

## CHAPTER 1: EXPERIENCING PARALLEL REALITIES

*Everything in this world has a hidden meaning.  
Men, animals, trees, stars, they are all hieroglyphics.  
Nikos Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek*

It was five in the morning when the news came. It was the only time the telephone had rung during my entire sojourn, and its sudden interruption of the stillness jarred me to full consciousness. Feeling an intense need for the soothing that only the ocean's waves can provide I quickly dressed and left my rented Balinese quarters. Intuition directed that I walk east—the direction of new beginnings.

My instinctive response to the difficult news was to send healing energy to my mother, hoping it would aid in curing her cancerous tumor. Yet even before I could fully formulate the intention, my attention was drawn to the magnificence unfolding before me. Mesmerized, I gazed as a large white bird elegantly lifted from the ocean's surface, to be followed by another of its kind. In a splendid display of graceful ease the pair ascended upward and eastward, until they were gently immersed in the golden radiance of the morning sunrise.

Stillness followed and, in its glow, awareness. A sacred union was unfolding before me. I knew at a deep level, yet without a cognitive doubt that I was being privileged to witness circumstances as viewed from another level of reality. The powerful symbolism revealed in those extraordinary moments imprinted upon my soul a knowing that my father had come to accompany my mother and guide her journey homeward.

In most ancient societies, people studied the natural world to understand the supernatural. This knowledge, and the resulting beliefs, lingers within many cultures. One common belief is that spiritual guides use animals or animal imagery to communicate with humans. Birds are

considered messengers from the spirit world. Through personal experiences, as well as through the observations of the spiritual growth of others, I came to recognize that, as we awaken to the spiritual aspects of ourselves, we automatically reawaken to the powerful spiritual messages being offered to us in the many forms that nature takes. We begin to recognize that colors and numbers are significant, and we come to know that nothing happens to us in this reality that does not have a mirrored reflection in and of the spiritual world.

As I gazed in awe, respect, and admiration at the magnificence being revealed, I recognized that I was given a powerful teaching. How could I witness such majesty, such splendor, feeling the joy of my parent's union, yet still desire to keep my mother in this dimension?

In that instance I knew my wish to send healing energies had little to do with my mother's best interest; rather, it was entirely about meeting my needs—my needs as a child, longing not to be orphaned. This acknowledgement shifted my intention. My prayer was no longer one of pleading for her life but was, instead, one of petition for her safe and easy passage to the other side. In that moment I chose not to hold my mother in captivity. I chose instead to free her of any bonds that might be between us, any bonds that would tie her to me and thus hold her in this reality. Mustering courage, I whispered, "With great love and gratitude for all you have given, for all you have taught, I now, in this moment, set you free. I wish you great joy as you advance on the next phase of your soul's journey."

The lesson was complete. The birds vanished. This sacred experience, like so many others, lasted but a moment, yet the effects continue to impact my soul to this day.

For a long time now I have been alert to the numerous and varied experiences that shaped my personal and professional life. I am aware of the powerful lessons I have had, and continue to

have, that teach and reinforce my knowing: that we live and work and play in parallel universes, that during our Earth walk we have one foot in this reality and one in another dimension. I am also aware that in previous times I would not have noticed the splendid birds that morning, or if I had noticed them, I would certainly not have acknowledged them as messengers from the spirit world.

I have, in recent times, also done considerable reflection on the reasons for my intense drive to acquire knowledge and gain skills in fields that appear to be (at least at first glance) unrelated. Yet my persistent spirit urges me forward. I continue to have a constant need to remind myself that I must walk in trust, because I believe that each of my experiences is necessary for the manifestation of some grander purpose. Although it is usually only in retrospect that I am able to identify the relationship between an adventure and the lessons it teaches me, at this point in my life I acknowledge that each discovery is somehow necessary for the next phase of my journey. I initially became profoundly aware of this when I began doing therapeutic work. Shortly after stepping fully into this aspect of practice, I recognized how frequently the person who had just left my office had taught me exactly what I needed to know and understand so that I might be of real assistance to the person who next sat beside me. The more that I was able to acknowledge, with gratitude, the teachings from the spiritual world, the more the guidance increased. It became awe inspiring to recognize that I was not alone—to know that I was being offered help to ensure a more positive, soulful outcome for the person who was seeking assistance for healing.

