

Glimmers of Light Dancing

A Fable for Our Times

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Chapter One

The Ocean Voyage

My first memory is of climbing a large wooden staircase in an old house somewhere in the countryside. The dark panelled walls were covered with large frames and prized possessions. The one that stood out for me was a silver sword hanging from the landing. I could not have been more than four years old, but I remember not only the vision of this imposing feature but also the sultry air. Beams of sunlight with grains of dust suspended magically in front of me. Time stood still. My life was beginning. It was the first experience of excitement, the unknown, the wonder of life, my future. It stirred something within me. Perhaps it was the first time I became aware of my own journey through life. I skipped to the bottom of the garden and found a leafy enclave. I danced around. I remember feeling I was not alone in this world, that life was very special.

Why am I telling you this now? Because I find myself on a journey, a journey into the unknown that is life. I am travelling through time and space in search of something. What this is becomes clearer and clearer as the mists surrounding me start to dissipate and a picture comes into focus of something so perfect it takes the breath away. This epic journey is part of us all: to discover life as it really could be.

My name is Idan. I am running down a bank towards the sea. There is lush, green foliage all around me. It has been raining heavily but has now stopped. The sweet smells of fresh leaves and wet grass accompany me on my way. There is a feeling of expectation in the air. I am not sure exactly what I will find at the water's edge, but I know it will carry me on the first part of my new voyage.

I turn the corner and see the still, blue water. I am lost in thought, thoughts of what may be in the future and have been in the past. I hear seagulls squawk overhead, a very familiar sound that brings me to my senses. I stand alone, yet strangely not alone. I have a choice, I can continue or I can stay. As I get closer, I hear the gentle lapping of the water. And then I notice a large wooden ship anchored to a small jetty. It stands

silent and majestic. I stop, blood rushes to my head, and my heart is pounding. What is ahead of me? I feel a pang of uncertainty. Everything in front of me is unknown, uncharted water; everything behind me familiar, safe, and known. I suddenly find myself walking towards the boat, as if the decision has already been made. I am being drawn to this new life ahead of me.

The ship has carved designs which continue around both sides as if telling a story. High above the bow these designs become very elaborate, coloured shapes and figures. One reaches out to the sky, as if willing this great structure forward. As I walk around the side, I follow the pictures, gazing high up at their magnificence, trying to trace any meaning. The ship is imposing and beautiful at the same time.

In life years I am young; not yet an adult and not a child. I am an in-between age. A good age to start out on such a quest.

The boat slips away from the jetty with no panpipes, waves, or shouts. It just pulls away on the glistening sea that is flat and calm. I watch as the shoreline becomes smaller and smaller and finally disappears. That was me; this boat is now me, the first part of my story. I wander around feeling rather lost. There is a beautiful wooden deck with beams and ropes, plenty of places to hide, to rest, and to enjoy. A light breeze whistles in my ears. It nudges at me as if telling me something I cannot yet understand. I am surrounded by beauty, order, and structure, yet there is a part of me that feels awkward, not yet whole and not totally at peace. I want to dwell on the rich, polished decks of the boat with not a care in the world. But instead, I feel the need to find somewhere inside that feels safe and warm, that will hold me for the while.

I go through a door that leads down some steps into a dark hole. In front of me is a corridor. As my eyes adjust, I notice the wooden panelling and little flickering lights every few yards. I continue on and feel comforted. There are doors on each side. I walk to the end to see where this leads and find myself in a small room with boxes and chests. I wonder what is in them. Perhaps they are prized possessions from a former life, a store of things that could be useful in the future, or forgotten memories that can be dusted off now and again. Each one is labelled and piled high on top of one another,

as if its place has been considered carefully. The floorboards creak as I pace up and down, trying to read some of the dusty labels.

There is a large wooden chest with metal bands around it. It looks like a treasure chest. I try to open it, but it is locked tight. It smells of something sweet and pleasant.

There is a smaller box. It is brightly coloured with rich reds and yellows. The colours seem to bounce off the box. I cannot resist taking a closer look and sit in the middle of the floor, drawing it towards me.

