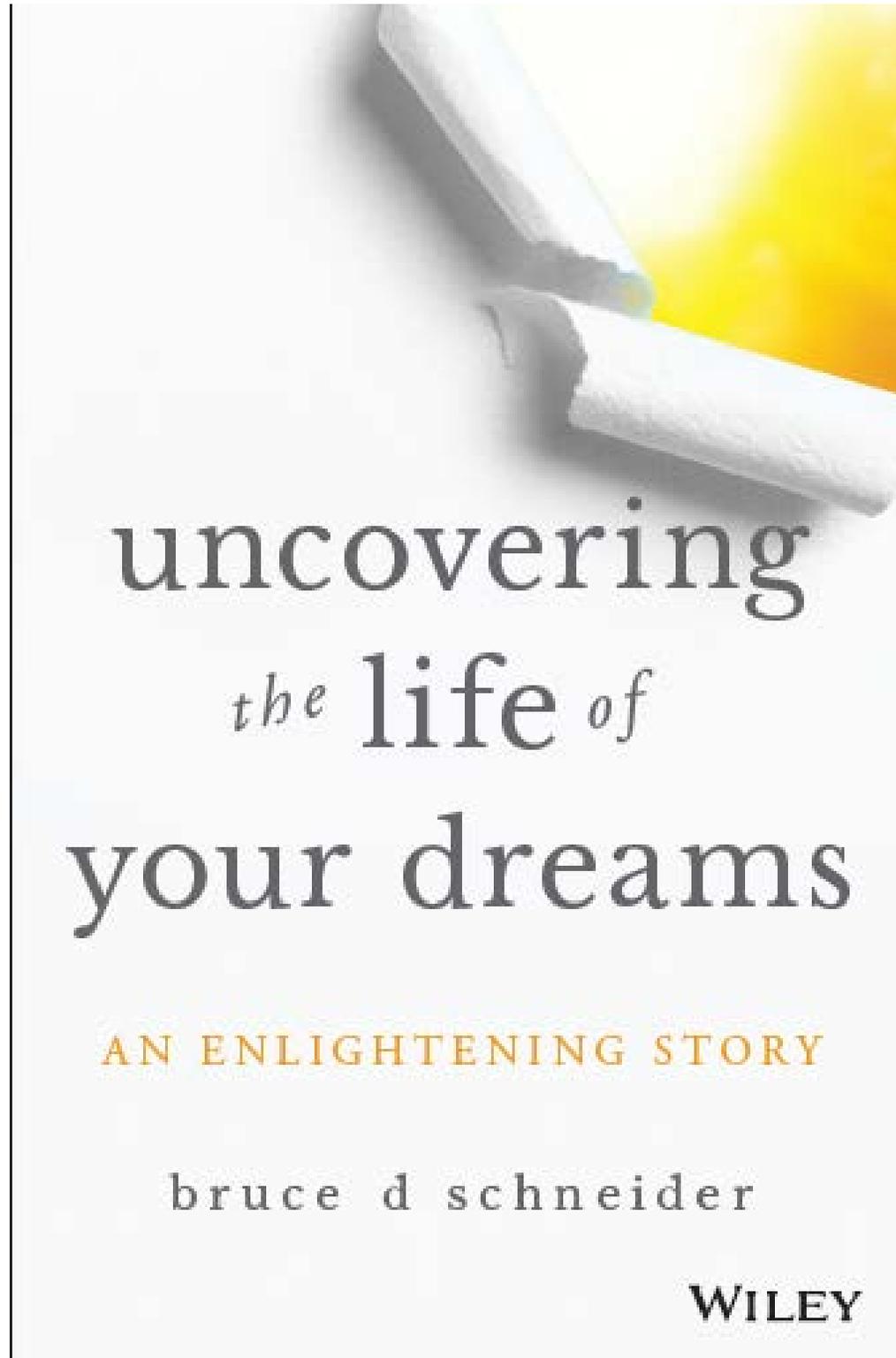


Excerpts from



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Now: Setting the Stage

Sooner or later you will awaken to realize that you've spent nearly your entire life worrying about things you could not control, bothered by insignificant annoyances, and distracted by self-inflicted challenges.

On that day, you will also realize that you've missed seeing a beautiful and entertaining world; a world filled with mystery, suspense, drama, comedy, and an unlimited opportunity to engage in and fully appreciate the human experience.

