

The Soul Speaks in Waves

Katrina hits New Orleans, levees break, and the city is submerged – like Atlantis. I want to go; I ache to go. My heart feels as if pulled from my chest, taking my body south where they need me. I see a man's face, in my dreams; his face black and strong, his eyes of sparkling amber. "Where are you," he asks?

"I am coming," I reply.

Again and again I see him: while sitting in rush hour traffic, gathering my groceries, walking my Jack Russell, Scotty, amongst the woods that I call home. I see him there. The face appears over and over until I can finally answer with certainty, sitting in seat 16A on Delta Flight 298 to New Orleans, "I am coming." As my sister drives me to the airport, I speak not a word. I'm too busy contemplating my destiny. I'm going to meet someone who will change my life forever, I think. My life will never be the same from here on out, I believe. This, right here, right now, is THE pivotal moment of my existence. I am assured.

Sitting in the plane I think back to how I predicted this event – just two months ago. It was right before my daughter, Nicki's, wedding when I dreamt it. Did I dream it into being? The day after the dream, the day before the wedding, as we were decorating the trees with white ribbons, I told my niece, Jessica, what I saw. The wedding was being held at my sister's nursery. Sharon, my sister and Jessica's mother, owns the most beautiful piece of property right up the street from where I live. She has 32 acres, several greenhouses, a few buildings, and a barn; rolling hills, a pond, a stream, and a gazillion plants, trees and shrubs. As Jessica and I were working the crinoline around the base of a large oak, I confide in her my vision. "I dreamed last night of a horrific event," I say, monotone; an almost trance-like state, "and I believe it is coming soon."

She looks in my eyes as I continue, "I saw what looked like a tsunami, like what happened in January . . . in Indonesia? . . ." Jessica nods, "but this time the waters rise up, like a big lake," I say, moving my arms out wide, "suffocating a city; suffocating the people, the trees; the animals." Tears well up in my eyes as I conclude, "Lots of people will die – but not the numbers found in Indonesia. It will be here where it happens - in the United States - somewhere in the south." I stare at the ground beneath me, and then up to the sky, finally taking a breath, like I've been holding my breath the whole time - under the water of my dream.

That is what I told her, and then, two weeks later, Katrina hits. It seems to work like that with me sometimes – prophetic visions happening about two weeks in advance of the catastrophe. It happened like that for 9/11 too. Two weeks before that tragedy, I gazed out my window, with my eyes wide open, seeing what I can only describe as planes crashing into a city. That happened; and now this. The city of New Orleans is the lake I saw. And as I predicted, many did indeed die, or went “missing”. And so it is and so it will be: this horrific event - a disaster zone that I’m hoping to help out. I close my eyes and realize – I have no idea what I’m doing.

How did I get to this point in my life, I wonder? I feel like I’ve been acting like someone I’m not for far too long. The charade is over! Everything has changed. I’m connecting with myself for the first time. I can really feel who I am, now - the ME, deep down in my gut. I knew things were changing when I started hearing the voices. Though, it’s true I’ve always had a running dialog in my head. But the words are louder now – louder than they ever were before, and now they are talking directly to me. That’s the big difference. It is no longer just background noise or stupid jingles (you know, those 60’s tunes or lame commercials that get stuck in your head)? No, these are distinct voices, and they are talking directly to ME. And I’m answering, in kind.

“You are earning your courage,” they tell me. “You are learning of your spirit,” they say. “You are earning your wings,” they laugh. “Time For Transformation!” I’m not sure who is doing the talking. At first I thought it was my dear Mommom, whom I love with all my heart, even though she’s been gone for over 25 years now. She has talked to me before. Or maybe it’s my father, or even my guardian angel. I don’t know. Now I’m thinking it isn’t a “they” after all. It seems to be more like me – but MORE than me. Maybe it’s the “real” me – like my soul or spirit. I feel like I’m connecting to something bigger, and I’m enjoying the dialog and that reassuring feeling of “someone watching over me”.