As I open the top I feel happy, exhilarated, a mixture of emotions I cannot describe. There are small particles coming out of the box. Some of them are thread-like substances in gold and yellow, suspended and rising like dust. Something in the air conjures in my mind a window with a light, lace curtain blowing in the wind and then a waft of smells from a street on a hot day. It is still and silent. Then a lighthouse with a beam of light comes into focus. It stands firmly on a rock, and I wonder at its significance. It is as though something good is happening, and all is well. A moment that I do not remember? A place where I have never been? A forgotten dream? A moment in time? It is a box of mystery, of something known but also unknown, and it strikes me that time does not stand still. Nor does it run in linear form; it jumps around. A memory can be part of now, and a dream can reveal something not yet experienced. A series of flashes from the past come into my head, each with a different set of emotions. It is like travelling in time and discovering something new.

I look around me at the other boxes, so many things to discover. There is a window looking out over the front of the boat. I can see the horizon and sun, now low. We are heading at a steady pace. All is calm. I go outside onto the front deck and watch the sun go down.

I find my cabin. It is small and cosy. I have a little door that opens to a walkway which follows around the boat. There is a bed with a soft, cloth cover. The floor is wooden, and an intricate, red and dark blue rug catches my eye. It has fine detail woven into it which seems to depict a story. I wonder what it represents or what story it tells.

There is rhythm to the boat, and I start to tune into it. There is a soft vibration. If I listen very carefully and stay completely still, sometimes I can almost step out of myself and become part of the ocean and sky around me.

Time passes, the sun rises and sets, and the boat creaks and sways with the swell. Birds fly around the boat but become fewer as we head further and further away from the shore.

In the evenings, I sit out on the deck and absorb the night air. There is nothing to do but to reflect, to watch, and to listen, I start to realise this is the most important thing for me to do.

Before I set sail, I was always busy; there was no time to think. Thinking wasn't important. I reacted to everything around me and always had something to occupy my mind. But now, in this space, everything is different. Emotions come to the surface. I try to focus but get wound up and confused. Sometimes I feel lost. Sailing on the open seas is not easy. I am exposed to the elements of the universe and to my inner self. But there are also moments when it clears, and I start to see things as they really are. I get glimpses of life when everything makes perfect sense, and it is as if the universe is taking its rightful place. At this stage in my journey, this happens infrequently, and I still do not understand what I hear.

There are times when the wind starts to rise, the sails flap, and the boat starts to sway in a new way. When that happens, I walk around the boat, looking for familiar places to hide. Everything looks different. I have to hold on tightly to the sides of the boat or the railings to keep balance. The sky takes on a new form. From a soft blue with gentle hints of colour, it turns grey and menacing. The clouds roll and circle around the boat; the wind howls through empty spaces. I feel vulnerable and cold. Where am I going now? What is the purpose of such chaos? I find it hard to find my feet and stumble on the deck. What does this storm mean? Where is it taking me? It is like being in a holding space. I cannot think straight; I cannot shift my position. I am lost in turmoil. I have to hang on and ride the storm. I have no choice but to go with it. When this happens, I want to go home, find a safe space, be surrounded by something familiar, and hear a voice that soothes and comforts. But I am on the open sea.

I feel alone. Anger and hurt rise up within me. It is as if a disturbance from the past is coming to the surface. Perhaps my mistake before has been to shut out such feelings and lock them up. But on the turbulent sea, that is no longer possible. I wonder if there is a time and place to surface such feelings. What would happen if I could just let them pass, like black clouds going by in the night?

It is one such time when, reflecting on the storm, I return to my cabin and realise I have a visitor. An old man is sitting in the chair. I am pleased to see him. I am still feeling disturbed and the distraction is good. I ask him, 'Why do we have to go through such storms? Surely we could go a different route, a safer, calmer route on our journey?'

'The storms are already within us,' he replies. 'It is not a matter of choosing a route. It is a matter of understanding the storm.'

