

A black and white photograph of a hand reaching out from the left side of the frame. The hand is illuminated from the side, creating strong highlights on the fingers and palm, while the rest of the hand and the background are in deep shadow. The background is a solid black.

**Now Give Me Your Hand**  
**Reflections On The Nature & Origins of Soul**

**By**

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**HERO'S JOURNEY<sup>®</sup>**  
**FOUNDATION**

## A Reflection On The Nature & Origin of Soul

*God speaks to each of us as he makes us,  
then walks with us silently out of the night.*

*These are the words we dimly hear:*

*You, sent out beyond your recall,  
go to the limits of your longing.*

*Embody me.*

*Flare up like flame  
and make big shadows I can move in.*

*Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.  
Just keep going. No feeling is final.  
Don't let yourself lose me.*

*Nearby is the country they call life.  
You will know it by its seriousness.*

*Give me your hand.*

– Rilke



This essay is anchored by a poem by the lyrically intimate Austrian poet from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rainer Maria Rilke. His writing widens my eyes, and with each verse he continues to deepen my understanding of what it means to awaken. Reading this particular poem always sends a shudder of recognition through me. This poem also serves as a kind of sentinel, stopping one from their half-hearted ways, suspending tendencies to pursue lifeless endeavors simply out of habit.

The notion of God speaking intimately to us points me towards the ineffable. *How does the 'I' that I am come to be? From where comes the precise nature of my being? Where are its origins?*

Destined for mystery, I will never know for sure where I have come from, at least while here in this world. When I think about my own incarnation having come forth in the manner this poem suggests, it expands the lens I through which I can look at the long view my life, and gives me a fresh orientation. How can this prayer of a poem help reshape the narrative that I live by?

*God speaks to each of us as he makes us,  
then walks with us silently out of the night.*



Read these first lines slowly. What if a divine spark of creation whispered certain intangible truths deep into the heart of our soul, before our first biological cells ever come into tangible existence? What if we are somehow imbued with a ‘witnessed purpose’ for becoming incarnate, before being literally born into this life?

Michael Meade states that we are both fated and destined to pursue these types of questions – they become quests - throughout our lifetime. How do we learn to walk with these questions, as if they were lanterns illuminating the way, as something to live by, as we go through our trials and tribulations?

Is there a call we receive, summoning into being, conveyed intimately into the depths of our being, from our very beginning? Is there a singular communication encoded from the source of life itself, meant only for us to hear? How might this call be buried deep within our unconscious mind, dormant yet ever there, waiting for us to awaken to its presence?

Looking back at our lives, how might we ‘recall’ this calling, with hindsight now recognizing the ways it has already echoed forth from us at certain times, through intuitive knowing, moments of déjà vu, or times of uncanny synchronicity?

Could there be a message or image from beyond always emanating from beyond, calling us into being in any given moment, ever pointing us towards a journey of awakening, so we might more clearly and fully come to ‘know thyself’?



I remember the one of the first times I experienced this kind of summons toward awakening, when I was nine years old. I went away to summer camp, leaving home to be ‘on my own’ for the first time. I recall during the car ride north, in our old turquoise Rambler station wagon, being excited and apprehensive about going to somewhere that seemed so far away, with people I wouldn’t know, and being left to stay.

What stands out most about that time was how dumbstruck I felt by the vibrant beauty of nature. I was taken by the scent of fresh dew on the grass in the morning, by all of the brilliant colors of green shimmering from the many surrounding trees and the large grass fields, and by how vast the field, the forests and sky felt to me.

I remember vividly the feeling of being visually awestruck, captured and swallowed up by the scenery, in ways my mind couldn’t comprehend, but my sensate body could *feel* and awaken to. It is only by looking back on this experience, fifty years later, that I could say I felt both very strange and yet so very much at home, while being so far away from the place and people I was born into.



