

THE PLACE OF RECONCILIATION

By Ellen Winner, J.D.

Last July, a few weeks after my seventieth birthday, I had a dream in which an authoritative male voice matter-of-factly announced, “God is calling you home.” In the dream, I found myself between and slightly behind two men I didn’t know, standing so that we formed a triangle. Another voice remarked that the three of us would be leaving together.

Fear of death has plagued me since childhood, so it was odd that it all seemed so ordinary. I would never personally have said, “calling you home.” Those were words for sanctimonious preachers or for church ladies to echo to each other with false assurance. Yet in the dream, they felt obvious and right, with no sense at all of whistling in the dark. Being “called home” was nothing more than a natural next step, something mildly pleasurable to look forward to.

I didn’t tell my family because I thought it would scare them, but made a note in my journal just in case. If anything happened, I wanted everyone to know I’d been “called home” rather than “snatched by the cruel jaws of death,” or “cut down by the grim reaper.” And now that months have passed since the dream, I’m no longer worried about waking up dead any time soon. It got my attention though – enough to investigate further.

Already familiar with Raymond Moody and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’s *Perry’s Life After Life*,¹ I now read neurosurgeon Eben Alexander’s *Proof of Heaven*² and Jeff Long and Paul Perry’s *Evidence of the Afterlife*³ and found several good websites.⁴ A common element of the near-death experience is a “life review” in which a loving spirit shows you, without judgment, scenes from your life when you caused harm to others. Fully experiencing the hurtful emotions you caused as if they were your own, you are moved to compassion. You are so deeply sorry for the pain you caused you have no desire even to try to justify your actions; and at the same time, you understand how your own pain and ignorance caused you to act that way and are able to forgive yourself. The loving spirit also lets you relive the kind acts you performed so you can fully realize how important they were.

Exploratory Journey to the Place of Reconciliation

In addition to learning about the near-death experiences of others, as a shamanic practitioner I felt compelled to investigate further with a journey to my own death. Imagining myself on my deathbed, I traveled upward, passing through a line of demarcation into a darkish place I took to be an “interworld”⁵

between the Middle and Upper Worlds in non-ordinary reality. There, stretching into the distance as far as the eye could see, was a scene of thousands of human heads and bodies like the views on television of massed protests in Egypt’s Tahrir Square. I understood that these were all the people who had shared the Earth with me during my life, and wondered briefly how the ones who were still alive on Earth could also be here in this after-death place. But it didn’t matter. There we all were, together in a gigantic crowd – middle-eastern men with beards, Africans, Asians, Americans, children, babies, women and men, of all ages, races and nationalities. Some I felt good about and some, like the Taliban men I could see in the far distance, could have been frightening, yet I felt no fear. The whole human mass was gently vibrating, jostling together as though settling in, reconciling to each other.

A surge of social anxiety triggered a temptation to come out of the journey until I heard a male voice say, “The principle of beauty applies here.” I refocused in non-ordinary reality. Everyone here was in it together. No one could escape, and in this place we no longer had power to do each other harm. There was nothing we could do but reconcile – accept each other as we were. That’s what the voice meant. We had to find beauty in this place because this was our whole reality and beauty was there to be found.

I began to sense the movement of compassion in the crowd as individuals focused on each other, feeling each other’s pain and grief as their own. This was a life review on a very large scale – but different from near-death experiences I’d read about because I wasn’t being asked to confront things I had personally done to hurt others. I had come into the journey with a strong need to understand dying, and now the compassionate spirits were showing me this place.

I knew it was real place in non-ordinary reality that others could visit, staying as long as they wished. The words, “The Place of Reconciliation,” sprang to mind like a recognition of its true name. As the journey ended, I knew I would be back.

The journey reminded me that compassion is a natural law for human beings. Despite the existence of selfishness and cruelty in the world (no one can deny that “survival of the fittest” is one of life’s operating principles), the highest law is love and connection. When we don’t feel scared or threatened – and in the Place of Reconciliation we don’t – compassion automatically arises.

You may be wondering what makes me so sure the place I reached in my journey is reliably compassionate and safe. What if a bully or criminal arrived there, someone so damaged they had no experience or capacity to care about the well-being of others? How could they be expected to suddenly begin feeling kindness and goodwill just because they had come to this Place? I can only say that in my journey I never thought to question my sense that bad behavior was impossible there – any more than I questioned the truth and basic kindness of the message in my dream that “God was calling me home.” If you journey to the Place of Reconciliation, you will experience it as it shows itself to you and see for yourself.

