

## God in Three Persons: A Spiritual Odyssey

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“Here is Wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”

- - Revelation 13:18

“Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold.”

- - I Kings 10:14

Apollos looked out of the small window as the airplane started to descend into the Eternal City, the sacred heart of Christendom. Beside him, Sophia reclined on his broad shoulder, resting and recharging her internal battery after having depleted her psychic energy at Delphi. Apollos reminisced about the long session with the oracle of Delphi, a role that Sophia had played admirably. He had already read the words in his little notebook that he had transcribed from the oracular revelation of the Key to the Initiated. He reflected on the science of the accelerated evolution of the human soul from the lower mind (and its attachment to the physical body) to the higher mind (and its ascension to higher consciousness). This science was revealed in explicit detail in the unveiled little book, which Apollos kept close to his heart in an inner pocket of his blazer jacket.

Simon Petroma sat behind Apollos and listened once again to the recording of the apocalyptic secrets through a set of earphones. He was experiencing a battle in his mind, and his heart thumped nervously, as he tried to reconcile what he had been taught and what he was now hearing for the first time in his life. What he had been taught from early childhood, when his imagination had been captivated by the terrifying images from the Apocalypse, the last book of the Bible, was that the book was about the past, present, and future of the Christian church. He had tried to decipher the symbolic language when he became a scholar within the Catholic Church. However, his interpretations always portrayed the persecution of the early church by pagan Roman authorities, and he saw the metaphors as literary devices used to represent pagan Rome, the city on seven hills. Within the apocalyptic story he saw the church being triumphant over paganism. Now, in stark contrast to what he had been taught, he was discovering that the church represented the human being.

Sophia drifted back and forth between a state of semi-wakefulness and a state of semi-somnolence. She was aware that she was flying in an airplane through earth's atmosphere, but her mind kept falling into a dreamy feeling of still being in Greece. It seemed as if her subconscious mind was replaying over and over again the oracular message that she had transmitted from some universal source, a memory of some distant

wisdom which had been buried in the fabric of space and time. The ancient wisdom had risen to her consciousness like a pearl brought to the surface from a cavernous depth. Images of a drama played out on the stage of life kept recycling in her mind, and she sensed her heart expanding and contracting rhythmically with each renewal of the play in which she was a prominent heroine. One particular image seemed to perplex her intuitive mind, and she tried to pierce through the mysterious image.

Apollos felt Sophia's body jump out of her seat and her head move from his shoulder.

"Sophia, did you just dream of something?" asked Apollos, who was familiar with the perturbations of the dream-body when it was reentering the physical body.

Sophia stared for a moment absent-mindedly as she sat in an upright position and gathered her senses. "I must have been dreaming," she said slowly, as if trying to recall the mysterious image that haunted her subconscious mind. She turned around to look at Simon and saw that he still had his earphones on. At that instant the mysterious image became a lucid realization. "Now I remember," she said in a whisper. "I remember seeing Simon hide a tape recorder when I came out of the trance in Delphi."

Apollos looked back at Simon and realized that he was probably listening to the recording of the esoteric revelation.

At that moment a voice came on the speakers within the airplane and told the passengers to prepare for landing at the airport. Simon opened his eyes and saw Apollos looking intently at him. The voice reminded the passengers to turn off all electronic devices. A light flashed simultaneously overhead to fasten the seatbelts.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" asked Simon as he turned off the small handheld recorder and put away his earphones.

"You recorded what Sophia said at Delphi, didn't you!?" stated Apollos in an accusatory tone.

"And what if I did!?" answered Simon with a mocking tone.

"You beast!" exclaimed Apollos through gritted teeth. He turned around and brought his seat to an upright position. He looked out of the small oval window and saw the city of Rome fade into the distance as the airplane descended westward toward the airport near the Tyrrhenian Sea. He couldn't make out the seven famous hills that he had read about, but his associative mind parroted a mnemonic device that he had learned in school: "Can Queen Victoria Eat Cold Apple Pie?" The first letters, he recalled, stood for the seven hills: Capitoline, Quirinal, Viminal, Esquiline, Caelian, Aventine, and Palatine. He could, however, see the Tiber River snake its way through the modern city.

Sophia reached out and held Apollos' hand as the plane rapidly lost altitude. They both seemed to hold their breath as the wheels of the plane touched down on the runway of the Leonardo da Vinci International Airport, Rome's main airport. They breathed a sigh of relief as the plane taxied toward the terminal, and Sophia smiled as if to reassure Apollos that everything would turn out all right as long as they were together.

A personal driver was waiting for Simon and his guests, as he called them. Apollos noticed the Alfa Romeo insignia as he walked up to the red car and got into the back seat with Sophia; two Milanese symbols decorated a heraldic inner circle: a red cross on a white field, and a snake-cum-dragon on a blue field. The passengers sat quietly as the driver drove down the Autostrada Roma Aeroporta di Fiumicino, the main highway connecting the airport with Rome. When the driver turned onto the Grande

Raccordo Anulare, the ring road motorway that encircled the city, Simon started talking to the driver in Italian. Apollos and Sophia had no clue that Simon and the driver were working together to sabotage the publication of Apollos' manuscript.

The driver took exit number one, Aurelia, and drove down Via Aurelia to Citta Del Vaticano (Vatican City). Within minutes the car stopped at the Starhotel Michelangelo, which was a short walk from St. Peter's Square.

"This is where we're going to stay," said Simon, breaking his self-imposed silence. He was still bitter about the word Apollos used when he found out that Simon had recorded the revelatory message at Delphi.

"Arrivederci," said the driver as he unloaded the suitcases and turned to leave.

"A piu tardi, Romano," responded Simon, calling his friend by his first name for the first time, as he told him he'd see him later.

"So what are you planning to do with the recording?" asked Apollos as soon as Romano drove away.

"Let's not make a public spectacle of this," answered Simon as he picked up his suitcase and headed for the hotel lobby. "Let's talk about it as soon as we get to your room."

As before, Simon made sure his room was adjacent to the room Apollos and Sophia shared. He wanted to keep a close eye on them.

"Look, Apollos!" exclaimed Sophia as she entered the hotel room. "We have a view of St. Peter's Dome!"

"I thought you'd be excited to have a room with a view of the greatest monument of the Catholic Church," remarked Simon as he stood at the threshold of their room. "I'll be back in a minute, as soon as I settle into my room."

"I still would like to know what he's up to," said Apollos as he stood beside Sophia and looked at the egg-shaped dome crowned with what appeared to be a four-directional or a fleur-de-lis cross on top of a gilded bronze ball.

"Don't push him too hard," cautioned Sophia. "Even if he has a recording of the oracle's revelation, he probably has no idea what the esoteric message is all about, or how to apply the knowledge in his life. Remember that the final initiation into the mysteries of the body and soul take place only after years of practice and meditation."

"You're right," admitted Apollos as he put his arm around Sophia's slender shoulder. "To be a true scientist of the soul, you must dedicate a life-time or more of serious endeavor. It's not any easy path to tread."

"So you want to know what I'm going to do with the secret wisdom I now have in my possession?" rhetorically questioned Simon as he burst into the room. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Now that I have the magical keys of the kingdom of the soul, I can become a magician, like your Apollonius. I can become the next pontifex maximus, the great bridge between heaven and earth. I can become a god." Simon stepped up to the window and pointed in the direction of St. Peter's basilica. "See the globus cruciger on top of the dome? That cross on an orb represents the dominion of the Roman Catholic Church over the world. Well, with what I now have in my possession, I can make or break that dominion."

"I think you're going a little too far with this," interjected Apollos, stepping toward Simon. "You made me believe that you wanted to suppress the dissertation that I was working on. Now it appears that you want to use it for nefarious purposes. My

purpose in bringing the story of Apollonius to the world was for scholarly reasons, to enlighten the world with the wisdom he tried to spread everywhere that he traveled, and every temple and sacred site that he visited. It was not for power or to bring down a religion.”

“Gentlemen, please listen to me,” said Sophia, stepping between them. She saw that the heated exchange was starting to escalate into a war of words. “I think I distinctly recall a story about Simon the magician, who tried to become a great one, and he also tried to buy the power to perform miracles. If I recall the story correctly, he was denounced by the same Peter who tradition says is buried in the basilica that we see in front of us.”

“I am well aware of that story,” acknowledged Simon. “As a matter of fact, I carry the same name, and I pride myself on being a follower of his teachings. His concept of mind as the father and thought as the mother uniting to produce the world is the best example of spirit above and matter below working together to bring existence into being. He was a true magician who understood how the Eternal One, through the mind and the Logos or intelligence, brings heaven on earth.”

“Then you must also be aware of the apocryphal story that Clement of Alexandria weaves to show that Peter, the champion of the Jews, was more powerful than Simon, the champion of the gentiles,” continued Sophia.

“That was just a legend that the Catholic Church created to discredit any heresy,” countered Simon. “You don’t really expect me to believe that they were flying through the air and all that nonsense.”

Apollos listened and watched as he saw the many sides of Simon come to the surface. Apollos suddenly recalled the words of Maestro Salvatore D’Aura about the paths of the biblical Paul and Apollonius of Tyana crossing in Athens, and he thought it referred to the story of Paul on Mars Hill and the story of Apollonius in the temples of Athens. Now it dawned on him that there was another story that entered into the mixture – the story of Simon the Magician. Apollonius was denounced as a magician, and so was the biblical Paul. Simon was a gentile and a heretic, and the early Church Fathers were eager to discredit the wise man Apollonius, so they inserted the story of Simon into the biblical account. They didn’t want to use the name of Apollonius, so they just called him Simon the Magician. After all, even the Jews thought that the biblical Paul (or Apollonius) was a heretic. Apollos still felt confused about all the stories that connected the biblical Paul with the philosopher Apollonius. Nevertheless, he persevered in his determination to make all the connections and demonstrate how the story of Apollonius was transformed into the story of the biblical Paul. After all, he was now in Rome, where the strongest evidence for their identical identity existed.

That night Apollos dreamed that he was entangled with Simon in an ongoing battle with many twists and turns: first, he saw a statue standing on an island in the Tiber River in honor of the new god, Simon, and the statue seemed to come to life, performing marvelous wonders such as making a dog talk, a fake fish swim in a pond, and a seven-month child talk like a man; at times Simon seemed to be a real magician performing illusions with the help of a daemon or spirit guide, and at times Simon seemed to be transformed into an universal genius whose stature equated with Ju-Peter. The protean nature of the two beings was such that it was difficult to discern who was who, for in the presence of a Roman emperor both tried to make a dead man come to life, a contest in

which the magician Simon first showed his command of the magic arts by putting the man to death and then the god-like Ju-Peter restoring him to life. Then in another contest of who was more powerful, Simon flew through the air all over Rome, and then the more powerful Ju-Peter caused Simon to fall from the air and break his legs. At that moment Apollos, who felt like he himself was floating in the air and then plummeted to earth, awoke. The last image that he saw as he fell out of the astral sky was Simon dying in a grove of Diana, the moon-goddess, in Aricia, which was outside Rome, and in the grove he saw two large tablets of stone which were joined together in a large Book of Stone called the Petroma. And Simon the Magician was holding that Book of Stone in his hands.

"Sophia," said Apollos as he gently shook her shoulder. "I had the most unusual dream. I've got to tell you about it."

"It's not even daybreak," said Sophia, rubbing her eyes as she looked at the drawn white curtains covering the window.