I don't really know what he is talking about, but I guess he has experienced storms, too. There is a heavy beating of rain on the deck outside, and the boat lurches to the side.

'I do not like it this way,' I tell him. 'There are times when I feel I cannot go on. I wish I were back in the comfort of my old home.'

'Home is somewhere in your heart and your soul,' he replies. 'You will only find your true home when you look deep into your soul and rest there awhile. This is your journey, and it is precious for you.'

'I want it to be over, I would like to arrive somewhere and feel my feet on sturdy ground.'

The old man smiles at me as if he has heard this many times before. 'You want to reach the end before you have travelled the distance.'

'I want to reach my goal,' I reply.

'Your goal would be barren if you were to go there now. It would hold nothing for you. It would be an empty place. Your goal is full of lessons learnt, paths trodden, and experiences to reminisce on. Your goal is not what you think it is right now, but your pathway through storms and adventures takes you there. When you arrive it will be a very special place to be.'

'Will there be many more storms to go through?' I ask.

'If you focus on the storms you will see discomfort, and it will colour your journey. You will miss some of the most important lessons in life. If you focus on the beauty of the journey, every step of the way, noticing something special and different, your journey will be good, and you will receive the messages from the universe which are yours.'

The rain has stopped, and a shaft of light filters in through the door. I smile. I have learnt something new today.

A picture comes into my head of a beautiful little harbour with a light drawing us in. I feel soothed and comforted.

The next time there is a storm, I sit out on deck and wait with my feelings bubbling and raging. What I notice is that it is good to feel this way; it makes me feel alive. I can sit with this for a while because I need to. The ship rolls, the wind howls, and I sit and watch. I notice that the angry clouds hurl and spit, and the sea turns grey and ugly. But if I stay long enough, I see other things. I hear other noises. The grey waves start to sparkle ever so slightly, and I focus on the patches of light. Tears roll down my cheeks, tears of ancient sadness, but now I am not overwhelmed. I watch with intense curiosity as the anguish passes over me. I focus on every piece of light that sparkles on the sea. The sadness lifts, because in this moment in time, there is no sadness, just patches of light. I smile, and the angry sea starts to settle. The calmer sea takes on a rich shade of blue. It splashes very gently against the sides of the boat. I listen carefully and hear only hushed tones and gentle winds. All is coming right in my world. What would it be like if I always noticed the sparkles of light rather than the grey turbulent clouds?

One evening I find myself walking out on the deck. It is a fine, clear evening. The moon casts silver shadows across the deck. I smile at the dancing light which shimmers with the movement of the boat. It is one of those moments when you feel nothing is impossible, anything could happen, and all is well. I gaze up at the stars. I am mesmerised by the scene before me. There are little specks of light in darkness; clusters of stars light up the sky. And then I see it clearly as if for thousands of years this has been the case, but I have never noticed it before. I am looking into the heart of life, movement, thought, possibilities. It is outstanding. It is miraculous. Then I notice jets of light or energy shooting towards the earth, as if there is a constant resource reaching us I never knew existed. I draw on this energy, and it dwells deep within me; it reaches into my soul. I breathe in and know it is always there for me when I need it.

I am standing there for what seems like only moments but is probably some time. There is a gentle breeze. The boat is changing direction with the wind. I step inside and sit for a while. The world goes on. Things are just as they were before, but the winds of change stir within me.

Days go by, years go by on my journey through life. There are many more storms and many more warm nights on the deck. In the future I might reflect on the lessons I am learning or look back and realise I missed many signs along the way. But now I am sitting below deck, in my favourite place. I am not sure what it is about this room I love so much. Is it the soft colours, a symphony of browns and creams that soothes me? Perhaps it is the gentle sparks of light that scatter around the room, or the creaking of the ship that lulls me into a gentle slumber. But I dream of other worlds, other places, which seem so familiar yet do not exist for me now. In my mind I see the picture again of a distant harbour with a sparkling light drawing my ship in.