We are hard-wired to pay extra attention to the thoughts and emotions that help us react to threat. This is an ancient strategy to keep us alive in a dangerous world. Yet when not disturbed by threat, we naturally settle into a happy resting state. When physical death has already happened, where is the need to continue running instinctual behaviors to avoid it? I found the Place of Reconciliation in a journey beyond my own death, and that’s the only way short of actual physical death I know for anyone to reach it. It

makes sense to me that whoever arrives, no matter how brutalized by life, must succumb to its harmonizing forces.

Compassion is a tool, a skillful means for arriving at reconciliation, acceptance, and harmony with the rest of the universe, defined by Webster’s as “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.” I would add that in the Place of Reconciliation compassion is more than a desire to relieve another’s suffering: it’s a heartfelt will to do so.

As a place of compassion, the Place of Reconciliation is a destination for healing, where shamans can journey for healing.

Based on my own impressions and reports from others I’ve introduced to this journey, visitors to the Place of Reconciliation discover a deep appreciation for the suffering of others and a strong and heartfelt will to make it better. They feel truly sorry. Their compassion can be so strong it sends out tendrils of force to surround and dig beneath the pain, lifting it out and away from a person’s soul.

Compassion can help you see your client as a hurt child and give free rein to your instinct to rush to his side and make the pain go away. In the Place of

Reconciliation that kind of compassion is the operating principle. It is the law. Everyone knows there’s no way out. They’re stuck there together with nothing to do but adapt and accept it as it is. No one has the power to harm anyone else, and no one can be harmed. The only movement possible is the movement toward beauty, harmony, and total reconciliation with what’s there. (Note that reconciliation, a movement toward life, is not the same as resignation, which is a giving up to the numbness of despair.)

Instructions for an Exploratory Journey to the Place of Reconciliation

Intent: to visit the Place of Reconciliation in non-ordinary reality to learn about it and experience the compassion there. Be open and willing to accept whatever happens and alert to witness kind, loving acts between beings in that Place.

You come to the Place of Reconciliation by right. It is a place in non-ordinary reality designed for you. You see it as your own. The others are there both for you and for themselves. You come as one of them.



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Travel upward to the Place of Reconciliation. Watch for a line of demarcation, probably not as definite as that between the Middle and Lower Worlds. Ask for a compassionate guide to meet you there. It can be an angel, sage, saint, religious deity, ascended master, ancestor, or friend who has passed on before you, or any other being of power who loves you unconditionally and whom you trust. The guide is to assist you in giving and receiving forgiveness and reconciliation.

Let this be a personal journey, just for you, to a place you will be taken after death for reconciliation with those who lived with you on earth – or since there's no time there, we could even call it a place where your reconciliation is going on right now. Your Place of Reconciliation may not look at all like the one I experienced. We all see things differently in our journeys.

Unity of All Things

“In shamanism, we repeatedly receive messages from our spirits that everything is alive and able to communicate. And the more we journey, the more our spirits teach us lessons of unity with a loving universe.”⁶

Thaddeus Golas, an intrepid LSD cosmonaut of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, who well understood the unity of all beings, wrote about his acid trips to help his brothers and sisters on this dangerous path deal with bad trips. A marvelous teaching he brought back was, “Love is the action of being in the same space with other beings.”⁷ In the Place of Reconciliation, we have no choice but to be in the same space with other beings. Our willed action of going there and our commitment not to leave is an act of love.

Golas describes how consciousness can expand to a level he calls “space,” or the One Mind, where we feel at one with all life. The One Mind, by definition, has a place and space within it for every being and everything that happens. If we fail to recognize a part of all that is and dismiss it as ugly, low, stupid, or unworthy of our acceptance in whatever

way, we deprive ourselves of access to the wisdom, power, and love contained in that part and basically create a shadow that won't go away until we accept it. When we journey to the Place of Reconciliation, we deliberately put ourselves into the same space with beings we failed to fully accept in the past, with the intent to accept them now (which is the same as saying the intent to love them now).

A Healing Journey to the Place of Reconciliation

Annoyed by chronic back and rib pain one evening shortly after my first journey to the Place of Reconciliation, and aware of Thaddeus Golas's teaching that pain is the experience of not being able to get into the same space with others,⁸ I thought of returning to seek relief. I could certainly use a little compassion.