"It was a most curious dream," began Apollos. "A contest between Simon the Magician and a super-hero named Ju-Peter." Apollos embellished the story of his dream somewhat as he retold it. When he came to the part about the Book of Stone called the Petroma, Sophia sat up in the bed and gasped, "You saw the Book of Stone?"

"Yes," replied Apollos. "What does it mean?"

"It means that you saw the book that was read by the hierophant to the candidate for initiation into the ancient Eleusinian mysteries. The two large tablets that were joined together represented the dual aspect of truth or ultimate reality as One."

"Why was it called Petroma?" asked Apollos, who suddenly realized that the name was the same as the mysterious man who was presently holding them as hostages in a megalomaniac plot.

"Peter, the man who was the interpreter (or inter-peter) of the mysteries, or the hierophant as we called him in Greece, was a title of the chief god or Ju-Peter," explained Sophia, her wide awake eyes shining like a beacon in the night. "He was the one who brought to light the sacred mystery of Zeus, thus Zeus-Peter."

"And we know that, according to Apollonius, there is not a structure nor a statue in all Rome but that had a Greek origin," remarked Apollos, who deductively reasoned that Jupiter, the Pater or father of the gods, was derived from the Greek Zeus.

"Precisely," stated Sophia. "Which brings us to the legend of Peter in Rome."

They were interrupted by a loud knocking on their door. "Are you both awake?" they heard the voice of Simon say.

"Wait a minute!" yelled back Apollos. He got out of bed and walked to the door wearing only his boxer shorts. "What do you want?" asked Apollos as he held the door slightly ajar.

"I heard voices coming from your room, and I figured you both were awake," explained Simon, who was standing in the hallway in his pajamas.

"I was telling Sophia about a dream I had," said Apollos, yawning for the first time since he had awakened.

"You'll have to tell me about it sometime," said Simon with a subdued interest. "Listen, I forgot to tell the two of you that today is the Feast day of Saints Peter and Paul. "There's a special jubilee celebration at Piazza San Pietro." Simon used the Italian name for St. Peter's Square or plaza.

"Oh, I didn't know that," commented Apollos indifferently.

"How would the two of you like to join me for breakfast in the hotel's fine restaurant, and then I can show you around my beloved city?" suggested Simon, whose friendly tone seemed to betray an ulterior motive.

Apollos looked back at Sophia, who was nodding her head in approval to the suggestion. "OK, un'ora," said Apollos, raising one finger skywards to indicate in one hour. "A piu tardi," he added. He had remembered the Italian phrase Simon had used the previous day. He was starting to catch on to the adage: When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

"What day is today?" was the first question Sophia asked when they met Simon for breakfast.

"Thursday, or as we Italians say it, Giovedi," answered Simon, getting out of his chair slightly out of respect for the lady who was going to sit across from him.

"Jumping Jupiter," said Apollos, winking at Sophia.

"By Jove, you've got it," winked back Sophia in response.

"What's the winking all about?" asked Simon, who noticed the subtle gestures.

"Oh, it's something that we were talking about this morning, how the Greek gods became Roman gods, and how Zeus became Jupiter, and so forth and so on," responded Sophia in a playful tone.

"And how curiously that the name Peter comes from the Roman god Ju-Peter or the Greek combination Zeus-Peter," added Apollos, stressing the parts of the dual name.

"So what was that dream about, that caused you to raise such a ruckus this morning?" asked Simon, changing the subject. He started to eat the food on his plate.

"Oh, it was only a jumbled up replay of the apocryphal stories of Simon and Peter that we were talking about yesterday," remarked Apollos. "The really interesting part was the ending, where I saw a book of stone called the Petroma."

Simon stopped eating as he looked up and saw the look of realization in the eyes of Apollos. "So now you know," said Simon sheepishly.

"Yes, we do," chimed in Sophia. "We now understand why you carry that name, and what drives you to be the grand interpreter of the mysteries."

"Say no more," pleaded Simon. "I have been found out. Let's just finish our breakfast and be on our way. I'd rather help you enjoy the city than spoil your day with an in-depth look into my true nature."

After breakfast, Simon's personal driver, Romano, picked them up and drove them across the Fiume Tevere (Tiber River) to the ruins of the ancient Roman Forum. They walked through the ancient ruins and reflected on the glory that was once Rome. As they walked down the Via Sacra (Sacred Way), Apollos began to expound on Apollonius in Rome:

"Apollonius must have walked through here in a religious procession along the route of the Sacred Way when he first came to Rome. In the biography by Philostratus, he mentions that Apollonius was not afraid to enter Rome, even though many philosophers were persecuted for speaking out about the tyrannical rule of Nero. He says that Apollonius first stopped outside Rome at a grove of Diana in Aricia, which was located beside the circular volcanic crater of Lake Nemi. That's where a fleeing philosopher warned him not to proceed northward to Rome. However, when he came to Rome, he was careful to only share his wisdom, and not his opinions about the buffoon

Nero. He visited all the temples and was given written permission by the high-priest Telesinus to recommend reforms. The major reform Apollonius attempted to inculcate was the abolition of animal sacrifices. So in the Temples of Jupiter, and Saturn, and Castor and Pollux, and in other temples, Apollonius tried to teach that it was better to bring an offering of fruit, or to burn incense as an offering to the gods, instead of trying to guess the will of the gods through bloody sacrifices."

"Would you like to visit the Colosseum, while we're here in this vicinity?" interrupted Simon as they started to head in the direction of Rome's greatest amphitheater.

"I'd rather not," bluntly stated Apollos. "Apollonius declined to go there because of the uncivilized activities that took place there."

"How about the Arch of Titus, which is straight ahead?" inquired Simon, who was trying to be a good host and a tour guide.

"I'd like to see it," stated Sophia, who walked hand in hand with Apollos.

They walked under the enormous memorial commissioned by Emperor Domitian in 81 CE after the death of his brother Titus, the general who conquered Jerusalem in 70 CE.

Simon translated the inscription in the frieze on top of the arch: "The Roman Senate and People to Deified Titus, Vespasian Augustus, son of Deified Vespasian."

Apollos looked up at the inside of the arch and commented on the panel with a relief of the triumphal procession with the spoils taken from the temple in Jerusalem: "That menorah, or seven-branched candelabrum, is the most precious sacred object that the Romans stole from the Jewish people. How humiliating for the people to watch a foreign conqueror loot their sacred temple."

Sophia was impressed by the symbolic representation on the second panel with a relief of Titus' victory: "There is the deified emperor Titus riding in a chariot drawn by four horses and accompanied by the goddess of Victory and the goddess of deified Rome. How those emperors loved to glorify each others military exploits!"

"I'm not too proud to say that Apollonius was involved in advising Vespasian to seek the crown at the same time that the campaign against Jerusalem was set into motion," remarked Apollos. "I guess Apollonius felt that Vespasian would make a better ruler than the tyrant Nero."

"I suggest we proceed to our next destination," advised Simon as they exited the Roman Forum through the Arch of Titus. "I'd like to show you the official cathedral of Rome, San Giovanni in Laterno, founded by Emperor Constantine in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century."

The first thing that Apollos noticed as they drove up to the plaza, where the basilica stood, was a red granite obelisk.

"That's the largest standing obelisk in the world," said Simon when he saw Apollos gaze in wonderment at the quadrangular pillar. "It's 105 feet tall, and it was moved from the Karnak temple in Luxor, Egypt under the orders of Emperor Constantine, who hoped to raise it in his new capital at Constantinople. But he died before it left Egypt, and his son, the emperor Constantine II, decided to bring it to Rome instead."

"I wonder if Apollonius saw this obelisk when he traveled up the Nile River on his pilgrimage through Egypt?" said Apollos musingly.

When Simon led his little tour group up to the impressive entrance of St. John Lateran, which was named after both John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, he read the inscription on the façade while Apollos and Sophia looked up admiringly at the seven meter high statues of Christ holding a large Latin cross, the two biblical figures that the church was named after, and twelve saints of the Eastern and Western churches:

“SACROSANCTA LATERANENSIS ECCLESIA OMNIUM URBIS ET ORBIS ECCLESIARUM MATER ET CAPUT, which means The Most Holy Lateran Church, Mother and Mistress of all churches of the city and the world.”

“That’s quite a distinction, to be named the Mother of all churches,” said Sophia.

“I would say that’s quite an egocentric claim,” remarked Apollos.

“Wait until you go inside and see the special high altar,” said Simon, hoping to build up some excitement for his tourists.

When they arrived at the tall, ornate papal altar, they stood looking upward at its heaven-oriented design for several minutes before Simon broke the silence:

“There’s a relic chamber at the top of this high altar in which the heads, or part of the heads, according to tradition of course, of the Saints Peter and Paul are preserved.”

“The only part of Apollonius’ head that I can imagine preserved here would be the hair of his head and the beard from his face that was shorn and shaved when he was in Rome the second time, which was during Emperor Diocletian’s reign when he was imprisoned and brought to trial for treasonous implications.”

“Well, according to apocryphal stories and church historians, Paul was beheaded during his second imprisonment during the reign of Emperor Nero in the year 67AD,” stated Simon.

“I remember reading about Apollonius in prison,” interjected Sophia, “and I especially loved the part where he consoled the other prisoners and then preached a sermon to them, telling them that we are all in a prison which is known as life. He explained to them that the soul is bound and fettered in a perishable body and has to suffer many things.”

“That is quite a philosophy of life,” admitted Simon. “But I don’t think we have much time left if we’re to make the appearance of Pope John Paul in St. Peter’s Square at noon. I think we’d better hurry along.”

“Now that’s a sweet surprise that I hadn’t anticipated,” expressed Sophia. “My heart is starting to open up to your ingratiating deeds.”

“I’m pleased to hear that,” smiled Simon, whose inner nature also seemed to blossom at the thought of the person whom he called Holy Father.

When they arrived at St. Peter’s Square, the plaza was already packed with pilgrims from all over the world. They made their way past the centrally located obelisk, and maneuvered past the standing crowd, to get as close as they could to the studio window overlooking the square. They could see a large purple banner unfurled from the open window; the banner was adorned with the pope’s personal coat of arms, whose central motif was a white cross of purity on a heavenly blue background with a large virginal white M in the lower right-hand corner; the M stood for his unflinching devotion to the Virgin Mary.

The crowd responded with a thunderous applause when Pope John Paul II made his appearance at the window. He held up his right hand to silence the crowd, and then he led the pilgrims in the prayer known as the Angelus:

“Angelus Domini nuntial vit Mariae (The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary)  
Et concepit de Spiritu Sancto (And she conceived of the Holy Ghost)  
Ave Maria. (Hail Mary)  
Ecce aucilla Domini (Behold the handmaid of the Lord)  
Fiat mihi secundum verbum taum (Be it done unto me according to thy word)  
Ave Maria. (Hail Mary)  
Et Verbum caro factum est (And the Word was made flesh)  
Et habitavit in nobis (And dwelt among us)  
Ave Maria. (Hail Mary)”

Apollos looked up at the frail, suffering pope as his words droned through the loud speakers. He was amazed to be standing in the presence of a man whose influence in the world was truly great. He remembered watching the man traverse the globe on television, and he watched as the gifted leader of the Catholic world brought communism to its knees. Here was a man who carried the two names that were paramount in Apollos' own life: John, the revelator of the Apocalypse, and Paul, the world traveler who was also known as Apollonius. Curiously, the pope signed his name in the Greek style as Ioannes Paulus, as if to connect himself to the mysteries of Greece.

