

Based on my own experience and my observations of other people and different faiths, I sincerely believe that we all begin life with a default destiny, a spiritual path that God has chosen for us as only He sees fit. This path will guide us in a general direction, much like a leaf on a stream. Unlike the leaf, however, we possess the ability to think and the gift of free will, which enables us to change our default paths for better or worse during the course of our lifetimes, in turn creating new paths for ourselves.

Sometimes our default paths are especially good, but sometimes they're just mediocre or especially hard; for example, the families into which we're born could be nurturing or neglectful, loving or abusive. The best way to rise above our default paths is to grow spiritually. The more we grow, the greater our rewards, either in this life or in the life beyond.

God loves His children and wants us to grow closer to Him. A very effective way for us to grow is to become more aware of ourselves and the world around us. One person who greatly exemplified this idea was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was keenly aware of the needs of others in society, and he fought for those needs his whole life. Given his faith in God and his message of peace and love, Dr. King was most certainly rewarded with a special place in the afterlife.

There are many problems in the world today. Naturally, the most effective means of eradicating a problem is to eliminate its cause or source. For example, illegal drugs are a dilemma in our society; the best approach for solving this problem is to stop the demand for drugs through education and interdiction. On a personal level, many problems arise because people have dysfunctions in their lives, often resulting in a *void*—something is missing. One important factor commonly missing in our society today is a cohesive family structure. Problem families create voids in both adults' and children's lives, in turn affecting children developmentally. These developmental difficulties often multiply into adulthood.

While family counseling begins to correct the problem, an excellent way to fill such a void is through *spiritual enlightenment*. Spiritual enlightenment helps people to build moral character and become more complete individuals, which leads to better relationships, stronger families, and more fulfilling lives. There is more than one path toward enlightenment, but a very effective way is to become spiritually one with God, ourselves, and the world around us through love and devotion for Him. Oneness, a union of mind, body, and spirit into a greater celestial whole, is a unique and unparalleled experience. To achieve both, thoughtfully practice these five principles:

1. Accept God into your life and Jesus Christ as your savior;
2. Complete your formal education;
3. Learn more about yourself, your health and your mental well-being;
4. Learn more about the needs of others;
5. Learn more about the natural environment in which we live.

This kind of understanding will help us attain a greater degree of wisdom and inner peace, giving us guidance to make responsible choices in life. This is especially true for young children, since they generally embrace faith and spirituality naturally. Once we fill the void in this manner, the problem will most likely be solved.

There exists an absolute truth in life, and only God knows it. The more we grow spiritually, the more we will begin to comprehend that truth. Earth is merely a learning ground for humanity to evolve spiritually before moving on to the afterlife. As with any form of education, learning involves lessons. We can either learn our spiritual lessons proactively or passively—either way, God will see to it that those lessons will be learned. If together we learn proactively, we will rise above our default spiritual paths and have the chance to lead happy, fulfilling lives. If we learn passively, we rely instead on our default paths, and we will then be destined to either repeat the lessons or learn them the hard way.

World Wars I and II are two 20th-century examples of how we learned lessons the hard way. In both wars, world powers didn't heed the threats of tyranny, appeasement, and imperialism far enough in advance, so many nations had to pay a heavy price to defeat these threats after the fact. An example of learning proactively is the 1991 Persian Gulf War, in which the global community mobilized its military forces against a tyrant before it was too late. The result was a war that lasted only a few months with far fewer casualties than other wars.

Three very important spiritual challenges we need to overcome in this century are global warming, overpopulation, and environmental degradation. Unless we reduce the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and mitigate the damage we have done to the environment, the world will become a fairly inhospitable place and millions of people will suffer needlessly as a result. Together, we can prevail over these challenges if we act now rather than later.

We only live on Earth for a short period of time compared to how long our souls live in the afterlife. It simply makes sense to make the most of our time while we are here. It may be easy to grow mentally and physically, but what about spiritually? We need to develop our minds and bodies for life here on Earth, and to develop our souls for our time thereafter. Doing so can only place you closer to God, therefore making it possible to share in His knowledge. After all, is that not the ultimate goal? Empowering yourself is one of the most enriching and liberating experiences you can possibly undertake. Since the path to spiritual enlightenment often has many twists and turns, it is my greatest wish that this book inspires you to accomplish this noble effort in as rewarding and straightforward a manner as possible. You will find the benefits far outweigh the effort involved. Keep in mind the concepts presented herein do not constitute the end of your spiritual journey, but rather just the beginning...