This time I found the Place subtly changed – less dark and a little higher up – as though progress had been made in the reconciliation process since my first visit. I felt a greater sense of harmony. My body spread out, expanding to include within its boundaries every one of those multitudes who shared the earth with me in life. Focusing on the beings in my back and ribs where it hurt, I felt their compassion for me and for each other as they continued to harmonize, engaged in a process of recognizing each other's presence and consciously replacing feelings of antagonism or resistance with acceptance. They were willing to be in the same space as my pain; they felt compassion for my suffering and each other's; and their love and acceptance lessened my pain.

A good strategy for dealing with pain is to stop resisting and accept it. You can test this out for yourself if you happen to burn your finger. Instead of rushing to the faucet to numb it with cold water, focus on it. Concentrate as the pain comes up, reaches its peak, and then recedes. It will be gone in much less time than if you tried to avoid feeling it. In my journey, all I had to do was focus on the pain and notice that spirits in my back and ribs were present and feeling compassion, and something shifted to

lessen the pain.

Becoming aware of spirits who live inside your body at the site of pain and making a space for them to reconcile is always a good strategy for dealing with both physical and emotional pain. If you take a step back and look at the pain objectively, you'll notice it's arising simultaneously with resistance to it. As shamans we know that everything has a spirit, and that includes both the pain and the resistance. You can have compassion for both these spirits. In the Place of Reconciliation you find extra support for bringing these warring spirits into acceptance of each other.

The Place of Reconciliation can also help deal with after-effects of trauma. The consequences of trauma can be greatly alleviated by administering psychological first aid at the time of the trauma. If someone is there at the time of the injury to comfort a victim of disaster or battle, the long-term need for treatment is lessened. (In shamanic terms, the effects of soul loss are reduced.) First responders are taught to show immediate compassion, engaging with victims and ensuring their safety and comfort. In the Place of Reconciliation, outside time, you may be given psychological first aid as you re-experience a trauma in the presence of healing compassion. When you come out of the journey, you may notice the memories of the trauma in your body and mind have become less insistent.

Instructions for a Healing Journey to the Place of Reconciliation

Intent: to journey to the Place of Reconciliation in non-ordinary reality and ask for healing of pain you have. It can be physical or emotional. It can be anything from a chronic back pain to a constant negative reaction you've been having to a situation or person in your life.

Identify where in your body the problem is. Locate the physical pain, or if you want to work with a chronic negative reaction or emotion, allow yourself to feel the emotion fully, and then ask, “Where in my body do I feel this most strongly?”

Then visualize that part of your body and work there. You can identify the place in your body before you start the journey or wait until you're in the journey to scan your body and find the place of pain. Pain often moves around, and you can follow it if you need to. But begin by locating a place to start where the pain seems most intense and work with the beings you find there.

At the Place of Reconciliation ask to meet at least two beings who are most involved with your pain. It may be that merely recognizing them and knowing they're working with compassion in this Place of Reconciliation will make the pain go away; or you may have to give them a little help to reconcile with each other. You can simply remind them that you are all here together in the Place of Reconciliation where compassion is the law, and ask them to make friends with each other, accept each other fully, and be willing to be in the same space with each other.

No judgment, no straining to get rid of anyone – not even a spirit of someone who hurt you in the past or someone you quarreled with, rejected, and could never forgive. In the Place of Reconciliation, you are able to forgive and be forgiven for everything.

You might ask to see both the spirit who's resisting the pain and the spirit who seems to be causing it by trying to arise and be noticed. Acceptance and love, the action of being in the same space with the other beings, is what happens here.

You may find a male and female spirit at odds with each other in the painful place in your body. Let them know that all acceptance is here and if necessary, help them reconcile their differences.

You can do this type of healing process in the Middle World without journeying anywhere except inside your own body, but the results are supported and magnified by doing it in the Place of Reconciliation where every being is willfully exercising compassion and learning to accept all that is.

A Journey to the Place of Reconciliation for Healing for Another

The Place of Reconciliation can also be a place where shamans take others to be healed. Asked to do shamanic work for a friend who suffers from “altered cells” in his brain that cause short black-out seizures, I decided to journey to see if healing would be there for him.