As I began to write this book, I knew which concepts and ideas I wanted to convey, yet because of my varied life experiences, I pondered the fit. What was the common thread? What

was the theme? How, as a storyteller, could I convey in written form the images, the truths that surface from my own soulful experiences and the soulful experiences of those I walk beside?

I learned to rely on the powers of meditation and stillness to provide answers. Over the past decades I have walked literally thousands of miles, connecting with birds, trees, clouds, and other life forms, in search of truth. It is during meditative walking that my head clears of its endless chatter, my senses sharpen, and I am most open to receiving the direction I seek. When I walk, I acknowledge that I am one with the Universe. I connect in a conscious way to the blending of my personal energies with the energies of the Divine in All. I permit fears, worries, and regret to be taken from me, and I make the intention to be open to receiving a full measure of the goodness of life. As I receive, I send unconditional love to all that has been created. It is often following these short moments of conscious connectedness with my own need for releasing difficult emotions, and for giving and receiving love, that I feel most in tune with and in awe of all that surrounds me. And it is most often during these moments of standing in awe, with a mind clear of chatter and fear, that I strongly sense the guidance and direction that the spiritual world offers.

So, although it was with great awe, it was without surprise that on that morning in Bali, when I focused on sending healing energy to my mother, I was instantly shown an answer. It was not the one I expected, yet the one I recognized to be of great truth. I was being encouraged not to hold my mother in captivity. I was being asked to set her free.

Pondering this experience and the lessons it taught, I recognized that much of my professional work provided similar teachings. In each situation I worked to help men and women find their inner freedom. The more I pondered the similarities, the more I acknowledged that my recent work with traumatized women who were incarcerated in our federal prisons was not

dissimilar from my previous work with older persons who felt trapped by institutionalization. In each of these circumstances it was not so much the lack of freedom that caused the intense feelings of entrapment; it was more the imprisonment of their spirits. When the spirit feels trapped, the soul's energy wanes. The source of the soul's entrapment matters little.

Bondage of the human spirit occurs in numerous situations. It happens not only within our prisons and long-term care facilities, but also in daycare settings and schools; it happens in our workplaces, our churches, and our homes.

The human spirit has many needs. These include the need to express who we really are, the need to use our talents and creative abilities to their fullest potential, the need to trust and hope, the need to be able to give and receive love, the need to feel a sense of belonging, and the need to feel that we matter and that we make a difference.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> When we are in circumstances in which the needs of our spirit cannot be met, our souls cringe. Entrapment of our spirit happens any time we dare not color outside the lines of the particular picture that has been designed for us rather than by us.

Reflecting on the many ways in which our individual and collective souls are held hostage often reminds me of the biblical story of the oppression of the descendants of Jacob.<sup>4</sup> In order to set the Children of Israel free, Moses needed to persuade the Pharaoh that the Israelites were no longer to be used as Egyptian slaves. He began his negotiations using ideas and strategies established within the then-prevalent wisdom, but he soon found it necessary to step outside the reality with which he and the Egyptians were familiar.

To do what was asked of him, it was essential that Moses recognize the presence of the Divine, acknowledge the power of the Divine, and rely on Divine intervention. Moses was compelled to expand his consciousness in ways most of us could only begin to imagine. He was

asked to step out in courage, to risk, and to trust that he would be guided as he did so. Moses was asked to shift his own thinking and beliefs, and the thinking and beliefs of those around him. He was asked to transform the reality that he was familiar with by using the supports and interventions offered from another reality. His major task was to “ground” in his third-dimensional world the interventions provided by the spiritual worlds.