I have flashbacks of my earlier life. I am not sure if I want to remember or to forget. What is the relevance now? I carry a load with me on my journey. Somehow I have to work through it, make sense of it, or perhaps just live with it and let it be.

On one of my wanderings, I find a small window protruding from the deck. It is a delicate little window, and I feel it needs further investigation. When I bend down and look through, I realise it must be the captain's cabin. It is the most delightful room,

almost circular in shape, with lights hung low on the wooden walls. There is a large table in the middle with what look like charts or maps carefully placed on it. How do I find my way in? I go below deck, exploring several passageways that lead nowhere. I retrace my steps and eventually find a small corridor I had not noticed before. It is plain and simple. It does not give the impression of anything special, but I guess it could lead me to my destination. I follow down, and there at the end, is a small door which leads into the cabin.

The room is stuck in time. Light streams through the window, picking out patterns on walls and the furniture. There is a sense of cosiness and the smell of warm air. I walk over to the table and glance at the maps and charts. They are full of designs, lines, and patterns I cannot make sense of but feel incredibly drawn to. I feel they somehow belong to me. I pore over them fascinated, as if looking down on my life. I see shapes and numbers. There are beautiful drawings of what look like animals and birds but show configurations of the oceans, many lands, and the skies. It is a map so delicately drawn it is enchanting. I see a line, or maybe several lines, mapped through oceans and lands I do not even know exist.

I hear a cough and jump up with a gasp. There is someone else in the room. I didn't notice him. It is the old man.

'Hello,' he says.

'You made me jump. I didn't know you were there,' I say.

'Do you like the maps?' he asks.

'They are amazing; they are so beautiful.'

'They are handcrafted, specially designed.'

I look back down at them, moving them around to see if they are different or the same. There are about ten different versions of what looks like the same map. Each maps out a different journey.

'We choose our path through life,' he says. 'There are many paths, many journeys, but we have free choice to choose what we will.'

'How do we know which is the best one?'

'If we stumble from one route to another without taking any consideration, we take a chance with what comes our way. Sometimes we make careful choices but do not listen to the voices of the universe and end up stumbling. The trick is to learn to listen and watch. If we can learn this lesson, we can find the voyage that is true to ourselves and gain the learning we have been seeking from the beginning of time.'

'How can I learn to listen?'

'You are still young and are swayed by many emotions and thoughts. But as you grow, you will start to tune in to the voices that call your name. When you start to hear them, take note and follow their wisdom. Many people hear the voices but feel foolish or do not want to listen. They turn away, and their heart becomes hardened, and the voices become fainter. Trust your instincts.'

'When will I start to hear them?'

'You will hear them when you learn to calm your thoughts and know what it is to have a moment in time where there is nothing but you and the oceans and skies.'

'I think I know that feeling. I had a glimpse of something like that not so long ago.'

'Then you are already tuning in.'

He smiles, and I feel an overwhelming sense of joy, as if everything is possible and good things are going to come my way. The storms may come and go, but the charts remain secure in this wonderful place, where time means nothing and adventure everything.

The boat sways back and forth as I stand in this beautiful cabin, and I am lulled into timelessness. Everything around me starts to fade, but I do not feel dizzy or ill; I feel

energised and free. I notice an unusual breeze against my face and a soft sound or call that I cannot distinguish or recognise. It is as if I am being transported to another place over land and sea, travelling through time. I have a sense that there is water flowing in front of me. I have arrived somewhere. I am in a garden. It is warm, the sun is shining, birds are singing. The water is coming from a waterfall or fountain. It is gold and catches the light as it flows. It seems alive. And then the picture starts to fade, and I become aware of myself back in the cabin. What does all this mean? I look around for the old man, but he is not there. Everything is just as it was except for one thing. One of the maps is floating slightly above the table, as if it is being blown by the wind. There are details I hadn't noticed before. The designs are even more intricate. It seems to come alive. I understand something very deep about life. The clouds have lifted for a second, and I know I have always had this knowledge. And then it is gone, and I can't quite grasp what it was.