Hopefully, that day will come soon, because when it does, you will smile as your body fills with a warmth that you will recognize as joy, and you will be incredibly grateful that you are alive and can choose how you want to spend the rest of your life.

Six months ago, before my journey began, I would have never thought I'd find myself sitting in the middle of an abandoned playhouse wearing a Bruce Springsteen tee-shirt, a thin polka-dotted necktie, a pair of torn Levi's jeans with a magnifying glass in one of the pockets, a pair of broken sandals, and a fisherman's hat. And I'd certainly have never imagined that, in this darkened room on this astonishing day, I would be about to open my eyes to a miracle.

Sitting here, I realize that my world had previously been a prison that kept me sleepwalking through life, ignorant and blind. Blind to the truth about reality, about life, about who I truly was. Now, with my eyes closed, I can see more clearly than ever before and, in a few moments, after the count of three, I will open my eyes and see the absolute truth.

The answer to life's most important question is about to be answered and yet, for the first time in my life, I'm content just sitting here, eyes closed.

Surreal and perfect. I'm smiling the kind of smile people have when they meet their soul mate for the first time and just know they have been, and will be, together, forever.

What will I see? I don't know and I have no expectations. I'm just ready—ready to open my eyes to an even deeper reality.

Literally, I didn't see this coming.

1 . . .

I am ready.

2 . . .

What a journey . . .

Six months earlier: Scott's Journey

There are many garden paths.

On each, there are beautiful flowers to pick.

A particular path may not be yours,

but do take the flowers with you when you leave.

Chapter 1

From where I spent most of my time—which was sitting at a desk next to a large, metal-framed window in my 3rd floor office at DM Realty—the streets of New York City looked like a scene out of an old storybook. It wasn't always a pleasant scene, but the distraction of staring at the constant activity below helped to take my mind off my empty life.

For as long as I could remember, I had been searching for some answers to make sense of it all. There were many questions to which I wanted the answers, yet every time I thought about my life, I found myself constantly returning to one question in particular: Is this all there is?

One afternoon in late fall, while staring out the window of my office and contemplating that question, I gave up on finding the answer. I can't explain why it happened then. All I know is that I came to the conclusion that there *was* no satisfying answer—no purpose to or meaning for my life. No purpose for anyone else's, either. Nothing more than this.

I decided to stop trying to figure it out and admitted to myself that my search for answers was simply an exercise to assuage my fear that life was meaningless. At that moment of resignation, I decided to accept that life was just a random, mathematical, and biological evolutionary process. A miracle, of course, that it could happen, but a meaninglessness miracle, nevertheless.

One might think that finally coming to any conclusion would bring some level of relief. Instead, the only thing I sensed was loss that this was, indeed, all there was to the waste of time that I called life. At that moment, I felt completely without hope.

It was just then that my boss walked in.

“Scott!” he yelled, loudly enough to let everyone else in the office know he was there and he was unhappy. I turned quickly to respond.

“I’m . . . I . . . Damon, I was just thinking about the Concord account. I’m developing a strategy.”

“Really? Looks like you’re just wasting time. Like usual. I don’t know why I even gave you that lead. If it wasn’t for Karine . . .” he blurted out, stopping there and closing his eyes briefly, as if to redirect his thoughts. “You to need to decide if you really want this job, once and for all.”

I didn’t know what to say, and he didn’t give me much of a chance to come up with something.

“You know, there was a time when nothing could stop you from getting what you wanted. Now, you don’t seem to care about anything.”

He didn’t wait for a response to that, either. He just turned and walked out of the room into the hallway where my administrative assistant, Karine, who was clearly listening to the whole thing, quickly looked away as he moved past her and across the floor to his office down the hall.

Damon’s personality had certainly changed since I’d first met him. He’d turned into a moody guy with little patience—not at all like the person he used to be when we were in college together, or even who he’d been just a few years earlier, before he took over the company from his father.

But he was right, of course. I wasn’t working on—or even thinking about—the Concord account. I didn’t know why he gave me lead, either. I wasn’t even sure why he hadn’t already fired me. We both knew I’d lost my passion for the job and that I was little more than a charity case. I didn’t know what, if anything, would have to happen to re-engage me, not only in my career, but in my life as well.