I wonder if these same “God-presence” isn’t also an aspect of ourselves that is like a muse, a close companion to us, which walks with us silently as a tangible presence, as a subtle beingness that is both witness and companion, that in certain moments we recognize and experience deeply, a place inside where words turn back. The Spanish poet *Juan Ramon Jimenez* portrays this presence beautifully, in his iconic poem, [I Am Not I](#):

*I am not I.  
I am this one  
walking beside me whom I do not see,  
whom at times I manage to visit,  
and at other times I forget.  
The one who remains silent when I speak,  
the one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,  
the one who takes a walk  
when I am indoors,  
the one who will remain standing  
when I die.*



It takes a sustained and ongoing practice to cultivate deep listening, to enter into a quiet state of mind. We need to be able to settle into an open and receptive attention, in order to sense moments where we are being accompanied by something larger and other than us, something ineffably loving and indescribable, as we make our way deeper into an incarnate existence, and move as a living body through a living universe, sensing our wordless participation in the field of time.

It seems to require a sustained, lifelong practice of listening deeply to realize this kind of intimate companioning of soul, a presence that both comforts us with a felt sense of companioning, and yet also as a witness, as a presence distinctly *other* than us.

When we have the feeling of being walked with by such an ineffable presence, we find ourselves ‘suddenly awakened’, like the feeling we have at the start of a dream. We enter into a timeless mystery that points back towards our original beginning, and forward to the endlessness of possibility. Perhaps this is what ‘*coming out of the night*’ means, according to Rilke.



*These are the words we dimly hear:  
You, sent out beyond your recall,  
go to the limits of your longing.  
Embody me.*

James Hillman speaks of the metaphor of *the acorn*, the kernel or nutshell of a divinely given image or message, something encoded within the core of our being. Again, this acorn mostly becomes accessible only through a deep and cultivated listening. The call of the soul, whether through an image or a word, almost always feels wispy and imperceptible at first. It often feels fleeting, yet it is undeniably there, nonetheless. And it doesn't come on command.

These words of Rilke's also speak right into us: "*You*" – the one listening, the only one who could hear these words – *sent out beyond your recall* – born into this life without any clear remembrance of your origin, or of what your purpose may be for coming into this incarnate world in the first place. Rilke now speaks on behalf of this calling from the companioning soul, and he gives us a directive, a task – *go to the limits of your longing* – a heroic journey if ever there was one.

We must discover – or maybe better said, *allow* what we long for most to be known, and let that longing live inside us like a flame. Then, we go in search of the object of our longing; we let the longing itself be a guide for us. So we have to let this deep longing awaken in us. We have to let the realization of this longing disturb us enough to *move* us, to animate us, to take forward into the unknown, in search of our heart's desire.

We have to *breathe* into our heart's longings, let our breath move within, in order to feel inspiration happen, and be awakened and guided by it. Another task for the soul's journey is to become ignited by our longing, to let it activate our desire for life, love and purpose – and yet we also have to contain it, and not become consumed by it, not let it burn out of control. Thus the image of the soul's longing as a light that is lit within the lantern, within a container that protects it and allows to illuminate the way.

This kind of longing does not desire the *possession* of any external object, but seeks to possess, through our embodiment, *our experience of longing itself*. In fact, this type of desire takes possession of us, as much as we can bear, and helps sustain through set backs, detours, disappointments, and

This transformational shift into an embodied state of awakened desire begins the process of entering a mystery, one we must ultimately encounter, embody and explore over and over again. My own earliest conscious awareness of this entry into mystery took place at as a boy at summer camp, standing in a large field surrounded by dense, green forest and a wide open blue sky, awestruck and filled with wonder, not knowing why.

I have come to the conclusion that we are all here to take up the tasks of incarnation and maturation by embodying our own sense of desire - without having to possess another, without being guaranteed any external outcome, and no assurance of any extrinsic reward. To feel our longing, to be able to express it out loud, and to feel how we come alive from its expression – this *is* the reward, in and of itself. Jellaladhin Rumi speaks of this very well in his poem, [Love Dogs](#).

Now we receive from Rilke the next potent, awe-inspired directive.

*Embody me.*



To embody within us the call of the soul, to become a companion vessel for spirit, for the essence of life. This is an intimate, daring, and wonder-filled call to courageous aliveness. I suppose this is what all the true artists and mystics learn to do. What could be more significant, more mysterious, more daunting, more meaningful, and inevitably more elusive, than to attempt becoming a life-giving reflection of infinity?