Today, in ever-increasing numbers, people from varying walks of life are recognizing a great need for their own personal exodus to freedom. Feeling captive in both their personal and professional lives, and noting the bondage of others, many are searching for ways to transform the servitude mentality so prevalent within their current way of being. Many leaders already acknowledge, as did the philosophers before them, that problems created within one paradigm cannot be solved with solutions generated from within that same paradigm.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing the need for change, they are calling for a new way of viewing reality and a new way of operating in the world. These leaders are asking those who follow to be creative, to take risks, and to think and act outside the box—the box created by a worldview that for the past decades has dominated our culture, a worldview that tends to see only physicality, and generally denies the spirituality of human beings.

Those who have accepted the challenge recognize, as ancient peoples did and as many Indigenous peoples of today do, that we do indeed live in parallel realities. Carl Jung, the famed theorist and leader in modern methods of helping, noted that even in our times the farther we get from countries that are influenced by Western thought, the more people still live in an enchanted world, making little distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the physical and the spiritual realities.<sup>6,7</sup>

Jung's words resounded each day during my visit and study in Bali. Reminders of the gods and the spiritual life of the people were everywhere. Every field was dotted with shrines and temples. The entry to every major intersection, bridge, or irrigation channel had a shrine. Most homes held not one, but several temples. At sunrise I witnessed the priestesses blessing food and flower offerings for placement in home and business shrines as gifts to the gods and in supplication for blessings. The shrines and temples were sculptured interpretations of the Balinese form of Hinduism, of their representation of the afterworld, and of their view of the relationships between the gods and this reality.

Nowhere was the overlap between the coexistence of the spiritual world and this dimension more evident than in the elaborate death rituals and cremation ceremonies that have, over the centuries, changed very little.<sup>8</sup> In the death ritual, loved ones mingle around the deceased body prior to the procession to the place of outdoor and open cremation. Some pour water from tiny clay cups, and others scatter marigolds and other types of flowers on the face and torso. Others bathe the body in sacred ritualistic fashion.

The Balinese believe that death is a phase in a circular pattern of reincarnation. Every ritual is symbolic of this belief and of their belief in the reality of the spiritual worlds. The water and bathing are symbolic of spiritual cleansing; the flowers symbolize something new that is coming into being. The various flowers communicate a particular spiritual message to the deceased.<sup>9</sup> Marigolds are a metaphor for the soul itself and are used in death rituals in a number of cultures as a reminder to the soul of its Divine light and brightness and, because of this divinity, of its continued existence.

The procession itself is a vibrant pandemonium. An orchestra, composed of dozens of sets of gongs and drums, clangs in a disharmonic frenzy. The purpose is to scare away evil

spirits. The body of the deceased is placed on a two-story palanquin, a towering pagoda-like portable bier mounted on a dozen giant bamboo poles. The bier is carried on the shoulders of 20 to 30 men. From the front of the palanquin is stretched a white rope—white to remind the soul of its spiritual essence. Women hold the rope in a ceremonial gesture of leading the funeral cortege to the place of cremation. The men carrying the palanquin frequently break into furious running spins, swirling the entire apparatus in wide circles. This is done to confuse any pursuing evil spirits to ensure that the soul of the deceased cannot be followed and to prevent the evil spirits from retracing the funeral procession and haunting the village.

An eight-foot-high black and white paper bull is mounted on a 12- to 15-foot bamboo platform. The bull represents Nandi, the vehicle ridden by the god Shiva, one of the greatest gods in Hindu cosmology. Shiva is a complex deity seen as a destroyer and a restorer, both as the god of death and the god of rebirth.<sup>10, 11</sup> The bull, hoisted on the shoulders of men, moves in procession just in front of the palanquin, which carries the body of the deceased. When the procession arrives at the place of cremation, the body of the deceased is inserted into a trapdoor in the bull. The bull of Shiva becomes the departed soul's vehicle for the journey to the afterlife.<sup>12</sup>

The symbolism surrounding this death ritual and cremation ceremony is a powerful reminder that in cultures such as this, people exist in a dual world, in a reality that sees little distinction between the world of spirit and this dimension. In a reality rich with symbolism and ritual, the human soul is nourished even in times of hardship. In cultures such as Bali, people live with a clear recognition of their soul's purpose, and they are acutely aware of the mirror reflections between this reality and the world of spirit.