And then a real miracle happened. Well, that’s when it began, anyway. I know exactly what time it was: 2:13 p.m. I remember that specific time because on that cool Tuesday afternoon in November, something unusual caught my attention. A flash of bright light reflected off the wall clock and back into my eyes, causing me to shield them with my arm.

I scanned the room for the source of the light and realized it was coming through the window from outside. Perhaps it was just a reflection from the sun at that particular time of the day, but definitely not something that I had ever seen before. I stood and looked outside and saw a steady, almost blinding, bright beam coming from a single spot across the street on the sidewalk, shining directly into my office.

Like a moth to a flame, from somewhere within the depth of my body, I suddenly felt a powerful tingling sensation and a strong, almost magnetic, pull toward the light. I rushed out of my office, startling Karine. She started to say something to me but her words faded as I headed into the stairwell, not wanting to wait for the elevator. Afraid the light might disappear by the time I got outside, I took the stairs, a few at a time, as my anticipation grew.

When I made it to the lobby, I stopped for a second to reorient myself. I looked across the street and the light was still there.

As I made my way toward the light, its brightness dimmed. I thought I was imagining that, so I stopped, mid-stride, and began to take a few steps backwards. I was probably a sight to see, not to mention an accident waiting to happen, and one would have, if not for some resourceful driving by one of New York City's cabbies. I barely noticed the cab, though, as I was mesmerized by how the light grew brighter with each step I took *away* from it. I started heading in the direction of the light again, but by the time I reached the other side of the street, the light was nearly completely gone.

A few people walked past me as I made my way. I looked into each of their faces for some sign that they, too, saw this strange light. No one else seemed to notice anything unusual. The fall air was quite chilly and watching a passerby reach down to zip up his child's jacket made me realize I hadn't grabbed my coat in my hasty exit. I was thinking about turning back when a gust of wind slapped that thought away and I was again focused only on finding the source of the light.

I slowly edged closer and saw an elderly man holding a white cardboard sign. While I couldn't make out what was written on the sign, when I tilted my head a little, I could see a slight glimmer coming off of it. I guessed the sign was indeed reflecting sunlight that, from my vantage point, I was unable to see.

The man was about 5'6" tall, with salt and pepper hair. He was dressed in ragged clothing and I was pretty sure he was cold. From where I was standing, I couldn't see into the bucket on the ground in front of him to tell if anyone had bequeathed money to this poor freezing soul.

Despite his appearance, there was something different about the man. Although he appeared to be pan-handling, he had picked an oddly disadvantageous location on the edge of the curb in the middle of the block. Since he was facing the street, pedestrians walking by would see only his back, and because he was not near the corner, he would not be able to approach cars stopped for red lights. I thought twice about approaching further, but my intrigue got the better of me and I continued to move closer.

The light was now completely gone and I could clearly see the sign. It was blank. It was just a blank white sign, held up by a homeless man standing the wrong way on a street in midtown Manhattan.

I leaned in and said hello, but he neither responded nor acknowledged me. I found myself uncertain of what to do next, but then the thought popped into my head to give him some money.

"Not too much money," I thought, "but a sum that would hopefully get a reaction from him." I reached into my wallet, took out a ten-dollar bill and extended my arm. He didn't move. I leaned in to look into the bucket and saw that it was empty. I thought about just dropping the bill into it and leaving, but decided to try to engage him by continuing to offer him the bill. For as long as I could, I held my arm extended toward him, bill in hand. I couldn't tell how much time had passed, but when I started to feel my fingers grow numb from the cold, I gave up and put the money in the bucket. I looked at him, again waiting for some sort of acknowledgment. But there was nothing. No glance, no smile, no nod, no thank you. Nothing. Not even a flinch. I thought to myself, "I'm an idiot. Damon is going to flip out if he finds out I left the office. I need to get back to work. Maybe I'll get lucky and he won't have noticed that I was gone."

As I turned away from the man and took a step back toward my office, he started to speak.

“I feel your pain,” I heard behind me in a rather deep, monotone, and hoarse voice. The broken silence startled me and I immediately felt crushing waves of fear and grief. I felt the urge to get away as quickly as I could but couldn’t seem to move.