Weezana

I finally get to Louisiana (or small “L” that dances right into Weezana, as they say in Baton Rouge) and it is HOT! I’m relieved to be here but still unsure exactly why I came. Like other Red Crossers, I want to “help” the “victims” and ease their pain; to lessen their “plight.” In that regard, I was in for a rude awakening. Things are not as I imagined. My “helping” is restricted by rules of the organization, and their “plight” is too big for any organization (or government) to handle, and the “victims,” I found, are just people: some good, some bad, some fat, some thin, some hurt and suffering, while others are just some cruel mother fuckers. More of a shock to me though, is the attitude of other Red Cross workers. But then again, they were just people

too: some good, some bad, some lesbians, some intellectuals, some helpful, some junkies, some too mentally unsuitable to be working in these hellish conditions. And their attitude reflected such. All and all, though, I found them to be quite a good lot!

I've never experienced a place where the majority of people around me were so much like me. At the morning shelter coffee table on my first day, I made cherished connections with those around me. I found that most Red Crossers were liberal, open minded, introspective souls who could hold a great conversation over a Twinkie and a Styrofoam instant coffee. And yes, I said Twinkie, and here is a little disaster-relief-factoid for you: even the snootiest dieter will resort to easy access food during a crisis such as Katrina. I witnessed a strict vegan eat a welfare bologna and cheese sandwich at the Resident's Shelter for breakfast. "When in Rome," she said. My new vegan friend said, too, that if we were feeding these poor slobs this crap, then damn it all, she was going to eat it too and suffer with them! Strong characters, these people; and, I am so happy to be working beside them.

After the first days in Weezana, I call home to let my husband know I'm okay and tell him what I've experienced. "You would never believe it," I say excitedly. "The people I'm meeting, my fellow Red Crossers: these are my people! They all listen to NPR, they are anti-Bush . . ." (I couldn't find a Republican within a 20 mile radius - from Baton Rouge to the broken levees!). "Not only that," I add, "a lot of people here even know who Edgar Cayce is!" My love for Edgar Cayce (the greatest psychic of the 20th Century), is seen as quite "odd" in my circle of family and friends. Here, though, is a different group; a different audience. It is here, I realize, that I've found my people and I am finding myself. I came to understand later, though, that some of these souls have been "my people" before – in other lifetimes. No wonder I liked them instantly and deeply.

I call my daughter, Nicki, and tell her what I'm really seeing and feeling. I have more of a true and authentic relationship with her. We can talk about anything. I'm sitting outside, under a lone tree in the courtyard of the Resident's Shelter, as I tell her how working at the Lamar-Dixon Red Cross Shelter in Gonzales, Louisiana is difficult, to say the least. How most Red Crossers work 12 to 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. "During orientation, they told me my first day off is two weeks away," I explain, flabbergasted. "And I'm a bit concerned since I am already feeling stressed and tired. And the big room full of New Orleans-refugees smells awful, too," I whine, "it's also very noisy and dusty. And did I mention it smells?" She laughs.

Even though I consider myself a sensitive being, I am usually not a whiner, but I am truly affected by this smell. The shelter odor seems to be a mix funk of what I can only describe as a cross between old green bologna, sweaty bed-sheets, and dirty diaper. When Red Crossers leave the Residents Shelter to come back to the Volunteer Shelter to sleep, they casually state they need to wash the “shelter funk” off of them before crashing in their bed (regulation-sized army cot draped with a sleeping bag).