In sharp contrast to the Balinese reality is the lived reality of many in the Western world. Although many in our culture are in great need of the guidance, protection, and nurturing that should be accessible to them during difficult life experiences, most of our methods of helping no longer contain practices, activities, rituals, and ceremonies that focus on the soul's journey, on the primordial battle between good and evil, and on our need as human beings for spiritual guidance and protection. Nor do our methods of helping provide ways for human beings to establish, maintain, and strengthen their coexistence with the spirit world.<sup>13</sup> Even our churches lack the ability to meet these needs. In *Dreamquest*, Morton Kelsey noted, "Few of our churches are providing the symbolic food human beings need for survival. Contemporary men and women are not adequately nourished on a diet of reason, logic and matter alone."<sup>14</sup>

In many parts of the world the symbolic food of glorious music, song, chant, color, art and art forms, dance, and ceremony rich and alive in participation and ritual has been downplayed in recent decades. These experiences once dominated religious practices. Experiences rich in symbolism create an opportunity for personal interpretation at an individual soul level. The extinguishing of symbol has, I believe, shifted the goal of religion from an individual soulful understanding of the sacred and the Divine in one's own life to a collective belief of the Divine messages. These messages are then interpreted and relayed by an appointed representative of the Divine. With few exceptions, the relaying of the interpretations at the collective level, along with the dogmas, creeds, and beliefs, are presented in oral language forms with little ritual or ceremony.

Soul does not easily comprehend oral language; its language is symbolic. Ancient and Indigenous teachings acknowledge that to address the soul, you must speak soul's language. Soul starves on a diet of words. Words are the brain's left-hemisphere food. The brain's left

hemisphere responds to verbal and written language and is associated with our masculine energies, our mental abilities, our cognitive minds, and our cognitive capabilities. Left brain activity facilitates order and direction. It helps move our physical lives forward in a structured and constructive way.

Right-hemisphere brain activity is associated with our feminine energies, with our creativity and our nurturing capabilities. Right brain functioning is more closely associated with our feeling states, our emotions, and with things of the heart than with concerns and issues of the physical body and the mind. Sound, light, and other vibrations in the forms of energy work, music, drumming, dance and song, and laughter are more easily interpreted by the right than by the left brain. Symbols that appear in dreams, art, and imagery are also more readily interpreted by the brain's right hemisphere, as are ceremony and sacred ritual.

Oral language is bound by culture and perhaps limited to one lifetime. Soul does not recognize such limitations; its language is broader, more expansive. The language of soul transcends time and space. Words can be easily misconstrued; their meanings change over time and are interpreted according to the accompanying nonverbal inflections sent from the giver of the message. The interpretation of verbal language also depends upon the feeling state and perception of the receiver of the message. Symbolic language carries a deeper truth—truth not altered by mood or circumstance. Symbol, compared with words, is undoubtedly a more powerful and lasting way of putting us in touch with our greatest strengths and our deepest fears. This, of course, is essential to our spiritual evolution.

In ever-increasing numbers, therapeutic helpers from various disciplines are seeking ways to more adequately address the soul concerns of those they walk beside. Although many helpers have acknowledged that we receive dream messages in symbol form and many therapists

have become interested in assisting those with whom they work in understanding the dream messages being offered, many do not recognize that our souls use numerous other forms of symbolic expression, always with the goal of providing hope and direction for forward movement along our paths of life.

Through guided imagery, our souls present symbolic messages to us, as well as through each of our art expressions, including doodling. The symbols reflected during these daytime experiences can provide powerful messages if we but take the time to reflect on the symbolic meaning being conveyed from the very core of our being, our soul.

Each time I enter a meditative state or perform a ritual or a ceremony, my everyday third-dimensional reality blends with the realms of the spiritual. I have learned that the more I tune into the language of soul, the more easily and more quickly I can access and work within the realms of spirit.