At the end of the Angelus prayer, the pope spoke about the Feast day of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul that the Catholic people were celebrating, calling Peter and Paul “the pillars of the universal Church.” Apollos had an image of two obelisks flash in his mind. One obelisk seemed to represent Egypt and the other Greece, two rays of the solar deity that shone like lighthouses of Rome’s past. The pope continued to speak of the destiny of the two apostles, how “a mysterious design of Providence brought them both to Rome,” and how their fate was sealed in blood: Peter by being crucified upside down at his request, and Paul by being beheaded. “One was buried at the foot of the Vatican Hill, the other on the Via Ostiense.”

Apollos caught the words Via Ostiense and held them in his mind. He repeated the words to remember them. He felt a strong need to visit the purported site of St. Paul’s burial.

Sophia, meanwhile, was savoring the devotion that the people showed to their beloved leader. She was especially thrilled when she heard him speak of his devotion to the Queen of Heaven: “Lastly, let us turn our hearts to Mary Most Holy, whom we invoke today as the Queen of Apostles and the Salus Populi Romani – the salvation of the Roman people.”

In her heart, Sophia couldn’t help but think about the life of the pope and his long pilgrimage through the many countries of the world, trying to unite all the religions under the umbrella of the universal (Catholic) church. ‘All roads lead to Rome,’ thought Sophia, ‘but the pope is not able to publicly state that all religions lead to God.’

Simon knew in his heart that he had made the right decision to bring his captive guests to hear the pope speak. And he still had one more surprise for them: the Holy Door. Simon tapped Apollos on the shoulder and motioned for him to follow. Apollos took Sophia by the hand as they threaded their way out of the crowd. When they had made their way clear of the dense throng, Simon explained what he had in store for them:

“I wanted to show you the Holy Door before all the pilgrims start to make their way to it,” explained Simon. “Since this is the year of the Great Jubilee, the Holy Father

has opened the Holy Door so pilgrims can go through the door of salvation and receive an indulgence by means of penance, forgiveness, and mercy.”

When they approached the bronze doors which had been opened by the pope for the Great Jubilee, Apollos and Sophia stopped and gave each other a look of familiarity.

“They look just like the Gates of Paradise by Ghiberti that we saw at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco,” they seemed to tell each other simultaneously.

“Except that the sixteen scenes on these doors depict the story of man’s original fall and the subsequent story of redemption as portrayed in the New Testament, whereas the Ghiberti doors depicted ten scenes from the Old Testament in a Renaissance manner,” observed Sophia.

“As you enter the Door of Great Pardon,” said Simon as he started to lead them through the gates of the sacred entrance under the watchful eyes of St. Peter, who held the keys of the kingdom in his right hand and an open book of life in his left hand, “you must be penitent and approach with a contrite heart, renouncing all attachment to sin. You can also pray a Hail Mary or Our Father as you enter.”

Apollos had his eyes riveted on the scenes portraying man’s path of redemption through the grace of a merciful Father and the sacred heart of a caring savior and shepherd. The story of the door was the story of Christ, through whom the prodigal son returned to find forgiveness. Apollos felt as if he was part of a huge procession entering into the kingdom of the blessed as he walked through the doors.

Sophia was wondering what Martin Luther would think about indulgences being granted for walking through the Holy Door.

Simon led them through the basilica, pointing out the highlights of the interior. He showed them his favorite statue, the one of St. Peter sitting on what appeared to be a throne.

“The hierophant, holding the keys to the mysteries,” whispered Sophia to Apollos as they meditated on the Greek method of sculpting universal truths into human statuesque forms.

“The Rock, from whom flows the wisdom of the ages,” added Apollos, using the Christian metaphor for the interpreter of the universal religion, commonly referred to as Roman Catholicism.

“It’s amazing how you can see all the ancient gods of Egypt, Greece, and Rome assembled during various periods of time into this monumental edifice constructed to the glory of the Church,” reflected Sophia as she looked around at all the various statues.

“And now these ancient gods are called saints by the Church,” remarked Simon, who led them to the ornate baroque-style high altar, the traditional site of St. Peter’s burial.

“Can we see the rest of this basilica and Vatican City some other day?” asked Apollos as he reluctantly followed Simon around each symbolic representation of the Catholic faith. “I’d really like to see the place where they say St. Paul was buried.”

“Sure, we can come back some other day,” replied Simon. “After all, we’ll probably be spending some time in Rome before we move on to our next destination.” Apollos ignored the sinister-sounding comment; he tried not to think of the fact that, even though they had a relative amount of freedom, they were still prisoners of Simon’s grand scheme. For Apollos, the battle with Simon would not be over until he had retrieved his stolen manuscript.

"I'd really love to come back just to spend a whole day at the Sistine Chapel," concurred Sophia. "I've always wanted to see Michelangelo's masterpieces, especially his portrayal of the sibyls or oracles." She had seen pictures of the Delphic oracle and other sibyls that Michelangelo had interspersed among his paintings of the Old Testament prophets, but she wanted to look up at the ceiling and see the actual representations of antiquity.

When they arrived at the San Paolo fuori la Mura (St. Paul's outside the Walls) basilica on Via Ostiense (Way to Ostia), Apollos felt that he was coming to a sacred site. The anticipation in his mind made his heart palpitate with a religious fervor. Here was a place preserved by tradition for posterity, a place where the memory of Paul or Apollonius was preserved throughout the centuries. Simon led the way to the front entrance. He wanted to give his tourists or "pilgrims of Rome," as he had started to call them, a historical perspective of the site which attracted many visitors:

"Catholic and Christian tradition hold that St. Paul suffered martyrdom by beheading in the first century, most probably during his second imprisonment in the final years of the reign of Nero in 67 AD. According to the Church Fathers, his body was buried in a cemetery along the Way to Ostia, right here on these grounds. A shrine was erected over the grave, and later, in the year 324, the Emperor Constantine consecrated a church over the burial site and placed the Apostle's body in a bronze sarcophagus covered with a marble slab." Simon paused in his extemporaneous speech, while he searched his encyclopedic mind for some more interesting facts.

"According to my calculations," interrupted Apollos, who was eager to present another view, "the traditional story of St. Paul has him imprisoned on two separate occasions, once in 62 AD on his first trip to Rome, and then in 67 AD on his second visit. According to certain sources, including a biblical allusion, Paul visited Spain and North Africa in between his two visits. Well, that happens to be exactly, without a shadow of a doubt, what Apollonius did after he left the environs of Rome when Nero was expelling the Stoic and other philosophers from Rome. The biblical record that suggests that Paul was only under house arrest while in Rome is paralleled by Apollonius being under the watchful eyes of the spies of Nero while he lived in the temples of Rome. The second imprisonment of Paul, which is only recorded by dubious second and third century sources, is unsubstantiated by historical records, which suggests that the story was a gloss or cover-up of the real story of the imprisonment of Apollonius of Tyana during the reign of the Emperor Domitian in the year 91 AD. And what better way to end the influence of Apollonius than by a symbolic beheading of the pagan philosopher (as they called him), who was denounced by the later Roman Catholic Church."

"Gentlemen," said Sophia, demanding her share of attention, "you have both given fine discourses on the two traditions that form the basis of our present attention. But I think you're both missing the point here." Sophia had already glimpsed the statue of the Apostle at the end of the courtyard through which they were walking. The statue stood on a pedestal in front of the impressive colorful golden mosaics of the façade of the patriarchal basilica. "By whatever name you call him, or whatever tradition you ascribe to the man, here was a wise man who walked the earth and conquered the hearts of a multitude of followers from all walks of life."

Apollos glimpsed the same aspect of truth that Sophia had propounded as he approached the dramatic statue of a god-sized figure holding a sword in the right hand

with the hilt placed over the heart and the blade elevated over the left shoulder. The hooded giant of a man stood in his long folded robe and sandals in a contemplative pose, with eyes lowered earthward in an aspect of looking at human nature passing by. In his left hand he carried a closed book along the side of his body, with the spine of the book resting in his strong fingers.

“PRAEDICATOR VERITATIS DOCTORI GENTIUM,” read Simon in Latin.

“To the preacher of truth, the teacher of nations,” translated Sophia, looking at the inscription describing the wise man. “See, that’s what I mean by giving credit and honor to Truth in the Greek fashion, by leaving out the name and anthropomorphizing an abstract concept.”

“I know what you’re trying to say,” said Apollos, who looked up at the object of adoration. “But this statue is very similar to the statue that I saw in the United States, and Maestro Salvatore D’Aura said that it was definitely Apollonius. He equated the St. Paul of the Bible with the philosopher and wise man of the first century, Apollonius of Tyana. Except that statue was not hooded and the sword of wisdom was turned downward, instead of upward.

“Let me show you the high altar, which stands over the tomb of St. Paul,” announced Simon as he tried to lure Apollos and Sophia away from the statue.

Apollos looked up at the tympanum of the façade of the basilica, with the symbols of the Christian faith portrayed in brilliant mosaics made from gold glass: Christ seated on a central throne and the apostles Peter and Paul on either side.

Sophia looked ahead at the bronze doors depicting scenes from the lives of the two apostles.

Simon was focused on the burial site under the high altar.

“He is not here,” stated Apollos as he looked inside the high altar, which had a red light behind a grille burning perpetually to designate the resting place of Paul. Apollos almost wanted to add, ‘he is risen,’ but he felt it would be inappropriate in a religious setting. “Apollonius was believed to have died at the age of 100 possibly in Ephesus, or possibly in India. But not here.”

Sophia closed her eyes and tried to meditate on the spiritual presence of the master who taught wisdom to the Mediterranean world during the first century. She saw an image of Apollonius in her mind – the same image with the unsheathed sword held over the heart, as if to signify that the battle of life streamed through the heart center, where good and evil contended for the mind of man – and the image verified, in a voice sounding through her inner ear, what Apollos had said: “I am not here. I am in India.”

“He is in India,” said Sophia when she came out of her semi-trance.

“You mean his dead body?” asked Simon, who took a sudden interest in what Sophia had said.

“No, not his dead body,” answered Sophia. “The living Apollonius. The master of the wisdom of the gods is in India.”

“That’s exactly what Maestro D’Aura told me,” added Apollos. “He told me he’s living in an etheric body in the Himalayas.”

Simon’s mind was already working on another scheme: how to get to Apollonius. “Oh, by the way,” remembered Simon. “There’s a chapel of relics where there’s a set of chains said to be the prison chains used on St. Paul. Do you want to see them?”

“We might as well,” replied Apollos. “Even though it’s really immaterial. Apollonius would not be confined to any chains of the body nor of any material substance. He demonstrated that no chains could hold him when he showed his closest disciple and biographer, Damis, the unclasped chains in the prison that the Emperor Domitian placed him. He could take them off or put them on at will.”

“These prison chains could have been worn by anybody, or by everybody in that prison,” stated Sophia as she looked at the alleged relics in the chapel.

“We have all been bound by the chains of matter at one time or another,” philosophized Apollos, who was not too impressed by the darkened iron chains.

“I suggest we unchain ourselves from this place and pursue other interesting places,” suggested Simon. In his mind he was thinking of other places besides Rome. He still wasn’t sure what to do with Apollos and Sophia; he needed them to get to Apollonius, so he couldn’t get rid of them. He had to keep convincing them that he would give the manuscript back and let them go if they provided him with the information that he needed. They had already complied by obtaining the little book at the Delphic oracle. Now he needed the absolute truth – that Apollonius was still living somewhere on the face of the earth. Simon’s imagination soared with the possibilities of what he could do with such a person.

“What do you suggest?” asked Apollos, who was anxious to leave the prison chains behind. He started to exit the chapel of relics.