I want to drive forward on this journey but also stop and admire the beauty on the way. I do not want to miss special things because I am in a hurry to live.

I go up on deck and find a comfortable spot where I can look out over the ocean. It is exceptionally still this evening, like a mill pond. I love evenings like this. The boat hardly moves; it glides over the sea. The water laps against the side, and I know that the universe has its own rhythm that resonates around the globe. It would be so easy not even to notice it. Perhaps there are many paths, but the one that floats above the rest is where we learn to listen. On this path we tread in the footprints of those before and feel the heartbeat of the universe. This is the journey of the soul.

I walk to the front of the boat and gaze at the open sea before me. The glistening waters seem to have a voice that draws me ever closer to my destiny. In my mind's eye, I once more see a harbour light swaying in the wind, calling the boat in. I wonder at my part in this. I am the captain of *my* ship. I close my eyes, and the wind brushes my face. I wait and in the silence visualise a small light swaying in the wind, drawing the boat towards its harbour.

I am drawing in deeply the energy from the universe.

Chapter Two

The Vast Plains and Wide-Open Spaces

As we dock with a thud against the side of the quay, I suddenly feel a sense of loss for what has been on the open seas. It is time to move on. It is time to step out once more into the unknown. The port is busy; several ships are arriving and leaving. I find my way through the crowds, pushed and shoved in all directions. I feel awkward in this new place and try to take it all in. There are people buying and selling. There is a lot of shouting and laughing, which seems strange after the familiar creaks and hushed tones of the boat. I wonder if I will be able to make it in this strange world.

And then I see him moving towards me – a tall man, plainly dressed. He steps forward to greet me. ‘Let me take your bag,’ he says, ‘and come with me. I am your welcomer to this part of your journey.’

I feel calm and safe. We walk in silence to his house along the quay. I watch children playing in the gravel and hear their shrieks of delight. It brings a smile to my face. I see a group of women sharing news, completely engrossed in their stories. Old men gather and pass the time of day.

We arrive at the welcomer’s house. It is sparse and clean. There are no pictures on the walls or trinkets laid out for inspection. I wonder how he lives with so little. ‘You have so few belongings in your house,’ I remark.

‘This is a temporary home. My real home is full of light and laughter. There are many valuable things there, but things that are not so highly valued here.’

‘It sounds like a wonderful place!’

‘A journey well travelled,’ he replies. ‘A homecoming fit for a king!’

‘I would very much like that.’

'It shall be yours if you take good heed of your journey now. There is nothing as good as a homecoming when you are greeted by your loved ones. When you know you have lived life as you intended and listened to the call of the universe.' He has a broad smile, and there is something very soothing in his voice.

'Listen to those you meet along the way, especially the wise ones,' he continues.

'Will you be guiding me all the way?'

'I will be there with you in many ways. You will never be on your own.'

'You remind me of the old man on the boat.'

'Of course.'

He spreads out a map on the table. It is not dissimilar to the one I saw on the boat. Laid out before me are barren lands, with vast plains that do not seem so inviting. Then there are great rivers and a magnificent waterfall that almost seems alive. Beyond is the Great White Mountain of Truth that draws me to its slopes. It feels important. Perhaps it holds a great secret or a particular truth. On the other side of the mountain lie deep valleys and forests. I can see there is much life there. It is rich and fruitful. There are many colours.

'There are many paths forward,' he tells me.

'How do I know which ones to take?' I ask.

'The path is of your making. Feel your way. Search your heart, listen, and watch. Do not spend too much time looking inward. If you spend too much time focussing within, your thoughts will turn to misery. Reach out to the world around you, and all will be well.'

He picks up a small lantern and hands it to me. 'This will shine your path in darkness; it will help you see a few steps in front. Sometimes people want to see much further. They strain themselves and search for brighter lamps, but much of the time we walk

in the unknown. That is who we are and what was intended. We might want to see everything, understand it all, and arrive at the valleys of sweet-scented flowers before we have trodden the open plains. But that is not the way. We cannot pretend we are something we are not, but we can appreciate every step we take and be thankful. Your journey is precious, my friend, make it so, and do not wish it away.'