My first awareness of how easily these realities blend occurred during one of those supernatural in-between times, when the indigo curtain of evening was rapidly descending on the performance of yet another day. My dog Buddy and I had lingered longer than usual. The magic of the season, its colors and fragrances, were too delectable to turn from easily. The scent of overripe cranberries, wafting from a nearby grove, prompted memories of Thanksgiving. The tartness of those savory wild berries had enhanced the festive bird during many celebration times in my youth. Taste and smell memories of cranberry jelly spread thickly on warm homemade buns stimulated my gastric juices, reminding me that lunch had been hours ago.

Movement on the path ahead, where no movement should be, drew me from my reverie and from its source. Although the dimness of the twilight made it impossible for me to determine the circumstances, I realized that something black and white was struggling in a frantic effort to

free itself from some entanglement. Inner twinges, not of fear but of urgency, jostled me forward. The nylon webbing from a once-round bale of straw had imprisoned a young magpie.

Sensing my approach, the frantic bird escalated its attempts to gain freedom, only to entangle itself even further in the mass of green fibers. Kneeling, I examined the fragile wings, legs, and claws. Witnessing this helpless creature and wondering whether I could be of any real assistance reminded me of a favorite childhood story. I remembered when Ken MacGlocklin had found his beloved horse Flicka<sup>15</sup> entrapped in barbed fence wire. He wished he had obeyed his father's bidding to always carry wire cutters when he was out on the open range. How I wished for wire cutters, for scissors, for anything sharp or knife-like. I noted with gratefulness that, although I did not have any such object, I did have gloves. They would not be of help in removing the webbing, but they would certainly protect my hands from the magpie's beak and claws.

As a child, when I helped my father relocate the mature hens to make room for new chicks, he would encourage me to cover their eyes as I carried them from one pen to another. I recalled how this had often put them in a sleep-like state. Trusting that if this procedure had worked for the hens, it just might work now, I reached with a glove-covered hand and secured the head of the bird. It was then but a simple maneuver to slide the other glove over the magpie, hooding its eyes. Whispering, I assured the frightened creature I would do all I could to free it from its prison. The reassurance and the glove-hood trick worked their magic! In seconds the frantic bird calmed, and although I could no longer see its face or eyes, its stillness and lack of movement indicated that the procedure had produced a sedating effect.

There was much to do and time was of the essence. I needed to take full advantage of the remaining light, for whereas at dusk this task was going to be difficult at best, in darkness it would be impossible.

As I feverishly set to work, it became obvious that, in its struggle to free itself, the young bird had become more entrapped with each movement. Its razor-like claws had badly frayed the twine, causing its legs to be tightly bound in a gnarled mass of twisted fibers. Methodically, I unraveled the web, one frayed thread at a time. The last flush of lavender was barely visible along the western horizon when the final ragged string dropped from the young magpie's right claw.

For the first time since I had discovered this captive, I remembered Buddy. He was a hunting dog. Why had he not paid attention to what was unfolding in this straw pile? The dim light, his failing eyesight, and his chance to linger in the gopher mound had certainly been in the bird's favor. Yet now, and as though my thoughts had aroused his curiosity, he appeared. His approach quickly brought the dazed bird to full alert. What if its wings, its legs were broken? What if it could not fly? I had been so intent on the task at hand, so focused on freeing the magpie from its captivity, that I had not paused to wonder about the effects that the tight bindings and its own struggles might have had. Recognizing that magpies need to fly to stay alive, I questioned whether I had spent all this time freeing a magpie that could not survive.

My doubts were short lived. Free from the glove and its bindings, the alarmed bird, wobbling into a hop-like gait, quickly gained enough flying ability to land safely on a nearby fence post. Relieved and satisfied, I turned homeward. I went only a few steps when the young magpie circled above me three or four times before flying off into the darkness. I knew I had been given a message of gratefulness.

I am a dream therapist and have studied symbolism and its sources. It was not, however, until I was relating this story to a colleague and she questioned the significance of the event that I began to ponder the possibility that the experience might contain a symbolic message for my life.