On the first night sleeping at the Red Cross Volunteer Shelter, I cry myself to sleep. I surprised myself, because I’m usually not much of a crier. True, I cry at poetry and a good love song (I can do this on a repeated basis every day driving to work, same song, same time of the day, same cry), but crying because I’ve been “done wrong” or in a bad situation, or feeling sorry for myself, rarely happens. On this night, however, my crying is of a different nature – not feeling sorry for myself, per se. Instead, it seems to be a release of the “shelter funk” and all the pain, frustration, and anguish I picked up from the residents at Lamar-Dixon. Because I am a “sensitive being,” this stuff seems to stick to me like the cheap mustard on the resident’s welfare bologna and cheese sandwiches. I cannot sleep. I just lie in bed (or on cot) and weep. I weep for the human condition. I weep for human suffering. I weep because I’m uncomfortable, tired and scared. And I weep because I know that each Katrina victim I’ve met is experiencing suffering much greater than mine.

The second night is the same as the first. I get angry with myself because I thought I was stronger than that. I just wasn’t expecting to “act” this way! I was expecting to be the helper, the hero – to rise to the occasion - not to fall apart! And worse, I realize, in this condition, I’m not much benefit to “the cause.” Being so tired and worn out from not sleeping makes me less effective at the Resident’s Shelter. In addition, because I’m so tired and stressed, my nature is one to start to retreat inward, becoming more stand-offish and shy – how people sometimes do when they are having a bad day - holding their breath and waiting for it to be over. That is my usual coping strategy. I find this is not a good way to respond in this situation. You see, frustrated refugees will pounce on a Red Cross Volunteer when they are stand-offish and shy.

A Katrina refugee stuck in a Red Cross Shelter is like a boil that starts to grow on the day they arrive and continues developing pus at each and every disappointment and loss. They are pissed off because of their “condition” - and don’t get me wrong, I believe they have every right to be. They have nowhere to go after weeks of time stuck in this smelly hell, their pets are lost or dead, their brother/child/mother is dead; the pre-Katrina life they knew and loved is dead.

The boil is growing and ready to pop. An uncontrollable need to release the pain makes a shy naive Red Crosser the perfect scapegoat.

Landon Lewis senses my fear and pounced. Yelling at me for at least ten minutes, he insults the Red Cross, threatens me - cussing me up and down and sideways – demanding an answer to his logical question: “what good are you? What GOOD are you???!” He may not realize it, but he just acted out in this way, as a way to release his steam so he did not pop; so he did not go crazy. As a trained psychologist (though I’ve never practiced – on paying customers, anyway - just on a daily basis with family and friends) I could appreciate Mr. Lewis’ condition. However, his hateful intense gaze and negative energy did not draw me to him so that I could help him. Instead, it acted like a vacuum, deflating my spirit. I felt like an old balloon that lost all its air: dirty, stepped on, crumpled on the sticky floor. I came back to the Volunteer Shelter lost and deflated. It is all a circle of anger, I know. Anger is infectious like the flu, like the plague. Someone threw some funk on Mr. Lewis and he proceeded to throw it my way, and now I was smothering in funk! Whereas Landon Lewis exploded to release his boiling anger, I was on the verge of imploding, like a black hole, and would have too, I am certain, if not for my awakening which occurred that very evening.

As I walk into the Volunteer Shelter my head hangs low. All the Red Crossers are smoking cigarettes and sitting outside talking with the security guards. They don’t ask me to join them; I guess they can smell the funk and thought I would be best left alone. At any rate, I walk past the table of mismatched bath products and the wall of cards sent to Katrina victims by children from an elementary school a thousand miles away. The cards are there to cheer us up - words of encouragement out of the mouths of babes. I read one, and then another. They do seem to elevate me a bit; like a breath of fresh air re-inflating my balloon. I am moved, feeling the sincerity in these little cherubs’ simple sentiments: “May God Bless You,” they say, “May You Find A New Home Away From The Flooding,” says another, “That Sure Was A Lot Of Water,” writes the third. There were others of more traditional greetings. I stare at one that said “Get Well Soon.” Reflecting on Mr. Lewis I thought, “Well, that is easier said than done.”