It took a few moments to collect myself enough to face him and respond. “Are you talking to me?” I asked quietly and cautiously. Since I had been turned away from him when I heard the voice, the thought occurred to me that maybe it wasn’t me he was addressing or perhaps it wasn’t even him who had spoken.

“Who are you?” he asked. Looking around, I saw no one but the two of us.

“I’m . . . I work across the street,” I said, reflexively pointing to my office window. He didn’t look up. “I noticed a light outside my window. It was coming from over here. Did . . . did you see it?”

“Yes.”

A man of few words, I presumed. “And who are you?”

“I am the beggar,” he responded. “I am *a* beggar” would have made more sense to me, but I decided not to read into his choice of words.

“What was the pain you were talking about?” I asked, but had a feeling what was coming was a blank stare—which was exactly what I got. I also knew the answer to my question. All my life I’ve been afraid. It was an underlying fear that seemed to always be there, ready to strike at the worst possible moments. Be it with regard to a job, relationship, opportunity, or challenge, I always felt a painful and almost crippling fear that made me feel that I was just not good enough to accomplish anything great. Sometimes I found enough courage to face a challenge in spite of it, but most other times, not. Regardless of what action I took, the feeling was pervasive. I believed I’d done a pretty good job of hiding this fear and, in turn, accomplishing enough to achieve a decent life, but right now, in front of a total stranger, I felt like I was an open book and that he’d chosen to read the only chapter I desperately wanted to remain closed.

He turned his head as if to stare deep into my soul. Although I still felt fear somewhere within me, I also felt something completely different from anything I’d ever experienced. A wave of energy ran through me—a low-voltage and enjoyable roll of energy throughout my entire body from my feet to my head. Suddenly, I felt like I was not on a city street with him; we were transported somewhere else. I didn’t know where I was or what was happening. I was still right there, but I was also not there.

He grabbed onto the lapels of his coat and, as if showing me his heart, opened his coat for a brief moment. As he did, the fear within me completely disappeared. Tears began to well up in my eyes and I felt no need to wipe them away. For a moment, I felt powerful, clear, and focused. It was then I realized that he was not a beggar, nor was he an old man. I wasn’t certain that he was mortal and was even less certain that he was actually standing there with me. His age and clothing didn’t change, nor did anything else about him, yet when I looked past his soiled coat and the dirt caked in the crevices of his face, I realized that he was glowing. It was absolutely beautiful. Stunning. He was the source of the light that I saw; it was not the sign and not from the sun, and perhaps not even from this world.

He closed his shabby coat and though I could no longer see the light coming directly from his body, I could feel its warmth deep within me. I wasn't expecting to be outside this long, yet I was no longer cold. In fact, I felt warm and strong and felt that I could, and part of me wanted to, stand there forever.

"I am humbled to be with you," I said. I had a million questions, but only one came out of my mouth. "May I ask you, why is the sign blank?"

"It is because most people do not want to know what it says," he responded.

"I do," I retorted.

"Then why do you see a blank sign?" he asked curiously, without any hint of judgment.

Gusts of wind so strong they could have knocked me off balance began whipping around, but the air between us was still and I felt steady. I closed my eyes before responding, "The sign is filled with messages." That didn't sound like something I would say. I had the weird thought that he was talking *through* me; like he was speaking using my mind and my voice and that I didn't have control over what I was saying.

The beggar continued where I left off. "It is up to you to decide when and what you are ready or willing to see. There are signs, everywhere, and it's your choice to read them or not and then determine what they mean to you. So what *does* this sign mean to you?"

I responded, again with words that didn't sound like my own. "I think you, showing up here as a beggar, offer me the opportunity to realize that I am not what I appear to be, as I know you are not who you appear to be."

"I am the beggar," he reiterated.

"No, I mean . . . I know you are . . . but you really aren't, right?" I said, believing that I was now owning my words again.

He didn't answer and instead asked another question.

"Why do you suppose I beg?"

"You probably . . ." I stopped myself at that point, realizing that anything I said next would sound condescending or judgmental.

"I do not beg for money and I do not beg for me," he said. "I beg for you. I beg for you to give me money."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because that is what I do," he patiently responded.

I could have probed more but decided it would have been unproductive to do so. I didn't understand any of what was happening and, surprisingly, I didn't feel I needed to.