“I know what,” said Sophia excitedly. “We can visit the picturesque piazzas of the city. Maybe one with an Egyptian obelisk.”

“I know just the one to show you,” responded Simon enthusiastically. “The Flaminian Obelisk from Heliopolis, city of the sun. It stands in the Piazza del Popolo.”

“The plaza of the people,” said Apollos, who recognized the word from the Latin word populous.

The piazza was located in the northern section of the city, and three major avenues converged at the plaza in the shape of a trident.

Apollos’ eyes were immediately drawn to the red granite obelisk that emerged from the center of the two hemicycles forming the plaza. The red obelisk rose in the blue sky as if to connect with the solar orb in the heavens.

“There are thirteen obelisks in Rome,” stated Simon in his tour-guide voice. “One stands on the west side of the Tiber River, at St. Peter’s Square; the other twelve all stand on the east side of the Tiber, in front of various basilicas or in the center of piazzas as focal points in the city.”

“The symbolism of that arrangement seems to indicate the twelve signs of the zodiac revolving around a central sun,” noted Sophia.

“Or Christ and the twelve apostles,” added Simon. “Whichever way you look at it, their present location was determined by Pope Sixtus V in the latter part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He raised a fervent enthusiasm for resurrecting the Egyptian obelisks from their ruinous condition.”

Apollos turned his attention from what Simon was saying back to the obelisk which stood on a tall pedestal. He wanted to reach out and touch the obelisk and feel its power. As he lifted his gaze upwards at the pyramidion crowning the obelisk, he postulated, “Rome has been turned into a grand temple of Ra, the sun god, with thirteen obelisks illuminating the city with the rays of the ancient Egyptian mysteries.”

Sophia sensed Apollos' desire for contact with the energy of the obelisk, and she lifted her hands in the Egyptian way of paying homage to Ra, and she intoned, "O Light Bringer, Father of All, may your rays continue to give life to all your children. May our souls unite with your light, and may your light radiate in our hearts and minds, revealing your true Self."

Apollos raised his hands with palms extended toward the power source, imitating Sophia's priestess-of-Isis pose, and he felt an energy flowing from the pyramidal apex of the towering obelisk into the palms of his hands, transmitting vibrations from an ancient land. As he closed his physical eyes, an image of an Egyptian deity formed in the center of his mind's eye. The deity wore a crown around his forehead with an ureaus or serpent of wisdom protruding from a position directly in the center of the forehead. In his hands he held a caduceus formed of a gold serpent and a silver serpent, which shone like the sun and the moon. The two serpents seemed to transform into two keys which the deity held in one hand. In the other hand he held a green tablet which appeared to be similar to the Book of Petroma, the book of stone used in the ceremony of initiation. All at once Apollos recognized the grandiose figure as the grand interpreter of the mysteries – the immortal Hermes, the personification of universal wisdom. The eyes of Hermes looked into the depth of Apollos' soul and transmitted a message: "I will meet you in Alexandria."

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"Joshua, the sun has come up," said Yusuf as he glanced at the streaming light coming through the eastern window of their hostel room.

There was no response from the direction of Joshua's bed. Joshua was not in his bed. When Yusuf looked out the window, he saw his newfound friend standing with arms outstretched towards the rising sun. Yusuf hurriedly put on his pants and went outside to join Joshua in a salutation to the dawning of a new day.

"What are you doing up so early?" asked Yusuf as he stood beside Joshua and watched him face the sun with closed eyes.

Joshua opened his eyes and turned his head to his right to look at his companion. "I had a dream-vision this morning at the break of dawn," explained Joshua. "I was sitting at the entrance to the Sphinx, and my angel Binah was standing in front of me telling me the story of my people. As I listened to her melodic voice, I was able to visualize the pictorial scenes of a land with a river flowing through it. I saw myself living in that land for a long time, and then a deliverer appeared to take my people out of that land of bondage to a better land. Binah helped me understand that I would be a servant of the deliverer and eventually follow in his footsteps. I don't know how she did it, but she was able to guide me through the wilderness of many trials and break down numerous limitations on the journey to the Promised Land. And lo and behold, just as I was about to step into a flowing river to cross into the new land, I saw the face of the Sphinx transfigured onto Binah's face, and I thought for a split second that I was witnessing the story through the eyes of the immortal Sphinx. That's when I got out of bed and came outside to watch the sun rise, just as the Sphinx does every morning."

"That's incredible," remarked Yusuf. "That sounds like the Exodus story, the deliverance from bondage."

"That's exactly what I thought as I meditated on the significance of the vision as I stood here seeking enlightenment from the source of all light," said Joshua, turning his face back to the rays of the sun.

"Don't tell me you're thinking that you've envisaged another *déjà vu* or past life experience?" queried Yusuf with a skeptical look on his face.

"Remember when we were discussing the similarities in the stories of the biblical Joseph and Joshua, especially the mystical age at which both were said to have died?" asked Joshua.

"Yes, I remember the one hundred and ten years," answered Yusuf, wondering what his friend was trying to prove.

"The two figures stand as two pillars of the edifice upon which the story of man's journey through life is built," propounded Joshua. "Joseph's journey down into the land of Egypt represents the descent of the soul into the life of the body, the physical and material existence; Joshua's journey out of the land of Egypt and back to the promised land represents the ascent of the soul back to its place of origin. That's what I was meditating about when you joined me out here in the morning sun."

"There might be some substance to your reasoning," remarked Yusuf, applying his knowledge to the thought process. "Joshua was born to the tribe of Ephraim, who was one of the two sons that Joseph had. When Joshua finally conquered the land of Canaan, as the holy land was called in those ancient days, he gathered the twelve tribes at Shechem for his final speech and covenant with the children of Israel. He spoke of the antediluvian fathers who lived on the other side of the flood in old time, and he set up a great stone under a tree as a witness to the covenant that the people had made with their God. Then he died at the age of a hundred and ten years old. And the book of Joshua ends with the bones of Joseph, which were carried out of Egypt, finally being buried in Shechem."

"So they were united in the land from which the journey began," said Joshua. "In short, they came full circle."

"That's an apt metaphor," confirmed Yusuf, who glanced at the round ball of light which steadily ascended into the heavens.

"It also dawned on me that there was a strong magnetic attraction in me toward the great stone that stands beside the Great Pyramid," announced Joshua, who was drawn back to the vision of the Sphinx.

"Are you thinking of going to the pyramids of Giza?" asked Yusuf, who was picking up on his friend's vibrations.

"I'd love to, if it won't inconvenience you," remarked Joshua. "We don't have to go back to Israel today, do we?"

"Not really," replied Yusuf with a new sense of adventure in his mind. "I can arrange to extend our stay at the hostel for another day."

"Can you make it for several days?" asked Joshua. "I have a feeling that I might need to spend several days at the pyramid to accomplish what I think my guiding light is leading me to."

Yusuf looked into Joshua's eyes and noticed a spark of something extraordinary, twinkling like a brilliant star, within the depth of Joshua's soul. "There is a spirit of

something good happening within you," noted Yusuf, whose perceptive look smiled into Joshua's eyes, "and I'm willing to stand by your side as you embark on this new pilgrimage of your inner being."

"You are a true-blue friend," said Joshua, who grasped Yusuf's left arm in a grip of friendship.

By mid morning the two sojourners were stepping out of the Egyptian taxi and buying tickets for entry into the Giza Pyramid Complex. Joshua headed straight for the Great Sphinx, whose half-human, half-animal limestone body spoke of ancient ages. He wanted to come close to the leonine form and sit between its paws, just as he visualized in his dawn vision, but a prohibitive enclosure was set up by the authorities to preserve the colossal royal sculpture from the eroding effects of explorers and tourists. So Joshua just stood outside the enclosure and faced the majestic sixty-six foot high being.

"Do you know that the Arabic name for this creature is Abu al-Hol or the Father of Terror?" asked Yusuf, who stood beside Joshua and looked into the stone eyes of the desert Lord of the Horizons.

"Why would they call it that?" asked Joshua inquisitively. "Could it have anything to do with the mysteries that are hidden under it?"

"Maybe it has something to do with the Arab proverb: Man fears time, yet time fears the pyramids," replied Yusuf. "The Great Sphinx and the Great Pyramid have withstood the test of time and are immortal."

"Speaking of time," enjoined Joshua, "ancient wisdom postulates that Plato's Great Year is enshrined in the design and orientation of the Great Sphinx and the Great Pyramid. The Man, or sign of Aquarius, is the head of the Sphinx, and the Lion, or sign of Leo, is the body of the Sphinx. The age of Aquarius is once again dawning on planet Earth, with the sun entering the sign of the Man at the Vernal Equinox."

"That would make the Autumnal Equinox in Leo the Lion," added Yusuf enthusiastically as the Platonic year formed a cross in his mind. "And the Summer Solstice in Taurus the Bull, and the Winter Solstice in Scorpio, the ancient Eagle."

"Precisely!" exclaimed Joshua. "The four seasons of the great year are presently reflecting the archetypal sacred four living creatures of Ezekiel's wheel and the Apocalypse. And so we have the fixed cross in a circle twirling through space and time, with the great year encompassing a cycle of about 25,800 years, or 25,920 years, depending on which authority you rely on."

"Making it about 2,160 years for each age," calculated Yusuf. "But how does the Great Pyramid fit into that equation or scheme?"

"Well, each side is oriented with the cardinal points of the compass, with the entrance on the north side," explained Joshua. "And the descending passage pointed to the most accurately aligned pole star, Alpha Draconis, over four thousand years ago, which some experts say is when the Great Pyramid was built. However, I'm of the opinion that it might have been built as far back as three complete turns of the great wheel around a central spiritual sun."

Joshua gazed up into the face of the Great Sphinx, and his eyes focused on the snake-like uraeus (symbol of royalty) on the forehead of the man-like figure. Joshua simultaneously felt a throbbing in the same area of his forehead, as if to indicate that his third eye or pineal gland was vibrating in harmony with the thoughts transmitted through the uraeus or beaming third eye of the god-like immortal Sphinx. As he stood silently,

gazing at the silent sentinel of the wisdom of the ages, he thought he heard a voice saying, "Look within your Self to find what is hidden underneath the Sphinx." Joshua closed his eyes and saw with his mind's eye the enigmatic face of Hermes, the Egyptian god of wisdom, superimposed on the face of the Sphinx, and in his hands he held a large book which emitted a subtle green light; when Joshua peered into the book, he saw that it contained the blueprints for the construction of the Great Sphinx and the Great Pyramid.

"Only Hermes, the immortal god of wisdom, could have built this foremost wonder of the ancient world," announced Joshua as he opened his eyes and pointed to the Great Sphinx, who was no longer an enigma to him. He also, for the first time, became aware of a subtle hermaphroditic aspect within the face of the immortal being, as if to reveal the androgynous nature of man, the male and the female.

For the rest of the day, Joshua and Yusuf walked throughout the pyramid complex, exploring the ruins of antiquity and reminiscing about the days of old. Joshua, however, couldn't get the image of Hermes out of his mind; it was as if the eyes of the Sphinx had pierced deep into his soul and were now part of his nature. When he closed his eyes, he thought he saw the eye of Horus or Ra, the sun-god, beaming at him from the right eye, and Thoth, the moon-god, reflecting the sun-god through the left eye. He came back several times to the antediluvian monument, walking along the 240 foot length and observing the seven geological layers of limestone bedrock out of which the body of the grand symbol of the great cross in the heavens was built.