Again I traveled upward from the middle world, this time merged with a lower world helper and carried my friend's reclining body in my arms like a sick child. I had to go even higher than before to find the line of demarcation between the Middle World and the Place of Reconciliation. Crossing it easily, I saw that the crowd had grown larger. People's heads and bodies stretched so far into the distance they looked like the tops of pine trees on a mountain seen from an airplane at twenty thousand feet. I questioned whether we were in the right place. Puffy dark clouds moved in and blocked the scene, and I felt us floating even higher. When the clouds cleared I could make out individual people nearby with compassionate helping spirits bending over to help them, and knew we had reached the right place.

I asked for healing for my friend and sensed we were inside

his skull, my helping spirit and I, surrounded by his distinctly identifiable but diffuse spirit. I became aware that many, many of his ancestors were here inside the skull with us. At first they seemed uncomfortable with each other, trying to avoid physical contact, but this was the Place of Reconciliation so I knew they'd soon settle down and start accepting each other. As this happened, disembodied feelings of love began to arise. I simply witnessed, feeling what was going on. When it was time to come back, the harmonization was still in progress, so I left my friend and spirit helper there and returned to ordinary reality, knowing they would gently return when the process was complete.

As in both my previous journeys to the Place of Reconciliation, things seemed to happen without my active participation, confirming that this was indeed a Place of Power. I knew I couldn't have created it by myself with my own little imagination.

As all shamans know, the spirits are always happiest when we work to help someone else. You can bring others in need of healing to the Place of Reconciliation and ask the spirits there to help them.

Instructions for a Journey to the Place of Reconciliation to Heal Another

Intent: to take another person (referred to here as the “client”) to the Place of Reconciliation and ask the compassionate spirits to heal them.

If you know someone in need of healing, ask if they would be willing to journey with you to the Place of Reconciliation and open themselves to any healing that's available. Have them describe a pain they're experiencing, physical or emotional, and encourage them to locate it in their body and tell you where it is. If they are unable to locate an emotional issue in their body, it's not necessary to press them. The spirits will know where the healing work is needed.

Bring your client with you to the Place of Reconciliation. Ask for compassionate spirits to be present and for a healing for your client.

If you can see or sense spirits that are causing the pain in your client's body, surround them with your love and express your compassion to each one individually, letting them know how very, very sorry you are for their suffering. Remind them that you are all in the Place of Reconciliation where compassion is the law.

If you are called to take an active part in the healing, you might model the acceptance and compassion you want the beings involved in your client's pain to show toward each other. In the Place of Reconciliation, you can put yourself right inside your client's pain and feel yourself digging it out, scraping it out, lifting it out, concentrating your whole soul on making your client whole and well and happy.

This kind of compassion can feel like a physical force – an energy you could almost cut with a knife. It's that powerful.

You may be given details about the causes of your client's pain and how the healing is being accomplished. Accept whatever you learn without judgment. If you are not given such details, simply

trust that the healing is taking place. Healing that takes place in Consciousness like this is the most effective there is. Healing at this highest level automatically results in physical and emotional healing at lower levels of being.

* * *

It's not clear how many people still in bodies have been allowed to visit the Place of Reconciliation, but these journeys have been tried with good results in healing circles I belong to. The need we have on earth for this Place of Reconciliation is great, and surely the compassionate spirits there are moved by our suffering and want to help. The more we visit and use this Place for healing, the more powerful it will become.

Endnotes

- 1 Moody R. and Kubler-Ross E. *Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon--Survival of Bodily Death*. New York, NY: HarperCollins; 2001.
- 2 Alexander E. *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks; 2012.
- 3 Long J. and Perry P. *Evidence of the Afterlife: The Science of Near-Death Experiences*. New York, NY: HarperCollins; 2010.
- 4 See, e.g., Near Death Experience Research Center. <<http://www.nderf.org/>>. Accessed 10/25/2013.

- 5 Harner, M. *Cave and Cosmos: Shamanic Encounters with Another Reality*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books; 2013. Harner describes the interworld as "narrow bands of particular spirits at the interfaces of the Middle World with the Upper and Lower ones." p. 68.
- 6 Mokolke S. "Why Study Core Shamanism?" <<http://www.shamanism.org/articles/article15.html>>. Accessed 10/26/2013.
- 7 Golas T. *The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment*. Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith; 1995, p. 57. "Beings," of course, include all things, because all are conscious and alive.
- 8 Golas. *Ibid.* p. 42.

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