As I stood there, I began to experience a change in perspective (which sometimes is all it takes to keep us here on planet earth). A small change in perspective can help move us from thoughts of “suicide” to something higher on the emotional scale, such as “despair”. As a result of this change in perspective, my head, like the proverbial balloon, didn’t hang quite so low. And because my head wasn’t hanging so low, I noticed a sign posted on the wall above the

children's letters. It read "Yoga and Meditation Tonight at 7pm in the Choir Room." "Hmmm - that's odd," I think inquisitively - resulting in yet another step up on the perspective ladder: "curiosity."

The Red Cross Volunteer Shelter is located in a large Southern Baptist Church. I found out later that The Red Cross negotiates with different buildings around a disaster zone to find adequate space to hold the victims and volunteers. They contract with them and pay them to use the buildings; often times these buildings are in churches, or like in Lamar-Dixon's case, a fairground. Initially I thought maybe the yoga being offered was for the Southern Baptists, and not for the Red Cross Volunteers at all, but then I realize that would be pretty progressive: Yoga and Meditation at a Southern Baptist Church in Louisiana. I didn't find that likely. My thoughts begin to clear, "I guess it is more likely the Yoga is for us - the Red Cross Volunteers. And maybe it is for me . . ." I decide I would *consider* checking it out.

At dinner over jambalaya (AGAIN) I meet a man named Frank. Truth be told, I really don't mind all the jambalaya – I actually grew to enjoy the dish. With its strange combination of meats and seafood, vegetables, grease, and hot spices, it has a way of settling you down by not only filling you up, but by filling that desire - that unfulfilled need, or hole – that some people feel when scared and alone, in this strange place called weezana. Or maybe the spices have a way of burning off the shelter funk. I don't know. I just know I like it. And it fit well in a styro-foam cup and could readily be eaten with a spoon or fork; and if worse comes to worse, even a coffee stirrer, or spork.

I fell in love with Creole cooking during Katrina relief and I now season most every meal, especially my eggs, with Tony Chachere's Original Creole Seasoning. Tony Chachere's manufacturing plant, boasted the locals, Praise-The-Lord, did not receive an ounce of damage during the storm. "It was a sign," said the little old lady cooking Cajun outside of the Resident's Shelter. I felt bad having to ask her to repeat her story a few times but I was having a hard time understanding her through her high pitched enthusiasm, strong Cajun accent, and lack of teeth. I smiled and nodded and put my styro-foam cup out for another helping. "And wasn't I suppose to be feeding her," I thought?

Yoga Addiction

Frank is an ex-alcoholic who had his fair share of hard knocks, it seems, looking at his lined face and the slight shake of his hands. Yet Frank is so open and genuine, that even in my funk,

I want to hear his story and share in his pain. He explains to me how he lost his wife, his job, everything, because of his drinking. I'm so tired, however, I can barely see straight to witness to his story. "I'm not feeling too bad these days," he tells me. "I did yoga and meditation last week and it changed my life," he adds, radiantly. I just nod; almost dozing off.

Frank keeps on and on about the yoga and meditation. Though, I just couldn't understand. How can Frank be so affected by something he did last week, I wonder? And how can yoga have helped losing a wife, job and everything, from drink? Sure, if I did a good aerobics class or had a good run, I would feel pretty good that day and maybe even the next, but Frank said he did the yoga last week and it was still affecting him - changed his life! The fact of the matter, it seems, is that this man was happy and he wanted some more of what put him into that state of bliss: meditation and yoga. I guess it is like any addiction, I think. He wants me go with him tonight and I told him I would – but that can only happen after I calm my own addiction. So I get up and proceed to the kitchen for another helping jambalaya.

After dinner, Frank and I walk into the Choir Room where we are instructed to grab a mat and sit on the floor. It seems ironic to be there. After all the weirdness I've experienced over the past two days dealing with hundreds and hundreds of people living like caged animals in a Red Cross Shelter, it is simply odd to be sitting on a yoga mat on the clean spacious floor of the Choir Room in a Southern Baptist Church, awaiting peace. It seems selfish too. Just being there was a big deal to me, and I'm not sure why. Anxiously, I look to the front of the room at my instructors - two fresh-faced young girls wearing purple AMURT T-shirts. AMURT is a relief organization, like The Red Cross, based out of India. The girls are standing by a very tall black man, also wearing an AMURT T-shirt. He has amber eyes. I recognize him right away.