At high noon, when the sun disk was at its zenith, Joshua and Yusuf took a well-needed rest from their fast-paced activity at the pyramid complex. They sat at the southern base of the Great Pyramid and replenished their bodily needs, Yusuf eating the sandwich he prepared for himself and Joshua drinking the quart-sized container of water that he carried with him. Joshua had committed himself to a three-day fast in order to raise his awareness of the subtle forces operating at the sacred center of the world's geographical landmass. He also wanted to prepare himself for the experience within the heart of the Great Pyramid. Yusuf told him that he could buy an extra ticket to go inside the pyramid, and Joshua decided that he would go into the king's chamber on the third day.

Joshua closed his eyes as he sat cross-legged on the warm desert sand with his back resting against a granite block at the base of the pyramid. The solar disk of Ra stood directly above the apex of the pyramid, shining its light on the crown of Joshua's exposed head. The face of Hermes was still imprinted on the reflective screen of Joshua's consciousness. Joshua felt a surge of liquid-like energy rise from the base of his spine to the base of his skull, and then he sensed a gentle voice like a slow-flowing stream within the region of his medulla oblongata: "Be not afraid, be strong and have courage." As the words resounded within the chamber of his mind, he perceived a small flickering astral flame ignite a fire in the subterranean chamber at the base of his spine. Within the cave-like chamber, a steady light beamed a stream of pictures on the wall: Joshua saw an older man dressed as a warrior sitting at the base of an acacia tree, instructing two men to view the land and report back to him. He watched as they crossed a river and entered a city where a harlot gave them refuge. The kind woman told them that the God of heaven and earth had given the land into their hands. The king of the city wanted to see the alleged spies, but the wise woman hid them on the roof of her house that was located on the town wall. The courageous woman, who claimed to be the

daughter of an Israelite, tired to dissuade the king from fighting against the warrior Joshua and his God, but the king wouldn't listen to her counsel. Joshua watched as the dark-haired woman helped the two men escape from the window of her house by letting them down a cord. Joshua at that moment noticed something familiar about the dark-eyed woman – she looked just like Binah.

"So you finally recognized me," softly cooed the dove-like voice of the angelic Binah. "I wondered how long it would take you to become aware of the feminine nature of the kundalini fire symbolized by the story of Rahab the harlot and the scarlet thread she hands from the window of her soul. Didn't you think of the two currents of energy, the positive and the negative, rising up along the skeletal walls when you saw the two men ascend to the roof of the house? Didn't you wonder about the personality, the ruler of the city, which is your mental ego that controls the land of your body? Didn't you feel a tingle in your spinal cord when the two men were let down a cord?"

Joshua opened his eyes and realized that the pictures he was viewing in the cave-like chamber were actual processes occurring within his own land, the consciousness of his inner world. He also realized that in order to conquer the vast territory of his interior consciousness, he would need the help and understanding of his personal angel, Binah.

"I thought you were sleeping," said Yusuf, who had returned from an excursion to the nearby solar boat museum.

"I just took a little journey in my soul body," said Joshua with a wide smile on his face.

"Do you want to walk around the Great Pyramid, stretch your legs a bit?" offered Yusuf. "We haven't done that, yet."

"That sounds like a great idea," accepted Joshua enthusiastically. "I can use the exercise. By the way, how far around is it?"

"According to the tour guide I spoke with, the base of each side is 756 feet long, which would make the perimeter 3,024 feet," answered Yusuf. "And the height of the pyramid is 453 feet."

"That's roughly almost a kilometer or a little more than half-a-mile around," estimated Joshua as he took a step in a clockwise direction.

"Give or take a couple hundred feet," added Yusuf, keeping in step with Joshua.

"Yusuf, do you think that Egypt was as much a holy land to the Egyptians as Israel is presently a holy land to the Jewish people?" asked Joshua as they slowly strolled in the direction of the western base of the pyramid.

"Yes, I think Egypt was and still is a holy land, just like the biblical Canaan or Palestine was and still is a holy land," replied Yusuf. "Remember that Moses, the great deliverer, was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he passed that wisdom on to Joshua, who brought it to the Promised Land. Both of the holy lands have a holy river running through it, and both were divided into two major sections: upper and lower Egypt, and the northern and southern kingdoms."

"How about the stories where Egypt is a metaphor for the land of darkness, and the land of the Israelites a metaphor for the land of light?" inquired Joshua.

"I think that sometimes such a comparison refers to bondage in contrast to freedom, or ignorance in contrast to wisdom," remarked Yusuf. "Perhaps darkness could even represent the mysterious and secret wisdom that is hidden in the monuments."

"Do you think that the builders of the monuments and the writers of the stories could have built and written edifices representing the journey of the human spirit through life?" asked Joshua. "And that the land would symbolize the physical body, and that liberation from the bondage of the body is the ulterior motive of the great works, including this Great Pyramid?"

"I'm not sure what you mean by liberation from the bondage of the body," admitted Yusuf.

"I would think that, first of all, you would realize that the real you is not the body – it's only a garment you wear or a vehicle you drive, or a house you dwell in – and, second of all, the real you is the immortal soul," explained Joshua as best as he could.

"I prefer the metaphor of a partnership that the physical body and the spiritual soul have," expressed Yusuf, "or better yet, the metaphor of the dance, where the body and soul dance together on the journey of life."

"And yet you would have to say that the body is mortal and passes away, whereas the soul is immortal and remains from age to age," reasoned Joshua.

By the time the two sojourners had run that topic into the ground, they had made one complete circuit of the Great Pyramid. They rested at the southern base of the pyramid before they called it a day, and then they headed back to their temporary dwelling place.

The next day Joshua and Yusuf returned to the pyramid complex, and Joshua instantaneously was found contemplating the face of the divine Sphinx, who had witnessed the passing of numerous ages. The age that the Sphinx revealed to Joshua (in the circular pattern of the precession of the equinoxes through the great wheel of the zodiac) was the passing from the age of Taurus, and the overthrow of the golden calf image which Moses accomplished, to the inauguration of the age of Aries, the sacrificial lamb or ram. Through the eyes of the immortal Sphinx, Joshua watched the new age unfold as the new energy and the cosmic forces poured out through the life-force (the blood) that flowed from the Celestial Lamb during the festive time of the Spring Equinox. He saw his namesake, the warrior Joshua, a new deliverer for a new age, wield the sword of self-mastery over all the centers (cities) of the Promised Land of his body, mind, and soul. In the silence of his heart, Joshua again heard the voice of the Sphinx (in the person of Hermes) speak: "Hoshea, son of Nun, god of the primeval waters from which the world emerged, in you is the spirit of wisdom. Henceforth, you will be called Jehoshua, the divinely appointed deliverer of the age, through whom Yahweh saves all his children." Joshua felt invisible hands touch the crown of his head and the third eye center in his forehead.

Joshua couldn't talk the rest of the day. He simply sat cross-legged at the western base of the pyramid and contemplated the immense task which he felt he needed to accomplish. Joshua felt two streams of tears flowing down the sides of his face as he thought of all the battles he still needed to fight till victory was won.

At noon, when Ra's rays beamed straight down on Joshua, and as Joshua continued to sit cross-legged with his back against a granite block, a stream of light descended through his erect spine and ignited a flame at his sacral region. He felt a flow of spinal fluid, like a river flowing down, descend simultaneously with the stream of light. The light-energy and the flowing-waters seemed to overflow the banks of the spinal canal and spread throughout the entire nervous system of Joshua's body, filling

him with a strong current of creative energy. He saw himself standing still in the stream of consciousness that flowed in his spine. He visualized himself as the causal body, the ark within which all the seeds of his past and future lives resided; he saw the causal body as Lord of his physical, emotional, and mental bodies. All the forces within his being seemed to stand still when he entered the stream and became conscious of a living omnipresence spreading outwardly in all directions. Joshua was so enthralled with what he was witnessing that he hadn't even noticed that his breathing and the beating of his heart had also seemed to have been momentarily suspended. When he became conscious of the supreme stillness in his land, the physical body, he took a deep breath again. As he did so, he felt the stream of light-energy ascend from the sacral region up through the five lumbar and the twelve thoracic vertebrae, and past the seven cervical vertebrae, to the place of the skull. He had reversed the flow of the light-energy-creative-waters within his body.

"You did it!" he heard the sweet voice of Binah in his heart. "You made the waters of your spinal river stand still and then flow backwards. You crossed over from the lower body of physical awareness into the Promised Land of the higher mind, the higher Self."

As Binah spoke those words, Joshua's mental faculties seemed to be illuminated with a sweet milky white light-substance. A vast panorama spread out before his inner mind. "Behold your higher Self as the conqueror of the lower animal nature!" annunciated his angel Binah.

Instantaneously, he saw an eighty-two year old warrior rise up early in the morning and move all his forces from Shittim, the place of the tree of life, to the Jordan River. After three days of preparation, the priestly (causal body) aspect of the warrior stepped into the sacred river (spine) with the ark (soul). The Jordan (flowing downward) river rose up in a wave of energy-motion, causing it to flow upwards to the city Adam (place of the skull). All the energized cellular particles of the initiate-warrior passed through the river (spine) on dry ground (through the physical body). When every aspect (every thought, feeling, desire, and unit of creative life) of the soul-warrior had been affected by the passage through the Jordan (spinal column, life-force energy), a memorial of twelve stones was set up in the river and in the lodging place in Gilgal (a circle).

"Do you understand what you are seeing?" asked Binah.

"It's like a pictorial representation of what I experienced in my spine," answered Joshua. "Whoever wrote the allegorical story must have experienced the same thing I did."

"That's absolutely right," confirmed Binah in a reassuring tone.

"But what do the twelve stones in the Jordan and in the lodging place represent?" inquired Joshua.

"The twelve stones or vertebrae are enshrined in the spine as the dorsal or thoracic area, to which are attached twelve pairs of ribs," explained Binah. "The ribs make a circle around the central part of man, namely the thoracic cavity, within which resides the soul in the dwelling place known as the heart. Now, if you look at the cosmic picture, then the twelve stones represent the twelve signs of the zodiac, at the center of which dwells the spiritual central sun, or soul of our universe."

"The Prime Mover," reflected Joshua.

"There's one more thing I need to show you," stated Binah. She placed her hand on his thigh and instantly an urge rose in his private member. A fire in the sacral region of his spine instantly flared up and agitated his emotional and mental bodies. An image of a yoni and a lingam flashed in his mind, and Joshua made a deliberate choice and pulled himself away from the desire that flowed toward his generative organ. "That's good," said Binah. "You are now capable of sublimating your personal desire and transmuting the creative energy for a higher purpose." The panoramic scene of the initiate-warrior returned into Joshua's field of vision, and he saw the conqueror proclaim a day of circumcision, a day of dedication of the highest power in man – procreation – to a divine purpose: for complete mastery of the land. As soon as the circumcision or sublimation of the physical forces in the body and mind of the initiate-warrior was completed, he was able to partake of the sacred meal of milk and honey flowing in the creative land of his higher mind.

At that moment his angel Binah displayed to Joshua's receptive mind an angelic being with a flaming sword in his hand. Joshua felt as if the shining two-edged sword was a triple force of energy in his spine, with the two edges sending the positive and negative, the warm and cool, currents through the body, and the central part of the blade ascending through the central spinal canal to the brain. The angelic being spoke to Joshua's mind in an inaudible voice: "You have displayed self-mastery. Now you can wield the sword of creative energy which resides in your spine." The angelic being handed the sword to Joshua, who took the sword in his hand. As he did so, he thought that the sword was a caduceus, and the angelic being was Hermes. "And for goodness sakes, take your shoes off, for the ground you're on is holy!" spoke the voice and then vanished.