I thought of asking him how he dealt with the cold and wind, but having felt the warmth of his light, figured that I already knew the answer to that. "I know you're making a statement, but aren't you afraid that someone will harm you? Can't you get your message across in another way?"

"I have. Many times, and in many ways. The message is always there for anyone who is ready to receive it. And I am safe. What can people take from me? My money? I do not have any. My clothes? Who would want them? My body? Someone might take it one day, and if so, so be it. My body would be still, but I would still be."

What he said should have saddened me, but instead it felt comforting. I imagined it was difficult living like that and wondered why he would choose to do so if he didn't have to. And yet, I had the feeling he wanted to; like he was born to do so.

And then he continued, "You don't have to feel the suffering of your fear. I can do that for the both of us." With that, he turned away from me and once again stared ahead.

I knew I wasn't ready to fully grasp his message, and so, didn't try. I also knew he was right about my suffering. But in that moment, I wasn't ready to explore that pain. Instead, I chose to dwell within the amazing and deepening sensations and emotions that seemed both brand new yet familiar to me. It was as if the beggar gave me a long-desired and welcome reprieve from myself.

I took a long deep breath and felt the wind flow through my body. It felt a part of me, everything did, like I was complete and whole, but now not limited to my body. There was only that moment and no other time or place in the universe existed. In the middle of the block on that Tuesday afternoon in a windstorm, I was home. Safe, fearless, invulnerable.

“That’s enough for now,” he said.

I knew at that moment that the bliss I felt would end and that I would strive to feel it again, so his statement offered a possibility. “You said ‘for now.’ Does that mean that I can meet with you again?”

“What you seek is only a dream away,” he said in a fading whisper.

His words seemed like another wind, one that blew me into an even deeper state of being. I completely lost myself, feeling my eyes close and my breath grow shallow. In that moment, all thoughts stopped. I was no thing. I was every thing.

I probably stood motionless in that spot for quite some time. When I opened my eyes, the beggar was no longer in front of me. I looked around until I saw caught a glimpse of him moving between other passersby, walking down the street with the sign in one hand and the bucket in the other.

Excerpt from Chapter 3

After a 30-minute cab ride, I stood in front of an old stone building that had probably been used as a grammar school years ago and was now home of the Ann Marie Casman Center for Holistic Education. I walked into the lobby, checked in at the reception desk, and spent some time checking out the list of upcoming workshops before heading up the old and creaking stairwell to a fairly small classroom. The chairs were set up theater style, with four seats across and four rows back. I chose the seat in the third row, behind most of the half-dozen others there. In the front of the room, a thin man, dressed very professionally and probably in his late 60's, was attempting to get a projector to work.

The presenter, who introduced himself as Tom Reynolds, began. "Welcome," he said. "Today we're going to explore the world of lucid dreaming. I just love this topic and think you'll find it quite eye-opening, until you go to bed that is, in which case keeping your eyes open will definitely get in the way of the process," he snickered. Other than a couple of grins, the participants were silent. He continued with a warm and engaging smile. "Sorry about that, couldn't help myself. So, before we get going, I'd like all of you to briefly introduce yourselves and tell us the one thing you hope to gain from tonight's workshop."

I only half-listened to most of the answers, thinking about what I'd say when it was my turn. What could I say, anyway? That I'm here because a beggar told me that what I am seeking is but a dream away? Or that I'm questioning my sense of reality? Nah. I just said, "My name is Scott and I just want to know more about lucid dreaming." Clearly not very original or deep, but at least no one thought I was crazy. Well, except me, perhaps.

Excerpt from Chapter 6

Over the next few nights, I lost count of the exact number of lucid dreams I had, but they were all spectacular. Besides acting out some fantasies, I did more flying and got pretty good at it. One time, I flew up into space and just watched as the moon orbited the earth and asteroids flew by me. In that dream, I saw something unusual—some sort of entranceway in space. I peered at it for a while, puzzled by what I saw. It was not quite a rectangular doorway and not circular, either; it was something in between. Looking from a distance through its glass-like opening, I saw that there were no stars on the other side and wondered if it was a black hole. Suddenly, I felt a strong pull to go through the entranceway, much like the pull I experienced toward the light outside my office window. As I moved closer, however, I woke up.