When Heather, one of the two girls, begins instructing our small group in yoga, I can feel my breathing begin to level out. After a few minutes I notice I'm not holding my breath any longer - as I often do when under stress. "I'm actually breathing in deeply, and then breathing out fully," I think, "how elementary, and yet how extraordinary!" My body begins to enjoy this process of regular oxygen intake and it too begins to relax. The tightness in my chest also eases as my heart realizes it does not have to work so hard. My system is returning to normal: homeostasis.

Heather maneuvers her helper, whose name is "Fresh," in the front of the room to demonstrate the postures, which is a good thing, since I'm having problems hearing some of her instructions because the tall black man with amber eyes to the right of me keeps laughing. And when he starts laughing, the young girls break out laughing too. He cannot seem to do the postures very

well because of his size, especially his unusually long legs, and the girls find his attempts to be quite hysterical. The laughing is a nice sound to hear after two days of the antithesis, I think, though I do find it odd to see people acting so carefree and easy during such a serious situation (Katrina relief, in general; the plight of the shelter victims, in particular). But their laughing makes me smile in spite of myself and my heart lightens. It seems for the first time in a long time that I begin to feel hopeful: that everything is not only going to be okay, but it already is. Most importantly, I feel a new desire well up in me: “I want some of what they’ve got. Whatever that is - that essence, that energy, that ability to be at peace, in the mist of chaos – I want that!”

After 30 minutes of yoga we are asked to lie back on our mats for shavasana (corpse pose) while the lights are turned down low. Heather walks around and repositions each of our bodies to a more naturally aligned state by adjusting our heads, neck and legs. She inhales a long slow breath close to my face and releases an even longer exhale. My body automatically mimics this breathing, and I sink further into the floor. She closes my eyes with her thumbs, with the confidence of a priest, and then takes her right thumb and places it at the top of my forehead. She then makes the tracing of a cross. I smile inside and out. At that moment I feel so loved and cared for – again - like I haven’t felt in such a long time. I think, too, that this world can’t be so god damn bad, regardless of my incident with Landon Lewis today. How can it be that bad when there are these two lovely young girls wearing purple AMURT T-Shirts doing yoga in the Choir Room of the Gonzales Southern Baptist Church with a large black laughing man who just so happens to have those same amber eyes that have been calling me to come to here; to come to him? I give up and I laugh too.

After shavasana, I sit up feeling refreshed. My body is happy now – as if I am no longer aware of it - which may seem counterintuitive since the goal of yoga is to connect the mind to the body through the breath. After the yoga experience, however, I can’t even feel my body because it is so at ease. There is none of that usual twitching of a muscle here, or tapping of a foot or hand there; there are no aches, pains, or strains; just peace. My body is without need, so I sit there happily looking around, in a slight daze, wondering if it’s over. I am about to roll up my mat and say goodbye – for I thought I had experienced this great yoga and meditation that was advertised on the flier. But actually, that is not the case at all. The best is yet to come.

Heather brings her hands in front of her, as if in prayer, and slightly bows her head to each of us. “Namaste’,” she says. She then explains the meaning of the word: “the divine in me,

honors the divine in you,” she says, with a Mona Lisa smile. She actually is glowing like an angel, I think. How beautiful, and again, extraordinary.

“Namaste” I repeat, clumsily. “Namaste’- I like that word,” I think. “Namaste’ is what this world could use a bit more of: respect for your fellow man (who, like you, is nothing short of a miracle). Think of the possibilities of a world where instead of ‘Hello’ or ‘Have a Nice Day,’ friends and strangers are greeted instead with the word Namaste’. What a wonderful world this could be.