Joshua immediately stood up and took his shoes off.

"What are you doing?" asked Yusuf, who was sitting a short distance away, reading a book about the pyramids.

"You are right, Yusuf," said Joshua affectionately. "This land is holy. Come, take a walk with me around the pyramid, and I'll tell you all that I've seen and heard."

On the third day, Joshua and Yusuf arrived at the pyramid complex early so that they would be assured of getting tickets to go inside the great pyramid. After getting their tickets, they waited at the north face for the opening of the entrance into the pyramid. The primary or original entrance, which was flanked by angled stones, stood 55 feet above the ground level, while the short cut entrance, a forceful intrusive opening ordered by Caliph El-Mamoun in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, was located below the original entrance.

When the secondary entrance was opened up for the tourists, Joshua and Yusuf entered through the roughly cut opening and descended with the group of tourists to the subterranean chamber, where Joshua saw and felt the stifling pit of dense matter envelope his soul. His mind was set on the main chamber, where he anticipated a fruitful resolution to his three-day fast. He followed along through the narrow passageways, up the steep, narrow steps of the ascending passageway and through a long tunnel for a short stop at the Queen's Chamber, where Joshua thought of Isis, the Egyptian Queen of Heaven and the Mother of Nature. As Joshua continued through the Grand Gallery to his destination, he felt as if he had been climbing through a suffocating darkness, and he gasped for air. Finally, as he reached the upper platform of the gallery and passed through a short passageway into the King's Chamber, Joshua was able at last to catch a

breath of fresh air coming into the large, high rectangular room from air shafts leading out onto the surface of the pyramid and from a ventilation system.

The first thing that Joshua noticed as he entered the 34 foot long and 17 foot wide and 19 foot high room was a lidless sarcophagus. As he walked to the west end of the chamber toward the rectangular sarcophagus, he noticed that the walls were made of the same red granite as the red obelisk of ancient Heliopolis. When he touched the broken southeastern six-and-a-half inch thick edge of the sarcophagus, he realized that it was also made of the highly energized rose-colored granite. He peered into the depths of the empty tomb-like coffer and saw that he would fit inside without any difficulty.

“Are you thinking of re-enacting the rite of death and rebirth in that stone coffin?” asked Yusuf, whose quiet presence had been forgotten by the contemplative Joshua. Yusuf had read about the initiations that were dramatically preformed inside the King’s Chamber in the book that he carried with him. “The book I’m reading says that the initiate would be symbolically buried in this great coffer, which curiously has the dimensions of 90” length by 38.79” width by 41.25” depth, which equals a volume of the biblically cryptic number 144,000. Or to be exact, it says  $90 \times 38.78509448 \times 41.25296125 = 144,000$ .”

“Yes, I am thinking of doing exactly that,” confessed Joshua. “It’s as if I’ve foreseen this moment for many lifetimes, and it has finally arrived.”

“Wait until the tourists leave, and then I’ll stand guard while you perform the ancient rite,” cautioned Yusuf, who was beginning to understand the importance of this moment for Joshua.

As soon as the last tourist exited the chamber, Joshua took off his shoes and crawled inside the stone coffin, which was positioned in a north-south orientation. He laid his head on the north end of the hard surface and took a couple of deep breaths and relaxed his body completely. He interlocked his fingers over the solar plexus area of his abdomen. Within minutes he was completely still and adapted to the dark enclosed space.

The first image he visualized was of the warrior-initiate Jehoshua, whose tall seven-foot frame was stretched out to almost completely fill the same sarcophagus in which Joshua was presently partially entombed. The second image was accompanied by a still, soft voice: “Arise, Jehoshua, and behold your seven-fold body.” He felt his bird-like soul body step out of his physical body lying in repose, and he saw a candlestick with seven branches spread out throughout the trunk of the spine, with seven golden bowls or vortices twirling like lotus flowers that were ready to open up, like almonds coming out of a shell. The central branch was affixed to the middle of the spine at the heart center. He saw a hand light the base of the spine, and the face of Rahab, the harlot, appeared in the flame-like flower. The hand lit the second bowl of precious oil, and he saw the warrior Jehoshua step into the spinal waters of the Jordan River.

“You are ready for the third center to be opened,” said the voice as an etheric hand lit the light within the lumbar region or third branch of the candlestick. Within the light of the opened ten-petal flower, Joshua watched as the ark of his soul with all seven of his higher faculties moved around the circuit of the inner city, the etheric spinal canal, with the vortices of each center vibrating with the sound of an active beehive. With each circuit of the inner city, from its head to its base and back, the vibrations throughout the body intensified, and the sound vibrated like a flute and then like a harp-string. At the

fourth round of the inner city, the sound of a bell rang through the tube-like central channel. As the spiritualized forces (seven priests) in his body completed a fifth circumambulation of the inner city (the symbolic Jericho), Joshua felt a thunderous roar, like the pounding of ocean waves, and he thought that the vibrations would break his eardrums. At the sixth round, as the symphonic sound of the seven-fold vibrations (seven trumpet sounds) raised the molecular structure of the body to a high degree of activity, Joshua saw the dark-haired woman Rahab approach Jehoshua and beg for the warrior to spare her people, and the warrior told her that only those who saved themselves by flight would be spared; and so it happened that Rahab and her household came to live with Jehoshua, and the inhabitants of the city took flight from the city to the mountains. Joshua no longer had any consciousness of his body; the mountain of his mind was the only consciousness that remained as he watched the last seven rounds of his inner forces complete the total of thirteen circuits of the inner city; and then he heard a crescendo of a prolonged OM chant resound throughout the universe of his body and regenerate every cell in his being. The walls of bodily consciousness were totally transformed and consumed by a fire which purified the inner city and left only the pure gold and silver and precious metal, which signified the solar, lunar, and planetary influences.

"The tabernacle of your body has been prepared for the lighting of the fourth light on the candlestick of your spine," said the voice of the hierophant-initiator as his unseen hand set a flame ablaze in the twelve-petal rosy flower of the heart center in the dorsal area. "You have sacrificed your lower animal nature on the altar of the generative region, and you have cleansed your inner being in the regenerative waters of your spinal river. Now, as you watch the lighting of the seven centers of your astral body on the etheric seven-branched golden candlestick of your spine and partake of the bread of your twelve positive character traits on the table of earthly experiences, you will sense a fragrant essence rise from the altar of your heart to the highest center of your being, the place where your spirit dwells."

Joshua saw the light within the heart center illuminate a scene where the warrior-initiate lifted the spear of his spinal energy and gained mastery of the entire central nervous system (city of Ai) by purifying it with the fire of his will and conquering it with the sword of his creative life-force. He saw Jehoshua hang the former king and ruler of the generative spinal energy on a tree, signifying that henceforth the warrior would rule the city by raising a great heap of stones on the cornerstone of that generative force, making it a veritable spinal column that would ascend into the mount of the brain, where Jehoshua built an altar (Mt. Ebal) to enshrine the divine self.

Another battle unfolded for the warrior Jehoshua. He would have to conquer and defeat five kings who waged war against the royal city of the heart (Gibeon). Those five kings ruled over the five kingdoms of the land: the auditory, the optical, the olfactory, the gustatory, and the tactual. Jehoshua spoke to the higher forces of his land to help him control those five rulers, whose will and desires worked through the heart center: "Solar and lunar forces, positive and negative elements within my body, be silent and rest from activity." As he made the affirmation, the five senses in his body were disconnected from the consciousness of the higher mind, just like in sleep, and the two great lights of the inner sun and moon stood in the midst of the heavens in his head – the solar light of the pineal gland and the reflective lunar light of the pituitary gland. As Jehoshua witnessed the inner celestial phenomenon, he saw an animal-bearing circle revolve on the

dome of his mind around the central celestial sun and moon. The circle appeared to be an ancient Egyptian sky map, the Zodiac of Denderah, which had thirty-six characters proceed in a counter-clockwise orientation on the outer edge of the circle. ‘Isn’t it written in the book of Jasher,’ mused Joshua to himself as he realized what he was witnessing through the higher mind of Jehoshua: “The Sun stood still in the midst of the heavens and it stood still six and thirty moments.” All of a sudden Joshua realized that the cryptic thirty-six moments referred to the thirty-six decans, or divisions of a circle of 360 degrees into thirty-six sections of ten (deca) degrees each. Time seemed to stand still in Joshua’s mind as he looked at the Egyptian representation of the Celestial Day of the universe on the ceiling of the Denderah temple.

“You have seen the body which encloses all things,” spoke the inner voice, “and now you know that the vision of the calendar of the ages was revealed within this temple, which was called the Mount of God or the Temple of Amon, the secret house of the Hidden One.” Joshua realized that the Egyptian moon god, Sin, was the origin of Mount Sin-Ai, the holy Mount of God.

A song erupted in the heart of Jehoshua, the warrior-conqueror, and its melodic lyrics were transmitted to the consciousness of Joshua:

“My goodness and my fortress, my high tower,  
I will sing a new song unto thee,  
With thanksgiving will I sing to thee,  
Thou art the strength of my salvation.  
Our tongues shall relate thy might,  
We will sing and praise thy wondrous works.  
And thy beloved shall be like trees planted by the waters.”

The following moment the face of Thoth, who was also represented as the moon-god, appeared to Joshua’s inner vision.

“Look at the light of the remaining three centers of your inner being,” spoke Thoth, as his hand lit the fifth light at the cervical area, and Joshua saw the battlefield strewn with the bodies of thirty-one kings, which represented the innate tendencies in the body. The sixth light illuminated the cerebrum, and Joshua saw the land divided amongst the twelve tribes or faculties of his inherited past zodiacal lives, the cities inherited totaling 365 or one city for each day of the solar year. The seventh light illuminated the entire golden seven-branched candlestick of the body with the glorious light of a thousand-petal lotus flower, wherein Joshua saw a recapitulation of the entire history of the warrior Jehoshua, the conqueror of the land. The crown of his head (the biblical Hazor) was conquered and purified with the etheric fire which flowed through his spine. And in the midst of the lotus flower, he became aware of the union of the masculine and feminine, the spiritual and the physical, within the body of the conqueror: Jehoshua and Rahab stood side by side, like two pillars in the house (similar to ISis, the moon-goddess, and RA, the sun, in the house of EL, the celestial IS-RA-EL).

As Joshua’s senses became reconnected with his bodily consciousness, and he felt his soul reentering his physical body, he heard the voice of Thoth-Hermes say, “Your final battle will be fought at Megiddo!”

Joshua opened his eyes and looked out of the depths of the sarcophagus into the watchful eyes of his friend, Yusuf.

“You’re back!” said Yusuf excitedly.

"How long was I gone?" asked Joshua, rubbing his eyes.

"You were gone three hours," answered Yusuf.

"It felt like I was gone three days," said Joshua, who was trying to reorient himself to his surroundings. He sat up and got out of the rose-colored sarcophagus.

"We have to get out of here," said Yusuf anxiously. "I think I hear the afternoon group of tourists entering the pyramid." They exited the King's Chamber and quickly descended backwards through the narrow passageway.

"So tell me," said Yusuf when they finally emerged from the darkness of the pyramid into the bright light of day, "what happened? What did you see?"

"Let's take a walk around the pyramid, and I'll tell you all about it," said Joshua as he stepped in a counter-clockwise direction around the Great Pyramid.