We talk into the night. I finally drift into a peaceful sleep, sitting beside the fire with the map perched in my lap.

The next morning I set out on my journey across the vast plains. To be on land was something I longed for, but now that I have found stable ground, it is not what I expected. It is a little overwhelming, and I am not sure which way to go. It used to be so easy confined to the space on the boat. Now the road is endless and the journey wide. I reminisce about the storms and the familiar noises, but something in me strives forward. The first few days are filled with false starts, great plans that come to nothing. Sometimes I come to an end before I have even begun. I realise I am now the master of my destiny, and there are times when I would rather this was not so. I can be anything I want to be, go anywhere I want to go. It feels like a wonderful opportunity, but the responsibility sweeps over me like a cloud. I stand and breathe in the air. There was a time when I could focus and call a direction into being, but now all I can do is listen to the whisper of a gentle breeze.

I see a child approaching. She is dancing along the path. 'Who are you?' she asks.

'I don't know,' I reply without thinking and then I wonder at my answer. 'Who are you?' I ask.

'I am the dancer. Watch me dance.' She spins around, and jumps and skips. She is a delightful child, full of fun. 'How can you be you if you don't know who you are?' she asks.

'I don't know, I have never really asked myself that question.'

'Well you must, because you have to know who you are. I am the dancer; everyone knows that. My father is the explorer, and he finds great things. My friend says she is the whisperer. She tells me things that make me laugh and cry. But you will be sad if you don't know who you are.'

She dances off into the sunset, and I watch her go into the distance. *I must find out who I am*, I think. Could I dance like the dancer or explore like the explorer? I am neither one. I am something different.

As I journey onward, I start to feel stripped bare of everything I know; the past is the past, forgotten in time. There are no soft mountain glades calling me, no oases to run to and hide, just vast open spaces. I am in a raw state of being. It would be easy to turn back and find a different route through the valleys of hope, the forests of opportunity, but I know this is the road I must travel. Why do I assume life should be easy? I start to move forward, not sure what to expect.

At night the stars shine bright and speak a language of their own, one I do not understand, yet I know it exists. During the day I wait and watch for signs, but in truth, I am still not sure what I am looking for or who I am. My thoughts cast shadows in my mind. Nothing is what it seems.

One morning a new day dawns in likeness to the very breath of the gods. Pink and fiery orange swirls circle above me. I feel a strange sensation, a sense of foreboding. The wind picks up. I press forward as best I can, but the dust flies into my eyes and covers my head. I look for shelter but cannot find any. I hold my lamp tight to my chest. The dust and gravel starts to circle around my feet. I see a whirl of wind. I feel out of control, as if being spun 'round and 'round in an endless state. I want to step outside and shout aloud that this is not how it has to be. But no one is listening. Flashes come into my mind: a troubled man, years of pain and anxiety on his face; a gypsy girl with begging eyes. What is it that runs so deep in my troubled soul? I am in despair. I reach out and cry, but there is no answer. I pull my cape tightly around me, but the dust still hurls around my head, and many more pictures flood my mind. I am hounded by all the mistakes I have made, regrets, things that I have said that I can never undo. They seem to circle around me like plagues of fiery insects. Why do I remain in this space?

Always before I have put bad things out of my mind, told myself it was not my fault, tried to forget. But now they will not be banished. I cannot escape myself. They are part of me. I can run from them no longer. I feel vulnerable, because I do not know who I am or what my purpose is.

I curl up and fall into misery, exhaustion, and a restless sleep. When I wake, the dust has settled. I am cold and tired. Does it matter which way I go? I remember the welcomer telling me not to dwell too long on things within but to reach out. I stumble forward step by step. A picture of the great mountain I saw on the map forms in my mind, and it gives me hope. I press on, focussing my mind on the mountain and the beautiful valleys beyond. And as I pass others on my journey, I reach out to them with a smile and a word of cheer, and I start to feel better.