Heather walks over to the laughing man and they both giggle as she tries to pull him to his feet. His legs are somehow twisted up from the yoga and since he is so tall and wearing jeans that are too tight in some areas and not tight enough in others, and since he has been sitting for so long, he couldn’t get up. Fresh comes over to grab his other hand and gives him a pull. The laughing man topples over and all three of them are chuckling now, which makes me feel so warm inside just by watching them. I think, “there is another thing this world could use a bit more of - simple laughter.” After the girls finally raise their yoga victim to his feet, they bend down to rearrange their yoga mats so they can sit down, side by side, facing the front of the room. They stare ahead with great anticipation.

It is the laughing man who now takes to the front of the room. He sits down in an orange elementary school chair – or tries to - his knees buckling to his chest. He finally stretches out his legs - a mile out in front of him, and still managing to stay seated on the chair, he smiles. Everyone laughs. I smile back at him, and then look over as Frank catches my eye. He is grinning with an expectant nod as if the rollercoaster ride was about to begin. The yoga girls are looking up at their friend as if they were waiting for the Jewish Carpenter to break the loaves and preach the gospel.

“There is definitely an air about this man,” I think, “that reeks divine.” Yet, all the jocularity seems contrary to my impression of Jesus (or my Catholic interpretation of him, anyway). “That loving, open, playfulness coming from this man with amber eyes is more like Buddha,” I realize, “or what little I know of Buddha.” The laughing man is a combo person, I decide - a cross between the laughing Buddha and the compassionate Christ. Now wouldn’t that be a lethal combination? Jesus’ love, compassion and mercy, combined with Buddha’s joy? “Such joy is like chocolate icing on a brownie,” I think, “or chocolate icing on anything, I guess. That would be a religion I could swallow!” My mind gets distracted for the first time after the yoga as I

wonder if they left the jambalaya on the stove for us and I make a mental note to check the kitchen directly after class.

His name is LEOTHA, he tells us, and he is going to lead us in Guided Imagery Meditation. I think back to when I've tried meditation before, by myself, on my bed. Since that was "unguided," maybe that was why it was so unsuccessful - or at least uneventful. I had tried meditation a few times and since I didn't feel immediate results, like anything, I just gave up. "Maybe this time will be different," I hope. I notice the yoga girls busily preparing themselves for the event by putting on warm socks, taking a drink, and getting comfortable. "Boy, they are really getting into this," I think. They finally get settled: seated in a perfect lotus posture with their backs straight and their chakras aligned (though I didn't know what either "lotus" or "chakras" were at the time).

Frank is lying prostrate on his mat, face-up, with eyes closed; but still the expectant smile. I sit with my legs crossed underneath me like an Indian. I'm sure there is a special word for this position, I think, but at this time "Indian Position" is all I know and is good enough for me. LEOTHA, reading my mind, says "you can stay seated, or lie down. Whatever makes you comfortable; whatever position works for you." I was seated as he began the session, but within a minute of his sedative voice, I find myself lying on my back, vacant, and barely conscious. Frank lay snoring (aggressively) beside me.

LEOTHA guides us through the meditation by first having us relax. He asks us to imagine we were in a safe place in nature. That I can easily do. I have a pretty good imagination and I love being out in nature, so I simply imagine I'm in the Arizona Desert sitting on the red rocks of Sedona. The rocks feel warm from the sun, a light breeze is blowing through my hair, and a little lizard is sitting beside me. I've been happy every time I'd been to Sedona in the past, and now I feel happy here, just by being in Sedona in my mind. How extraordinary.