The following morning the fellow sojourners caught the early morning bus out of Cairo, Egypt, and headed for Tel Aviv. They followed the Great Trunk Road, the ancient highway that connected Ancient Egypt with the civilizations of the Fertile Crescent in Ancient Mesopotamia. On the third day after their arrival in Tel Aviv, they caught a bus and followed the Great Trunk Road (or Way of the Sea, as it was also called), eastward to Megiddo.

The full moon shone brightly over the ruins of Megiddo on the day that Joshua and Yusuf spent time together there. The mound of the archaeological site Tel Megiddo revealed the excavations of more than twenty strata of settlements dating back to at least six thousand years. Joshua had only one purpose in coming here: the voice of Hermes had told him that his final battle would be fought at Megiddo, and he aimed to find out what that meant. He was familiar with the stories about this being the site of the last battle that would be fought at the end of days, the biblical Armageddon. He was also aware that the strategic site could be an allegory for the eternal battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. However, for Joshua there seemed to be something at the soul level which drew him to this many-layered ancient city.

"Did you know that the name of this place is called Tel-el-Mutesellim in Arabic?" asked Yusuf, who walked through the heap of ruins with Joshua. "It means the Hill of the Ruler."

"I wonder if that refers to King Solomon, who rebuilt the city as a royal city to administer the northern part of his kingdom," stated Joshua. "He collected six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold in one year to build his kingdom, according to the biblical record of the kings of Israel."

"That's also the biblical number that is associated with the number of the beast who would do battle at the place called Har Magedon or the height of Megiddo," remarked Yusuf astutely.

"Which could just be an allegory of the innumerable battles that Man, whose number is nine or the total of 6+6+6 or 1+8, has to fight on the battlefield of life, especially the battle to overcome the beast or the human animal nature," expounded Joshua.

"By the way, did you ever read the book called The Source, by James Michener?" asked Yusuf, changing the subject abruptly.

"No, I haven't" admitted Joshua.

"He bases his story on a fictional archaeological site, called Tel Makor, which means the source," related Yusuf. "It actually seems to follow the story of the historical

Tel Megiddo. Anyway, his story begins sometime in 9,000 B.C.E., and it's centered around a well of water."

"There's a tunnel that goes to a spring here at Tel Megiddo," interjected Joshua. "We should go see it."

The two explorers went to the tunnel which cut through more than 200 feet of rock to a spring. As Joshua walked through the tunnel, he thought he was back at the Great Pyramid, and again the words of Hermes echoed in his mind: "Your final battle will be fought at Megiddo!" At that moment, Joshua realized what Hermes meant: The last battle was judgment day for the soul, when it reviewed all the layers of its lives, and all the deeds of the heart were weighed against the feather of truth in the balance in the Hall of Truth. Here at Megiddo he witnessed the strata of over twenty ancient cities, each of which had a beginning and an end. The ultimate battle was for the immortal soul to transcend the mortal nature of its earthly existence and to reach the heights of its spiritual kingdom. And then a final thought occurred to Joshua: At the end of each life, the soul transcends the body and is liberated from the land of bondage, and is ushered into the Promised Land.

Three months later, the battle for the holy land of Israel was reignited when a second intifada was announced, and the forces of light and darkness once again did battle on the battlefield of life. Joshua's friend Yusuf was a victim, or a sacrifice, of the battle as a bomb blew up the bus he was riding in. Joshua's last words to his friend, at Yusuf's burial site in his former home in Shechem, were: "We'll meet again, my friend."

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"Little One, today the kingdom of heaven is at hand for you," said Bannus. His voice rang out with an apocalyptic fervor in the chamber of the cave. Paul's body shuddered with a nervous anticipation as he sat beside his master. "The world as you know it will come to an end for you, and you will be born into a new world." The words of Bannus vibrated with a profound finality.

"Will I die?" asked Paul, his body still shivering like a butterfly about to break out of its confining chrysalis.

"No," chuckled Bannus at Paul's apprehension. "You will enter a state of trance where you will simulate what we call the little death. During the trance you will enter a timeless dimension where your higher self will reveal to you what you need to know."

"Will I see myself as Elisha ben Abuyah, again?" asked Paul, referring to his recent encounter with, what Bannus explained, was a future life.

"There seems to be a purpose for your glimpse into the future," replied Bannus, "and the only way to find out is to commune with your divine soul, which is a miniature universe within you. It will reflect to your conscious mind an aspect of your eternal self, in which the past, present, and future exist simultaneously."

Paul closed his eyes and tried to comprehend what Bannus was telling him. He felt a tingle in his forehead, in the area of the pineal gland, as he tried to focus his attention on the light streaming in his mind.

"Lie down, here," said Bannus, pointing to his bed of reeds on which he slept. Paul lay down on the dry firm reeds in a supine position and folded his hands across the solar plexus area near his navel. He had learned to trust his master explicitly, and he trusted him now as he prepared to enter the trance state.

"All your bodily functions will be temporarily suspended," instructed Bannus. "I will watch over you as you venture into the unseen world." Paul's mind attached itself to the words "the unseen world," which reminded him of the meaning of his Hebrew name, Saul. He also thought of the other meaning, or variation, of his name: Sheol, the vast underworld where Hades and Paradise coexisted.

Paul felt a light breeze as the hands of Bannus waved in circular motions over his body, sending an electro-magnetic charge through his aural body and a surge of energy through his spine. He felt a fiery pulsation at the base of his spine ignite a rapidly spreading inner fire, which sent a heat wave throughout his spine and nervous system. The inner combustion seemed to immerse his entire body in flames, burning away all the dross of his physical being. And then he felt a release, as if his soul body was lifted out of the physical world and thrust in a spiral motion upwards into ethereal worlds. The last thing Paul saw, before his consciousness left the earth plane, was his physical body lying in repose on a bed of reeds with Bannus' bark-woven robe covering it.

As Paul's inner gaze turned upwards, he saw a light shaped like an equal-armed cross. The cross of light was affixed to a twelve-spoked wheel hurling through space. On the arms of the cross he saw a familiar tetramorph: the four living creatures with the appearance of a lion, an eagle, a man, and an ox. In a flash of illumination, the four living creatures became the wheels of a chariot and also the driving force that carried the soul of Paul into the heart of his own being. On the wheels Paul saw the flaming letters YHVH: the Y letter emanated the wheel of fire, the H emitted the wheel of water, from the V emerged the wheel of air, and the final H originated the wheel of earth. Now Paul understood the meaning of the four flaming letters that he had seen in the cave of Hermes at the base of the holy Mount in the wilderness.

Inside the chariot sat the divine charioteer, who appeared to Paul's inner eye as a handsome long-haired youth this time. He was wrapped in a garment of brilliant rainbow-colored light. Paul realized that his own incorporeal being was also wrapped in a similar garment. The celestial messenger sat in silence as he mentally steered the celestial Light-ship, whose counter-rotating fields of electro-magnetic energy sent it spiraling in wide circles upwards to the throne of the higher Self.

And then for what seemed like a moment of eternal silence, everything stopped moving. The chariot and the charioteer were gone. Paul's consciousness and his awareness of Self was all that remained. He stood face to face with his own inner being. In that one blissful moment, he understood that his true Self was that all-pervasive, infinite existence.

Within that realm of existence Paul noticed a spark of light blossom forth into a six-pointed star, which was encircled by an ethereal body. When his consciousness turned to look at the embryonic form emerging from within the star, he felt himself descending into that form at the same moment that he heard a baby's cry as it emerged from the womb.

"It's a boy!" exclaimed the midwife.

"Elisha has come!" cried the jubilant father, Abuyah, who hoped for a boy and had even picked out a name for him. The father had even made a vow that if his son lived he would dedicate him to the study of scripture, namely the Torah, in hope that he would be as powerful a man as the Torah-minded rabbis, who could bring the proverbial fire down from heaven. The child lived.

The mother was too exhausted from the delivery to say anything. She was just glad that it was over. She was hoping for a girl. Somehow she sensed that a boy would have a hard life during the troublesome times ahead. The Roman general Titus had just laid siege to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the mother sang songs in Greek and in Hebrew to the child in hope of stifling any fear. Throughout his life, Elisha would sing those songs in honor of his mother, whom he lost six weeks after his birth.

Four months after the child's birth, Titus captured Jerusalem, and shortly thereafter the Romans destroyed the temple. The great revolt of the anti-Roman rebels, the Zealots, to attain political and religious liberty came to an end. Even the notable Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai could not save his people from the ill-fated revolt, which caused the devastation of the land, the city, the temple, and the people. This was the world that Elisha ben Abuyah was born into.

Elisha's father, who was an esteemed and rich citizen of Jerusalem, was forced to relocate north to the province of Galilee. He settled in the small city of Migdal, near Tiberias, along the Sea of Galilee. The father moved in two social circles: the intellectual Greek world and the legalistic Jewish world. The son followed in the footsteps of his father, learning to read Greek and Hebrew. By the time Elisha was ten years old, he was already reading Homer's Iliad in Greek and the Books of Moses in Hebrew.

A turning point came in Elisha's life when his father died. His uncle became his guardian. The uncle tried to completely sever the young boy from all Greek influence, and he burned all the Greek books that the father had accumulated over the years. Henceforth, the intelligent student would be taught only Hebrew law and scripture. At the age of thirteen, Elisha was placed under the tutelage of his godfather, Joshua ben Hananiah, who was present at the celebration of Elisha's circumcision. At the rabbi's little house in a valley of Judea, Elisha learned to appreciate the vast tradition of his Jewish background.

When Elisha turned seventeen, his mentor took him to Jamnia, the great Jewish cultural center, which was located near the Mediterranean Sea, seven miles south of Joppa. Here he witnessed the resiliency of the Jewish people to regroup and reestablish the Sanhedrin after the fall of Jerusalem. The semi-circular assembly of the seventy-two members of the highest judicial and ecclesiastical council of the Jewish nation was an impressive display of scholarly knowledge and legalistic prowess. Elisha's master, Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah, indicated to him that someday the young student might grow up to be an elder and sit in the throne-like chair, just like the rabbi.

Sure enough, Elisha applied himself to his studies and quickly mastered the Torah and the entire corpus of Jewish law, and he was accepted as a candidate for ordination. He became proficient in discussing and interpreting the written and the oral law. It was at this time that Elisha compared his education to the writing on a tabula rasa (clean slate): "He who learns as a child, to what is he like? To ink written on new paper. He who learns as an old man, to what is he like? To ink written on blotting paper." Little

did he know at the time, but old ideas from Greek books were hidden underneath in his subconscious mind, waiting to emerge from dormancy.

The year 100 C.E. was a momentous year in the life of Elisha ben Abuyah. The Patriarch Gamaliel II laid his hands on Elisha's bowed head and endowed him with the title of Elder and with membership in the Sanhedrin by declaring him a rabbi. This was the culmination of a lifetime of diligent study and perseverance. In his ordination lecture Elisha gave his sage advice on the study of Hebrew law and tradition: "A man who studies the Torah and does good deeds is like a man who laid a good foundation of stones before he began to build. When the floodwaters came, they could not undermine the building. However, the man who does not study the Torah and doesn't do good works is like a man who laid a poor foundation, and a heavy building on it. And when the floodwaters came, they undermined the building easily."

The ordination overshadowed his recent marriage and the birth of a daughter into his household. He soon was a busy man: hearing cases in courts of law, lecturing at the academy that Johanan ben Zakkai had set up in Jamnia, preaching in the synagogues, and attending the council meetings. He made lifelong friends, including the respected Rabbi Akiba, and he found a disciple named Meir, who would be faithful to his master for the rest of his life. Elisha would spend hours discussing scripture with his disciple. They especially loved to investigate the life of Job, whose trials and sufferings seemed to mirror the story of the Jewish people.