After a while, I find I have company. I am joined by a figure, softly spoken and light in step, someone who feels vaguely familiar. My spirits are lifted. It is such a different journey now. We walk in silence for many hours; there is nothing to say in words.

I start to notice things on the way: a rough stone that gleams golden in the light, a flower so extraordinary with its intricate petals, a bright blue butterfly circling overhead and disappearing into the sky.

I smile, and my companion smiles with me. 'Tread carefully along the path of life, taking note of the extraordinary and the ordinary,' he tells me.

'There are so many beautiful things here,' I tell him. 'For miles and miles I was alone, and it was so desolate and cold.'

He looks at me, confused. 'Then you didn't notice the great fiery planes, the lights that dance across the vast spaces at dawn, or the great shadows at dusk that clip the edge of the rocks to reflect light from the heavens?'

'My eyes were cast down. All I could see was the swirling dust.'

'You didn't hear the roar of the great wind call your name or the echoes of the ancient worlds ring in your ears, telling you to go on and find great treasures in life?'

'How could I miss such things?'

'Your eyes were cast down.'

'How can I be sure not to miss these signs again?'

My companion takes my arm, and we walk forward in silence to a place where the path splits in two directions. There is a big rock and an old tree that looks well worn from years of storms and plagues. We sit down, and he tells me to wait with him. I wait in silence, and many thoughts come flooding into my mind. 'Why was I so foolish that I did not notice those things?'

'Your mind is in a crowded space. You cannot hear the great lessons of life while you dwell in such a place. Calm your mind and listen carefully. What do you hear?'

I hear nothing; there is silence, no chimes of bells, no rushing of the wind. All is still. 'I can't hear anything.'

He says nothing; he is listening to something I cannot hear. I continue to listen. A faint buzz attracts my attention. A small fly is skating around in the dust, and I realise I can hear myself breathing.

'I am alive!' I say aloud. 'I am breathing!'

'And that is true. The only thing that really matters is that you are alive in this moment in time. Could there be anything more real than that?'

My mind stops racing. I wait silently for a moment to cherish the thought that all is right in this world in the very moment that is now. Everything else seems insignificant.

I rise to set forth on my journey and realise I am faced with a dilemma. There are two roads ahead. I feel a moment of panic. Which one is the right one? Then I wonder, *Is there a right one and a wrong one?* I am not so sure. Perhaps both are right. So many thoughts coming tumbling back into my head. *What if I take the wrong path? How do*

I know what the right path looks like? Is there a sign of some kind, or do I just have to choose one and hope for the best?

I turn to my companion. 'I don't know which path to take.'

He leads me to one of the paths and tells me to stop. 'Breathe in the air, focus your mind on this path, imagine you are walking down this way, and tell me how it feels.'

I stand at the beginning of this path, look forward, and breathe in its air. In my mind's eye I see myself walking this path, and it feels good. I step back. He leads me to the other path and tells me to do the same. Instantly, something different happens. I see myself walking this path but do not feel the same. I feel slightly troubled, a bit anxious. I step away.

'That is the route I shall take,' I say, pointing to the first path. 'But what would happen if I did take this other one?'

My companion shrugs. 'Who knows? There are many paths and many choices. There is not one that is good or bad, but some are more refined to your purpose in life. If you can tune in to the universal voices and the call within you, you will find yourself moving to the rhythm of your soul. And that is a wonderful thing.'

And so it is I continue on my path, this time alone.

The path narrows. It becomes damp underfoot. Water is seeping from the moss on the old stone wall beside me. Clear freshwater droplets form before my eyes, and I watch them develop and drop. I hear a rumble ahead of me, soft at first and then louder and louder. It is a constant, heavy thud of volumes of cascading water. My mind turns to the map and a picture of a waterfall that seems to dance with life. Eventually I turn a bend, and in front of me, there it is, so vast it is breathtaking. The sound is almost deafening now. The water sprays into my face. I stand in awe of this great marvel of nature. The water crashes into the river below. A gentle mist rises like vapour in its wake. It reminds me of the washing away of troubled times. The great torrents hurtle into the still water that gently flows away to another place.