Next LEOTHA has us "ground ourselves" by imagining that we are a tree and that our feet are like the roots of a tree, snaking down into the center of the earth, or Gaia. Gaia, I found out later, is a term frequently used by the New Agers (for lack of a better term) as the name for the living planet earth. It comes from Greek Mythology as Goddess earth. Or, states LEOTHA, we can imagine that we have a grounding cord going from the base of our spine down into the earth. Since I don't know what a grounding cord is exactly, I decide to switch my safe place in nature to somewhere I can be a tree (I don't want to be a cactus, for some reason), so I simply imagine I am on the beach at Long Key in Florida. Just like that, I'm transported in my mind to

the warm sunny beach and I am now a tall palm tree swaying in the wind. My roots go down, deep down into the sand, into Gaia - Mother Earth. "Wow," I think, "this is easy!"

LEOTHA instructs us to let all our negative energies, or "energies that do not serve us," to leave our bodies by transmuting them down through the imaginary root system (or through our grounding cords) into the earth, where they will be cleansed (or neutralized). With that thought, I felt a release of all the energy from the shelter and from my trip and from my messed up life, leave my body - Gone. Amazing – I start to feel so much lighter. What a relief to get the shelter funk off of my body and out of my space. What a relief to get my fear and anger and remorse out of my body. It is the perfect physical sensation of the word: RELIEF.

After our negative energy is clear from our body it is time to clear our chakras. This is done by simply imagining the opening of each chakra, like the spinning of a wheel, while mentally focusing our "minds-eye" on the location of the chakra area in our bodies. Each chakra has a color associated with it and we are to imagine that color. The first one was red and it is located at the base of our spine, below the pelvic region. I'm not certain what a chakra is but I just imagine this first wheel spinning open and clearing. I notice as I did this, the color, which initially appeared a murky brown color, became a clearer and brighter shade of red. Then we are instructed to move up to our second chakra, directly below the navel, and the same thing occurs. A murky orange/brown color begins to clear up and become a brighter orange, like the color of the sun. Next is the third chakra, below the sternum, yellow; the fourth or heart chakra is green. I actually began to see these areas and move to them BEFORE LEOTHA instructs us – "how could that be?" I wonder.

When we move up to the fifth, or the throat chakra, LEOTHA croons in his golden voice that this chakra should be a clear blue, though when I move my thoughts to that area, I see a dull colorless grey, and then feel my throat begin to constrict. I start to feel very uncomfortable physically and mentally. Fear begins to well up inside of me. "Maybe I shouldn't be doing this," I think. "Maybe I'm not ready for this - it is probably all bogus anyway." LEOTHA remains on this chakra for what appears a greater time than the others. He has us "breath in and out of this chakra". This is a simple concept in my meditative state and I just go along with his prompts. I am certain he is directing this meditation specifically to me: that he knows I am having difficulty on the throat chakra and is taking time to help me work through it. Eventually I feel the constriction in my throat ease and my fear begin to dissipate. My breath becomes slow and regular again.

We then move up to the sixth chakra, at the forehead, often referred to as “the third eye,” explains LEOTHA. My reaction to this chakra opening was significant and astounding. I immediately feel a clearing in this area, like someone is wiping the haze off the pane of my window, my third eye. “Now I can better see,” I think, “into the truth, the spirit world, into the light.” I then see an image of a pyramid, in my “mind’s eye”, with an eye superimposed on it. The image is familiar to me but I can’t recall where I’ve seen it before. “How remarkable,” I think. Finally, we move to the seventh chakra, located above the crown of the head, and I imagine that opening. As this occurs I become even lighter, spacier – and yet somehow clearer and more open than before. I feel connected to something much bigger than myself, though I don’t know what that is and yet I don’t seem to care. I stop being the third person, the witness, and I just “am” in the moment.

“Now that our chakras are open, we can better manipulate the energy in our bodies,” LEOTHA informs us in his mesmerizing voice. Next we are instructed to imagine “earth energy” running up through our legs (or the roots of our tree, or through our grounding cord), and into an imaginary brass bowl located at our pelvic floor. “Just imagine it,” he says, and “it will be.” At this time, I begin to feel something physically and energetically move in my body: a vibration, a pulsing, or something like light or heat waves, coming up my legs and gathering at my pelvic region, stopping directly before my belly button.