Joseph Campbell spoke of this as well. He said that as human beings, we are to become our own unique expression of “*the zeal of eternity for incarnation in time*”. I love the peculiar phrasing of those words. It speaks directly to the life affirming nature of a worthwhile task. We first have to face the notion that we are being summoned or needed, by something coming from the eternal world, for a worthy task to fulfill in this world.

Laying claim to this awareness for ourselves is a daring task, a kind of initiation, as it is also the very thing which can infuse our life with meaning, vitality and adventure. Finding an authentic way to embody enthusiasm, an ‘*entheos*’ or ‘God-filled-ness’, helps us to feel present to a life worth living, a game worth playing, a future worth having.

This essential awareness – *becoming the zeal of eternity* – helps us to embody our longing fully, without needing anything from anyone else – only that fundamental connection to the companioning with our own soul. In this way, we become living signposts, pointing towards the mystery which is the source of all life, that mystery which pulls us all the way back to our very origins, while at the same time propelling us forward towards an unknowable future, taking us even beyond our best ability to imagine.

When we surrender over fully to become the ‘*embodiment of the zeal of eternity*’ – again, no easy or simple task – we live inside a timeless moment, luminous, a living reflection of something that began somewhere else – in the same way that moonlight is the indirect reflection of sunshine being obscured from our direct view by the earth’s position.

So once more - how do we realize that something is calling us? How do we let that calling come alive is, and be expressed from us? How do we dare to pour these life-giving expressions out into the world? For me, this has always been the ‘*pearl beyond all price*’; It is a sense of purpose that is worth the pursuit, that must be witnessed by life. Campbell said this is precisely how a vitalized person can vitalize the world.

*Flare up like flame  
and make big shadows I can move in.*



*Flaring up like flame* means we fill ourselves up with the awareness and feeling of our heart's desire awakened within us. This gives us 'flare' allows us to be seen in a compelling fashion, gives us the passion we need for daring and action.

We become an embodied presence that has passion, heat, flame – capable of demonstrating our inspiration through our gestures, our words and our deeds – all reflections of our distinct aliveness, which reflects and directs those around us to its source. This flaring up like flame is the essence of aliveness, our gift of life, and our gift to life.

This kind of flame will cast shadows all around it, showing us dark places of unconsciousness, from which new energy consciousness can begin to awaken, to move, and to become manifest. This is where mystery and wonder come alive. Big shadows of unforeseen events and unexpected moments that begin to come forth and unfold, imbued with synchronicity, serendipity, humility, playfulness, surprise.

When this happens, we feel moved deeply within our bodies, without our minds ever really knowing exactly the source of what moves us. This is shadow movement, life force coming from the unconscious, a deep wellspring of vital and ever-flowing life.

*Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.  
Just keep going. No feeling is final.  
Don't let yourself lose me.*



Rilke's next directive to us – *Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror*. He invites us to let life happen to us, on life's terms, not ours. This is another daunting call to surrender our personal ego over to the purpose of the soul, to the sacredness of a life beyond our ability to manipulate and control outcomes. Let everything happen. Stop the ego's endless moaning and complaining about life as it is. The ancient mystics and the modern physicists both tell us that in the reality of our physical universe, '*everything is in everything*'.

We are all connected. Everything is connected to everything. The sea is made of water drops, and what is in the sea is also in every water drop. Human beings have the same molecular structure as the stars lighting the night sky. We are in the heavens, and the heavens are in us. The light *is in* the dark. The dark *is in* the light.

The same is true of our own full experience of humanity; it must be this way. There must always be pleasure *and* the pain; one eventually leads to another. There must be peace *and* there must be disturbance. There must be what is sacred *and* also what is mundane. There are fields of energy *and* there are fields of matter. Invisible life energy *is within* physical matter; un-manifest physical matter *is within* energy. This is the mystery and the paradox of oneness that transcends all duality here on our planet.