"What are you studying today?" asked Elisha, stopping by the schoolhouse at Tiberias where Meir was studying.

"I'm studying the end of Job's life where it says the Lord blessed his later days more than his earlier days," replied Meir, who was glad to see his teacher.

"How do you interpret that part of scripture?" asked Elisha in his customary teacher's role.

"I take it to mean what a previous verse stated, that the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before," answered Meir in hope that he had understood the meaning correctly.

"You've got to dig a little deeper," said Elisha. "Rabbi Akiba would say that Job's later days were blessed on account of his earlier days. And I would add that he earned the blessing through the merit of the good deeds that he had done."

The foundation of Elisha's faith received its first jolt when the plague visited the home of Meir and took his two young boys. Elisha was very fond of them, and his faith was visibly shaken. Meir accepted God's righteous judgment and cried, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away." But Elisha inwardly was in anguish and began to question, "Where is the justice and mercy of that righteous judge in regards to two innocent little boys?"

Other questions and issues began to stand out on the battlefield of Elisha's mind: Was the Jewish way the only truth known to mankind, or was truth multi-faceted, including the Greek approach to truth? Were miracles of scripture to be taken at face value, or were they sleight-of-hand performances of magicians? If the absolute authority of scripture is questionable, does that mean that there is no firm basis for the tradition that springs from it? An agnosticism vexed his spirit, for he was no longer sure of anything that he had formerly believed in without question. He wanted the inner turmoil to go away, but it persisted in shaking the foundation of his being to its very roots.

Elisha appealed to his friend Akiba and two other friends, Simeon ben Azzai and Simeon ben Zoma, to help him resolve the raging battle that was tormenting his mind and soul. He asked them to join him on his great quest to build a solid foundation for their faith by supporting it with arguments from all the resources available to them: nature, philosophy, tradition, scriptures, and logical systems. They would buttress their faith with irrefutable evidence and remove all doubt in the veracity of their Truth and Tradition. Ben Azzai chose to look into mystical methods of approaching their tradition, ben Zoma agreed to investigate controversial and contradictory scriptural passages, Akiba decided to approach Greek philosophy with the purpose of defending their tradition against it, and Elisha took up the task of surveying pagan philosophy in order to remove all doubt and arrive at ultimate truth.

At the same time that the four scholars were working on the monumental task of building a lasting edifice to Truth and Tradition, the Emperor Trajan was sitting on his throne in Rome, listening to Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah's request to allow the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt. The request was granted. Soon the temple mount in Jerusalem was swarming with active builders, leveling the ground and preparing to lay the foundation. No sooner was the work started than the capricious emperor changed his mind and issued a decree to stop all work on the rebuilding of the temple.

When the four seekers of truth had their next meeting together at ben Azzai's house, they were surprised to hear of the culmination of his mystical quest. He told them: "I have searched in all the wrong places for the presence of the Almighty and for a glimpse of what's behind the veil that separates us from this world and the world to come. I fasted and denied myself all the pleasures of the flesh in my ascetic attempt to reach the goal towards which I was striving. And then it dawned on me. I needed to get past the illusion of this world that the demiurge created in order to reach the transcendent reality. Now I am on the verge of breaking through the great barrier, the abyss, and I'm ready to enter into the light." Ben Azzai's eyes rolled upwards and only the whites of the eyes were visible as he withdrew from the visible world. The last words that he uttered before his emaciated body slumped to the ground were: "God is Light." The seekers were shocked to see the consequence of ben Azzai's self-mortification. They carried the lifeless body to his bed.

The outer world (and his inner world) that Elisha lived in were both in perpetual agitation. There was talk once again of war as Emperor Trajan was close to death. Anti-Roman sentiments were spreading like wildfire once again. A new leader of the insurgent party was organizing an army of men to fight the Romans, this time in hope of driving the oppressors away permanently. There was even a coordinated insurrection planned in other parts of the empire. However, the wise Rabbi Joshua stepped in and convinced the insurgents to avoid bringing an apocalyptic end to the land and to the people. Palestine was saved for the time being, but other parts of the empire were not spared from destruction.

Elisha decided to jettison his work and begin his quest anew, starting with all the competing sects and divisions running rampant throughout the world he lived in. He went to the Nazarene congregation and listened to moral epigrams and parables attributed to an itinerant teacher named Yehoshua, whom they had accepted as their Messiah. However, he was not convinced that the followers of the Law and the Messiah could prove their case on anything more substantial than blind faith. He went to the Jewish

Christians and to the Gentile Christians and only found a bitter dispute about the role of the Law of Moses in their religion. He went to the Gnostics, and he saw the elaborate symbolism of the temple of Mithra, and he heard the teachings about the evil demiurge, the prince of the world, and the road to salvation through a secret wisdom. He looked at a world where there were followers of Christos, of Apollos, of John, of Cephas, and of countless deified saviors and messianic leaders. He viewed the entire menagerie of statuesque figures with equal disdain, all unworthy of standing on the pedestal of ultimate truth.

The end of the quest for ben Zoma came when his friends found him reciting scripture incessantly. They couldn't have a coherent conversation with him. It seemed as if he had reached such a level of mental agility, that he could quote scripture and give various interpretations with the rapid flutter of words like the wings of a hummingbird darting from flower to flower. There was a method to his madness. However, in the end, it was madness, and it appeared that he had literally lost his reasoning mind and had been transformed into an automaton.

The end of Elisha's quest came when he witnessed a boy plummet to his death from a tall tree. He had just listened to his father's instructions to get the eggs from a nest, being careful to shoo the mother bird away safely. According to scripture, such an obedient boy should have his days prolonged on the earth, and yet he was lying dead in his grieving father's arms. Elisha felt like a vindictive judge himself when he blasphemed in the presence of witnesses, "There is no reward for good works, for there is no righteous judge."

Henceforth, Elisha was viewed by the people of the Law as an apostate, a person who had fallen away from the faith and was destined for excommunication and perdition. He had climbed to the heights of being a rabbi and a member of the highest council in the land, and now he had become an outcast. When he entered a schoolhouse, he no longer encouraged the pupils to study the Torah. Instead, he told them, "What are you doing here? You should be a mason. You should be a carpenter. You should be a fisherman." He told them to pursue practical occupations, and so he destroyed their love of learning.

There was nowhere that Elisha could find peace of mind anymore. At the scene of one of the inhumane Roman executions, he saw a dog running around with the bloody tongue of a rabbi in its mouth. Elisha could not refrain from saying, "Here was a rabbi who recited the holy words of the Torah, and look what has happened to him. There is no reward for reciting the Torah in this world, nor in the next."

His friend Akiba tried to reason with him. Akiba had discovered during his quest for truth that peace of mind comes from having an unshakeable faith in a benevolent providence that guides men's lives. Any belief that enlarges man's concept of life and gives him a purpose in life is better than having no belief at all. Even urging people to believe that there is a divine essence that resides at the heart of man's being is better than living a hopeless existence as a mortal with no conviction of a future life. Such was the theological reasoning that Akiba tried to persuade Elisha to consider. Elisha turned his back on his friend and cut himself off from the God of his faith and his tradition.

The man whose name meant "to whom God is salvation" became the unmentionable one, and his name was not uttered by the people who had once looked up to him as a sage and a respected law-abiding rabbi, a paragon of virtue. One last time, when he entered a schoolhouse with Rabbi Meir, and he asked a child what he was

learning, the child read, "There is no peace unto the wicked." Another child, when asked, read, "But to the wicked God says, what business have you reciting the laws?"

Even Rabbi Meir couldn't convince his dear master to repent of his unlawful ways. When Elisha was riding a horse unlawfully on the Sabbath, the disciple Meir asked him to stop and get off. Elisha replied with the self-deprecating words: "I heard the divine voice issue, 'Repent, you backsliding children, except for Elisha, who knew my power and rebelled against me.'"

In self-defeat, "the Other" (Acher), as he was now called, moved as far away from his friends and community as he could. He moved to Antioch in Syria, where he reasoned that since he was now barred from the next world, he might as well enjoy himself in this world. The former world, as he knew it, was collapsing all around him. Nevertheless, a new star rose on the horizon of his once-beloved land. Akiba declared that this new star, Bar Kokhba, was the promised Messiah, the deliverer of the people from the oppression of the Romans. Elisha was recruited by the Romans to be an informer against his own people during the ensuing war. His own people were ordered to violate the laws of the Torah. The Sanhedrin was exterminated. Once again, Elisha witnessed the wanton cruelty of human nature and the realization that there was no reward for virtue.

Amidst the final destruction of his people and his land, Elisha realized that he couldn't inform against his former disciple Meir. Elisha was imprisoned by the Roman authorities, who condemned him to live in shame and infamy for his acts against his own people. It was while Elisha wasted away in the dark dungeon where he had been placed, and where he had reached the lowest point in his life, that he cried out in his soul for help. He felt the searing tears of a lost soul streaming through his being, and the alienation from his roots caused him to cry out for mercy. He felt that he was a traitor to his spiritual mission, and he had wasted the best years of his life on a useless quest. He had tried to bridge the faith of his tradition with the reason of Greek philosophy. All in vain.

There and then – in a split moment – a light broke through the tear-ravished mind of the apostate, and in the darkness of the dungeon he felt his spirit being lifted from his chained body and transported up to the third heaven, a place where he presumed he had entered paradise. He thought he was in an orchard, for he saw a fruit-laden tree of life with a river flowing beside it. On an elevated mound in the orchard was an angelic being sitting on a throne. Elisha hesitated at first to approach the majestic throne, for he expected that in heaven only God is seated, and the other heavenly beings stand. The thought crossed his mind that there might be two deities, which he considered to be a heresy of dualism. However, when he saw the outstretched hands of the angelic being beckoning him to come near, Elisha slowly approached the awe-inspiring presence of radiant light. As he came closer, the light became brighter and multicolored, and it appeared as if the colors of the rainbow made an arch above the throne. Elisha fell on his face and prostrated himself before the divine presence.

"Rise, Elisha," spoke the being of light. "I am not God. Thou shalt worship the One God only, the invisible Father of us all. I am his messenger, Metatron, the angel of the divine presence. I was the angel sent to preserve you and bring you to this place. This place is the crown of your achievement."

Elisha suddenly felt the crown of his head light up with a thousand lights, and he felt himself transformed into a new creature, a being of light. He noticed that Metatron was holding a large book in his hands, and that he was writing the name Elisha ben Abuyah in it. At the feet of Metatron (within the folds of his vast white robe) sat four living creatures: a lion, an eagle, a man, and an ox. The four living creatures became the wheels of a chariot, and Metatron motioned for Elisha to sit in the chariot. As Elisha sat in the chariot, he felt himself transported to another dimension.

The last thing Elisha saw, as the chariot started moving and vibrating at an accelerated rate, was a fiery bolt of lightning striking the grave of Elisha. His disciple Meir put out the fire with his cloak. The smoke rising from the grave ascended into the heavens, and the voice of Meir trailed the spirit of Elisha rising into the air with the words: "Elisha, the Other One, will be redeemed by virtue of his knowledge of the Torah."

The voice of Bannus rang out in the cave, "Come back, Little One, come back." Paul felt like a lost soul drifting in the outer regions of Sheol for a moment. And then he felt the chariot of the light-body descend back to the entrance at the crown of his head. He saw with his mind's eye the light dissolve back into darkness.

Paul opened his physical eyes and looked at Bannus smiling at him.