We are then instructed to imagine energy coming down into our body, through the crown of our heads, from the cosmos. You would think this might be hard to imagine, such a fanciful concept, however, that is not the case for me. I can see the energy streaming down my head and neck, into my shoulder and arms, down my back and abdomen, and landing in the brass bowl at the base of my pelvic floor, just like he said. The energies are to mix, he informs us. At that time mine begin swirling and changing (and just like the chakra colors - I swear I saw them before he even prompted us) and like a vacuum cleaner, moving about various parts of my body, cleaning and clearing out all my pain and discomfort (my “dis-ease,” as LEOTHA put it).

The energies are continuing to pour in from mother earth, Gaia, and the cosmos and were building up in my body until LEOTHA instructs us to imagine the energies exploding out the top of our head, bathing our auras, and going down to the base of our feet - back into mother earth, where the energy will once again be cleansed. This took a second or two and afterward, I feel so clean and clear; like a newborn babe. At this point we are encouraged to fly about (in our

minds) wherever we like – other places in nature, other planets, other star systems. It is then that I see my beloved grandmother, who, even though deceased, becomes very alive and real to me in this state. My Mommom holds me in her arms and tells me she loves me. She hands me one of her homemade cookies that she would set aside for me for I liked the burned ones. I ate it. I can taste the tart charcoal of the burnt butter cookie. I tell her how much I miss her and she gives me a squeeze.

Then, the scene changes and I see myself on the couch at my childhood home. My head cuddled into my father's strong chest. I notice I can feel him even more strongly than I did my grandmother; I can smell his cologne and as he holds me I feel the familiar hair of his arms. Tears begin streaming down my cheeks, soaking the yoga mat beneath me. I have so much love and gratitude for this moment in time (and yet – isn't this just all in my head, I think?) that I start laughing. Regardless of the fact that it may just be my imagination, the experience is beyond words, and beyond any description I can write here. This moment is a gift, I know: beyond the speakable, beyond mere words, and truly, beyond this physical realm. I bask in the moment for as long as I can.

Eventually LEOTHA brings us all “back in the room” and asks us to call back our life-force energy. We are to do this by imagining good times in our lives where we felt happy and “in our power.” We are to capture the feeling, not the memory, of those times. I am crying again, but out of joy; pure joy. Like a recognition of someone you thought you'd never see again – there I was – oh JOY! The “me-ness” of me is pouring back into my body; that fresh childlike me – the spirit me who was open and loving and free from fear. I feel amazing. It is as if a protective armor that I've placed around my heart, is removed; a barricade separating me from my spirit is lifted. As bandage upon bandage unraveled for each wound I've experienced in this life (and let me tell you, like most of us, there are a lot of bandages and a lot of wounds) I become cleaner; clearer. The unraveling started during the chakra clearing and continued throughout the meditation. Now, without the barricade and the armor, and with LEOTHA's loving guidance, I am allowed to return to the connection we are all born with – the connection to Source – the connection to my spirit; my soul. I find God in this moment, and she is me.

After we sit up, I am speechless. LEOTHA goes around the group for everyone to share their experience of the meditation. When he finally turns to me, I am afraid I won't be able to

formulate words into a sentence. Surprising myself, I speak confidently: “You are why I am here. You are who I came to see.”

The New Me

Nine years later, I am a new person. I've spent this time endorsing LEOTHA and the ideas of yoga and meditation. I've become a Yoga Teacher, a Reiki Master, an Adept in The Modern Mystery School and was inducted into The Swami Order. I featured LEOTHA at many retreats and at a festival I created called KarmaFest (The Ultimate Holistic/Psychic/Yoga Festival) which I hold 2-3 times a year since my “awakening.” Together we have touched thousands and thousands of people. I continue to do so. LEOTHA helps me from “the other side” since his passing in 2012.