*"For you and I, we must learn to say yes to all"*, Krishnamurti once said to Joseph Campbell. Let everything happen. Let life be as it is, and respond to life by changing yourself –

heroic action indeed. If we say *yes* to only what we would prefer, then we do not grow and mature. Eventually, we must also *yes* to what we would not prefer. By doing so, we can live the paradox of *joyful participation in the sorrows of the world*.

*Just keep going.*



Another straightforward, essential directive. Just keep going forward, one step in front of the other. Our human nature can give up quickly. Our ego gets hurt; we want to quit when things do not go our way. We become easily defeated, we are prone to feelings of helplessness. Just keep going anyway. We learn that we are resilient, the way children naturally are.

As we get older, we tend to become more fixed, gradually losing the ability to simply start anew once more. As we age, we can start to feel like we are running out of time, or that we have failed too many times. But to begin again, over and over, even if from the same place, and to be sustained on our path as we go, this is an essential skill to learn, because of the verse that comes next.

*No feeling is final.*



We cannot underestimate this universal truth. This is both the beauty and the terror of our *impermanent existence*. We are not here on earth everlastingly, only temporarily. This is the same for all our human experiences, as all things will pass. We know the beauty of realizing that our moment of suffering has begun to end; we fear our knowledge of the coming future, knowing that eventually what we have, we will lose – the beautiful companionship of loving people, the happiness that has been hard won, the joys of our fortunate circumstances. This is the burden that comes with the gift of forethought, which we all possess as human beings.

Yet it is exactly this awareness of impermanence that also makes the accompaniment of *that which does not cease to exist* so essential and so meaningful to us. Thus, the next directive:

*Don't let yourself lose me.*



When we are connected to the intangible and intimate presence of the soul's companioning, this non-human intermediary, which ever points us towards that which is mysterious and eternal, we will be better able to stay grounded in the joyful expansions and the painful contractions of being human.





Our happiness and our sorrow is a result of our connectedness to this world. We are better able to bear this life, this being in the world of suffering, when we remember that we have come from, and we will return to, a world beyond this one. *Everything* here is temporary, is passing. Therefore, it is a low aim to continually seek to escape from the realities of this life; that time will come soon enough.

When we stay connected to the subtle presence that points us towards mystery and eternity, we are to better able to bear our losses in this world; we accept more of life on life's term; we can learn to let go of fixations and attachments that do not serve life. Yet how do we take hold of a connection to that which is intangible and fleeting?

This is a good question, and good questions are those that take us on a worthwhile quest. We need ordinary rituals and do-able deeds that help us to find our way back to what is sacred, to what holds mystery, and to what embraces wholeness.

We find this through sustainable, consistent practices that we establish in our lives: contemplative prayer, devotional reading, slow walks in the outdoors, mindfulness meditation, yoga practices, doable acts of loving kindness.

We ultimately can come back to wholeness through simple but conscious acts, such as watering the plants, taking care of our pet, listening to a song we love, or just feeling deeply the sun on our face – by really being there when life happens.

Seek out anything that quiets your mind, opens your heart, and brings you more fully into your body, then find your way into relationship with something beyond the self, into a conscious exchange with whatever is happening in the immediacy of the moment, here and now.

*Nearby is the country they call life.  
You will know it by its seriousness.*



Vitality, meaning, connection, and renewal is never far from where we are in any given moment, regardless of how little we believe in or are aware of this possibility. *Nearby is the country they call life.* Physical life on earth also holds an intangible but undeniable field of life force energy – a living universe - which is all around us, even when we are lost in confusion, or when we are preoccupied and ruminating on petty self-concerns; or trapped in an eddy of recycled thinking.

Life is always nearby, waiting to unfold in our midst, ready to include us in its happening, wanting to exchange itself with us. If we can just simply follow our in-breath and our out-breath in any given moment, we can feel directly with our bodies how this is always the case.