The entranceway to what I thought of as some sort of portal appeared in other dreams and in many other locations as well. Each time I approached it, I would lose lucidity. Even spinning around didn't work. I could see it, but could never get close enough to see what was on the other side. In one dream, I decided to ask the woman about the portal.

We were lying on the deck of a huge yacht, staring at the sky. I felt relaxed and peaceful and was very happy to have her right next to me. A few soft, white clouds moved overhead and when they did, I could see the portal. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course," she replied.

I raised my arm to point to the sky and asked, "What is that?"

The answer I got came from my alarm clock and was not the one that I wanted to hear. I immediately felt irritable. Time to get back to the real world.

Excerpt from Chapter 8

“The purpose of this journey is to find yourself again . . . to remember the truth about who you are and why you are here. That is what you want. Doing so will also help you remember your power. The beggar, as you call him, started the process. It’s now up to you to continue it. It may not be easy, but if you make it through all the portals, you will reach enlightenment, that is, the remembrance of the truth.”

“What do you mean *if* I make it through?”

“You might decide that this is not your desired journey. Many others have said they wanted to know the truth, but what they really wanted was whatever they could find that agreed with what they already believed was the truth.”

“Okay. I’m with you. So how do I get inside?”

“You can see that the first one is already starting to open because its light is beginning to shine. That opening occurred when you let go of your basic human desires and sought something deeper and more meaningful to you. Each portal is a deep part of you that is available to explore. You have the potential to enter them all, but you do not yet have the capacity, meaning the frame of mind or the right keys to get in.”

Excerpt from Chapter 10

There they were, all five of them, and I felt more than ready to jump through to my first portal experience. The border of the first of the five was glowing with a bright and penetrating light. I walked to it and tried to put my hand through. Blocked again. At first, I was surprised, but then I recalled something Karine had said that day: “This is the key to success.”

I snapped my fingers and the polka-dotted tie appeared in my hand. I tied it around my neck and again tested the portal. This time, I saw my hand disappear up to my elbow. I pulled it back for a second, took a deep breath, and stepped through.

I zipped through some sort of tunnel until I saw a bright light ahead. I’d spent only a few seconds in the tunnel but felt that I’d traveled very far. When I reached the end, I stopped moving and looked ahead to see an ancient city in the distance. I assumed it was Rome, since what looked like the Colosseum was in my line of sight. There was a light misty rain falling, and the sky was decorated with many clouds, including a few darker ones right above me.

I began walking around within a small village, passing through a large area with open-air shops around its perimeter. There were many people walking near me, most wearing sandals and dressed in tunics, yet no one seemed to notice me or care that I was there. I thought they should have, as I was wearing what would have been for them some very unconventional articles of clothing, including the now extremely inappropriate necktie. I took in the scene and then tried to figure out what to do.

This world within the portal seemed even more real than the places I visited in other dreams I’d had. It had such a different quality to it that I checked my watch, almost expecting it to be working. It wasn’t.

The mild rain stopped as the darker clouds drifted away from the village. Ahead of me was a circle of benches filled with people, all gathered around a small boy who sat, cross-legged, on the ground in the center of the circle. I felt a magnetic pull forward.

Without looking at me, he raised his hand and waved me over to him. As I approached him, all the others disappeared. When I was close enough, I sat on the ground next to him. Almost immediately, I had the feeling I first had when I met the beggar. It was him but he was now the small boy. I put my hands together in prayer position. He let out a small laugh and asked me to just sit with him.

“I wondered if I’d ever see you again,” I said.

“How likely is it that more rain will come?” he asked.

“I . . . I don’t know,” I said. “I feel like it’s taken me forever to find you.”

“How long do you think it will take for you to find you?” asked the boy.

He seemed to be about eight or nine years old. He had long dark brown hair and wore broken sandals and a small white tunic with a crimson border. I could feel the glow within him as I had back on the street in New York. It was amazing. He didn’t confirm his identity, but I needed no confirmation. I felt braver than the first time we met and I jumped right in.

“What is this portal and why am I here?”

“Portal?” He appeared to ponder the word. “Portal. Yes, I really like that!” he said. “This is the Portal of Awareness.”

“Awareness? Awareness of what?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied, “and also of who, where, when, how, and why. It is about seeing what is, not the illusion created from the mind.

Here, you will get the answers to some of your questions, and more likely, questions about what you believe are some of your answers.”