I find a small enclave, like a small grotto of natural rock, and stand under cover of the falling water. I close my eyes and listen to this wondrous noise as cool droplets splash onto my face. Suddenly, tears start to stream down my cheeks. I remember all the hurts of many years. I am overwhelmed by pain and suffering. It feels like the washing away of sorrows, a letting go of everything that is past. For many hours I shed tears, like the water from the waterfall soaking the earth beneath me. I know that to move forward, I must let go of the past, all those hurts and troubled times.

When I rise from this enclave, each step forward is like a shedding of many layers. A shedding of things that have been hidden, secrets held so firm, past hurts carried for generations. There is deep pain so unexplainable yet so present. The wind rushes forth, tearing at my soul and piercing my inner self. Still I move on, step by step, shedding the load in the presence of the mighty river. A stab at the heart, a painful blow of realisation; at last I start to see things clearly. Life is a cleansing process of all that has gone before. Have I been focussing on the wrong things? I have always wanted to feel good, to avoid pain and achieve success and recognition. But the true nature of the journey is not about this. It focuses on something else.

As I watch the flowing water, I notice one of the streams disappears into the ground ahead of me. It captures my attention, and I follow its course. It seems to sink into the ground and disappear. I try to follow its path. There is thick vegetation that is difficult to pass, but soon I stumble upon a great hole in the ground, like a huge upward cave. It is extraordinary. I climb down, slipping and sliding into this enormous cavern. At the bottom is a beautiful lake of turquoise green, completely still and calm. I sit beside its banks, listening to the water dripping from the rocks above. The sunlight filters through, picking out patches of turquoise. It seems to penetrate deep within.

Beside the lake is a very ancient-looking tree. It stands firm, with short, spiky branches. Its trunk is twisted and knurled. Hanging from its branches are many trinkets and jewels that sway in the breeze. The light dances around them, and they reflect a pattern of shimmering lights against the pale waters below. What a spectacle.

I close my eyes, and a kind of vision comes to mind. I see a traveller pass this way, but when he arrives, he is so exhausted and ill that he falls beside the tree and cannot

get up. He manages to prop himself up against its trunk and is stuck there. He gazes on the great turquoise waters but has no energy to reach it. He seems to know that if only he could reach the refreshing waters all would be well.

Then in my vision I see him slowly look up at the first branches of the tree that are within his grasp. He makes himself raise his arms. The tree gives him strength, and a voice from the tree speaks out. 'Lift yourself up against my trunk and touch one of my middle branches.'

Slowly and gently he lifts himself up and is now able to stand, He feels a little better. The tree speaks again. 'If you can reach up to one of my high branches and let go of your many burdens, you will receive back your strength.'

The man stretches up high, and the stretch makes him feel good. The upper branches bend down to meet his hand. He reaches out and touches a branch. He laughs at something so extraordinary. He then steps down to the beautiful lake, soaks in the soft waters, and his energy is revived. The man is so delighted he takes off his precious, gold bracelet and hangs it on one of the branches in thanksgiving before he continues on his journey. I wonder if that is how the trinkets and jewels originated on this ancient tree.

I decide to lay my own worries and thoughts upon this ancient tree and plunge into the calming waters. I watch as the shafts of light pick colours around me, and I dwell in this holy place. I have felt the washing away of sorrows, and now I feel a new sensation, something very calm and sweet. I am filled with a sense of acceptance and forgiveness. I leave this place feeling a greater sense of peace and calm.

Before me stands a bridge that marks another phase of the journey. It passes over the great torrents of the river to a land beyond. As I ascend, I watch the water rush beneath me, leaping and swelling as if in a rush to move on. I have shed the cloak of sorrows. I have taken on the mantle of forgiveness, and I continue on my path.

*I am letting go of all that hinders me, and I am
reaching forward into a new world.*