brain case was scraped clean, hollowed out. A warm stuff filled it, caressed the backs of my eyeballs.

“Every cell of my brain was sopping with joy. I could hear the arteries gurgle in the back of my skull. Every tiny piece of me was brimful of happiness. I felt that my body could survive on love until it got so old that it just caved in and turned to dust.

“Then the central-most sun showed me a vision of a man, a college professor who was speaking in an arrogant and self-important fashion. Life was visibly rushing in a bright arc through the body of this college teacher, from his feet to his head, but his mouth and the words he spoke were completely dissociated from the spiritual current that supported his existence.

“I immediately understood the vision to mean I must throw away self-importance and somehow become one with that spiritual current, learning to speak from the spirit force that supports my life.”

Elias paused, opened his eyes, and fixed me with a piercing look. “Good stuff, huh?” he said. He cleared his throat and took another drink of juice.

“Were you on drugs?” I asked, without hesitating.

“I’m glad you asked. ...No, I wasn’t on drugs. I didn’t try drugs until later, as you will see. This was me meditating and getting very introspective and following a chain of logic in the mind until it took me to the end of myself — the place where the world drops off and we discover what separates us from God.

“I wanted to end that separation. I said ‘now’. Nothing happened. I was holding out. The tiny dark seed next to my heart refused to rise to break open and be purged. I relaxed all my muscles, every last

one. I stopped fighting with myself. My mind soared deeper. My penis was getting erect. I could barely feel its existence, but I knew it was quivering and excited.

“Then there were two sharp pains on the top of my head. I expected the skull to crack at any moment and thick transparent juices to come oozing out. Any minute I expected to die and be tossed into the infinite. I thought of my corpse lying there on the grass in Central Park. I saw newspaper headlines, parents' tears. I told myself not to die because my family would feel sad. But that was a lie. I knew that in the end they will die also. It made no difference whether I go now or sixty years from now. And yet still I did not go. Either I was not letting go, or God would not take me.

“And then the vision abruptly ceased, the overwhelming joy faded, and I was left exhausted and happy on the grass in Central Park. I sat up and looked around me, watched the people and their dogs, watched an airplane skim across the cloudless sky, and the world looked like a very nice place to be.”

“That’s enough for today,” Elias said. He looked tired, but radiant, like a dying man who is becoming transparent to the light.

“Sure,” I said. But I sat there, looking at him and waiting for him to tell me to leave. Finally some words surfaced in my mind: “You and Hugh McKiernan are the only people I know who had real visions.”

“Oh, yes. Hugh had some good ones. He’s dead now, and I don’t know if he wrote them down

somewhere. But he told me quite a few. ...Every Roman Catholic knows about visions. They read about them in the Bible and in the legends of the saints. But how many know the experience directly? How many believe that *they* can have a vision?”

(continued in *The Visions of Elias...*)

The full 212 page book can be purchased in paperback or e-book (Kindle) format on Amazon.com at the following link:

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