*You will know it by its seriousness.*



Here, Rilke is referring to a sense of something substantial that gives weighted-ness to our existence, in the way gravity does. The kinesthetic sense of a gravitational pull reflects to us the solidity and substance of a meaningful and vital interior existence as well. It pulls us inward, gathering us down and into ourselves with a certain magnetic bearing, and this can both ground us and wake us up. Psychological *insight* feels like this; we awaken to the recognition of who we are or what matters most to us.

In these moments, we ‘*come to*’. We come alive from knowing ourselves a little better; we have the feeling of becoming ourselves a little more. We glimpse more clearly and distinctly – no matter how briefly – into our own indelible nature; into the immensity of love; into our true sense of place in the universe. The wordless expression of awe – or just the word ‘*aha*’! – *flares up like flame* from inside when we drop down into being more substantial. Our own depths then seem to rise up to the surface of our awareness, when we sink down into them.



When we enter fully into our memories, we step out of time and fall away into the eternal world of ‘here and now’, and then insight and realization can flare up like flame. Our past is re-lived in the present, and we can experience resolution and repair with our past, by doing so.

I am struck by how, some 50 years later, I can relive a moment as if it is happening again right now. I am moved by an anchoring realization that the boy in me *knew he was a part of everything*, yet he had no conscious comprehension of oneness at the time. I wonder if a more conscious awakening, such as the one I am having now, could have saved him from some of the suffering he endured during his childhood years.

So I let myself have the understanding, the awakening, *now*. I have just kept going, through all these years. The sorrow and loneliness of the boy who felt at times like a fish out of water dissolves, my early years do not seem so sad or heavy to recall, in this repairing, arriving moment. I relish both the mystery and the knowing that what is with me now (as I remember him then) *was also somehow with him then*, in a way was watching over him, in the background of his life.

Maybe the compassion in me now is singing to him back then, resounding through the flickering greens of the trees; through the fresh smell of the grasses; through the bright, blue brilliance of the big afternoon skies; and through the penetrating warmth of the summer sun. Even the awakening that was in Rilke way back when, that feels as if it is in me now, through his written words. We are all connected.



The final line of Rilke’s poem both reflects and summarizes the call of the soul to enter our total being, one more time. Embodying our heart’s desire, becoming expressions of the zeal of eternity for incarnation in space and time, we are now petitioned by this intangible presence to reach out once again towards the ultimate Source. By doing so, we are pulled towards life itself.

Reach out. Open more. Be taken. Move towards. Extending our hand out towards life, love, and connection yet again. Being pulled forward by what is infinite – into the next breath, the next encounter, the next day, the new start – embracing what is impermanent.

We just keep going, now with more of ourselves, yet also transcending ourselves, more than before.

This is what a true sense of purpose does. This is how a myth comes alive, how an inspiring narrative works. They teach us not only what life is all about, but also how to live in it. The mystery is what now moves us forward. Something opens us, makes us vulnerable to more life, more love. We learn to let everything happen.

This type of longing has inspired to go further than I would ever typically go, without such a felt sense of companioning. The feeling of being accompanied is with me often now in my later years, especially when alone, and it still fills me with wonder as I go towards my unknown future.

The living and universal myth of the hero's adventure continues to carry me forward, sometimes pulling me deeply into my past - again and again, throughout life. I feel less and less certain of anything anymore, and that seems about right. My focus goes more towards my being willing to embody wholeheartedly that one particular thing that is ever calling to each of us, from beyond.

[Now give me your hand.](#)

– Michael Mervosh



“The search for meaning involves a particular relation that for each person seeks and establishes with themselves, and for many it may never rise to the level of objective thought. It is rather a sense that one's being is imbued with witnessed purpose, as if we are watched over by a muse who guides us through our life.

In the lives of writers or painters that figure may be well known as an imaginary presence but, from a psychoanalytic point of view, we might say that most of us feel guided by the unconscious trace of a caring other, an internal sense and function that we owe originally to our mother.

This maternal presence will express itself in our relation to an internal companion, as we transform our mother's love of us into our love of an ideal self that would fulfill her wishes.

Eventually the sense of seeking, and being looked after by, a caretaking other permeates the relationship of our self to our mind.”

- Christopher Bollas  
*Meaning and Melancholia, pages 120-121*