Magpies are believed to be symbolic of abundance; they are always around when there is a generous supply of food. I was going through some difficult times in those days. I had recently left a well-paying position, intent on living my life in ways more consistent with my own soul's growth and therefore with my real purpose in life. Contracts were slow in manifesting, and reimbursement for work completed was even slower in arriving. Yet three (the number of magic) days after freeing the magpie, I received payment for three overdue accounts. I had taken the time to unbind a magpie, a symbol of plenty. Was this indeed a metaphor? Was the universe trying to tell me that it was up to me to free the flow of abundance?

The experience also caused me to ponder the meaning of black and white, the colors of the magpie. Was it time to release my views of a black and white reality? Was it time to recognize my darkness—the fears that fused me tightly to a third-dimension reality—and to accept myself as light, as a spiritual being, and, in so doing, to acknowledge my place in parallel worlds?

I have noted that when we begin in earnest to pay attention to the messages being conveyed from the parallel universe, we are often surprised at how many images already surround us. Seeing such images with new eyes can be powerfully affirming and validating of our spiritual unfolding.

The name of my company is *Taking Flight International Corporation*. My company's renaming followed a dream in which I saw the logo I now use. The bird-like image initially appeared in the dream state and reappeared shortly after in a meditation and again later as I

gazed into the early morning sun. Although I knew that the image was giving my company a new name and accompanying logo, I was also aware that there was more to understand about the image and experiences that were begging for examination and integration into my life.

You might also wish to reflect similarly. Is there more that you may need to become aware of regarding any of your recent activities? Can you integrate more completely the spiritual aspects of those experiences into your life and your life's work? Pay particular attention to any situations that might perhaps be categorized as paranormal. Recall the last time you shared such an experience—one you would describe as spiritual or supernatural. What was the basis for your choice of person to confide in, the person you trusted enough to comfortably relate the experience to? Did you use a testing statement? Did you preface the information with a comment such as “You will never believe this, but. . .” or “This is really weird, but. . .?”

How comfortable were you in relating your spiritual experience? Did you leave parts out to soften the load? I notice a tremendous difference in comfort levels among various cultures regarding the sharing of experiences considered to be sacred. Many Caucasians become tense and have considerable difficulty even saying words such as *spirituality* and *healing*, whereas these words are part of the normal parlance for peoples from cultures less influenced by Western thought and beliefs. There appears to be a general lack of trust among Caucasians in this regard, and I often wonder about its source. Does it flow from educational systems, political systems, and religious systems, or from previous times, perhaps times of long ago, when it was unsafe to be associated with anyone or anything related to notions of healing and spirituality for fear of torture or being labeled *witch*.

I believe that the testing statements used prior to relating a sacred experience help to ensure that the information about to be shared will be heard at the level at which it was experienced and that both the content and the speaker will be safe with the listener.

I am also aware that during my own journey of healing following the death of my son, I was catapulted inward, there to rediscover my spiritual essence. During those dark days I found no one with whom I could safely share my expanded awareness. In my professional life I now walk beside others who are deeply wounded, and because of my own soul pain and soul healing, I recognize their journey as a soul walk. I listen intently to their spiritual struggles and their soul's awakening and remembering. I know of the great need to honor their knowing, for I hear and read daily of the experiences of others who likewise feel abandoned when their spiritual path is not consistent with the paths designed by the dominant and well-entrenched models of our day.<sup>16, 17, 18</sup>

At this point in life my mission, and therefore my purpose for writing this book, is to encourage and support others as they too become more attentive to soul concerns. I am keenly aware that once soul concerns have been identified, it is essential to offer interventions that are soulful. For me, this means listening to soul pain and then responding at a soul level. To respond at a soul level it is essential that I recognize the depth from which symbols and other soul images surface and know the meaning behind some of the symbols being expressed. It is from this place of recognition and understanding that I can offer empowering guidance. Such a process not only facilitates the soul healing of those I walk beside, but has also expanded, beyond my wildest dreams, the growth of my own soul.