

YOU AND YOUR STORY

Imagine that you knew at birth that you were a master, that you were powerful beyond measure, that you possessed enormous gifts, and that all it would take to deliver your gifts to the world was your desire. Imagine that you came into this world with your heart filled with the healing power of love and that your only desire was to bestow that love onto all those around you. Imagine that you had the innate ability to create and have all that you want and all that you need. Is it possible that at some point in your life you knew that there was no one else in the world like you? And that in every fiber of your being you knew that you not only possessed the light of the world, but that you were the light of the world? Is it possible that at one time you knew who you were at the deepest level and you rejoiced in your gifts? Take a moment now, and see if you can remember that time when you knew the truth of who you really are.

Then something happened. Your world changed. Something or someone cast a shadow on your light. From that moment on you feared that you and your precious gifts were no longer safe in the world. You felt that if you didn't hide your sacred gift it might be abused, injured, or taken away from you. Deep inside, you knew that this gift was like a precious, innocent child that was yours to protect. So you did what any good parent would do: You hid all your magnificence deep inside so that no one would ever discover it, so that no one could hurt it or take it away from you. Then, with the creativity of a child, you covered it up. You created an act, a persona, a drama, a story so that nobody would ever suspect that you were the keeper of so much light. You were very smart-brilliant, actually-at hiding your secret. Not only did you convince others that you were not that; you also convinced yourself-all because you were being a good parent to the gift that you held. It was your secret- your deep, dark secret, which only you knew. You were even creative enough to manifest the exact opposite of that which you truly are so that you could protect yourself from those who might be upset or angered by your innate gifts.

But after days, months, and years of hiding your precious treasure, you began to believe your story. You became the persona you created to protect your secret. At that moment you forgot that you had ever buried your treasured gift in the first place. You not only forgot where you had hidden it, you forgot that you had hidden it at all. Your light, love, greatness, and beauty got lost inside your story. You forgot that you had a secret.

From that moment on, you felt lost, alone, separate, and scared. Suddenly you became aware that there was something missing - and there was. The pain of separating from your treasure felt like losing your best friend. Inside, you ached for the return of your true self. So you began a search outside of yourself for something that would fill the void and make you feel better. You looked to relationships, to other people, to your achievements and awards, trying to find that which was missing. You looked to your body and your bank account, trying to get that feeling back. Maybe, like me, you were driven by feelings of unworthiness that ran so deep that you spent most of your life frantically searching for something to complete you. But everywhere you looked you came up empty.

By the time I was five years old, I was all too familiar with the voice in my head telling me that I wasn't good enough, that I wasn't wanted, and that I didn't belong. Desperate to feel loved and accepted, I set out on the exhausting task of getting other people to validate my worth. Deep inside I believed there was something wrong with me, and I went to great lengths to conceal my flaws. I quickly learned how to charm people, flashing my biggest smile to get them to notice me. I thought that if I was more talented than my older sister or smarter than my older brother, I would belong and my family would fill me with all the love and acceptance I hungered for. I believed that if they

loved me enough, I would no longer have to listen to the awful thoughts that filled my mind or endure the painful feelings that consumed my small body.

As the years passed, I became skilled at finding ways to hide my pain from myself and others. When I couldn't find someone to validate me or tell me I was okay, I would sneak across the street to the nearby 7-Eleven and buy a package of Sara Lee brownies and a bottle of Coca-Cola. That dose of sugar really seemed to do the trick. But by the age of twelve my pain was too big to hide: I felt too tall, too awkward, and too stupid. I was envious of the girls who seemed to fit in, who wore the right clothes and had the right families. For years I cried every day, trying to release the inner pain that consumed me. My tears of sadness always had the same message: "Why doesn't anyone love me? What's wrong with me? Please, won't someone come and *help* me?"

Then, to make matters even worse, one Saturday afternoon when I was twelve years old my mother informed my brother and me that while we were at the beach, my father had moved out of the house. Their marriage was over, and they were going to get a divorce. The breakup of my family added to my deep-seated fear that I was flawed, damaged, and that I had been dealt a bad lot in life. My parents' divorce unleashed all the pain that was stored up inside me. In an instant every bad feeling I thought I had under control came flooding out of me. My pain was so overwhelming that to numb it I turned to drugs, cigarettes, and fast friends in a desperate attempt to fit in and get the love and safety I could not find in my family or myself.

Struggling to make meaning from the emptiness I felt inside, I decided that success was my ultimate ticket to freedom. I began working at age thirteen, and by the time I was nineteen I owned my first retail store. I had an eye for fashion, and I loved designing new looks for women to wear. Wearing cool clothes always made me feel better about myself. It seemed that I could cover up my shame, if only for a day, by wearing something everyone liked. I strove to have the coolest, hippest, most trendy looks so that I would finally feel like I belonged. And from all outer appearances I succeeded: I had the right car, the right clothes, and what I considered to be the right set of friends. I had finally made it as a member of the "in" crowd. But despite all my successes and all my friends, I still felt lost and incredibly lonely. No matter how much I accomplished in the outer world, I could never seem to get away from the internal voice that told me I would never amount to anything and that my life really didn't matter. In the quiet of the night, my despair overwhelmed me. I felt flawed, small, insignificant, and painfully alone.

Managing the insanity of my mind became a full-time job. I began trying to quiet the constant internal noise by drowning myself in drugs. I was hypnotized by my continuous internal dialogue, by the story I told myself over and over again about how I would never make it, how I would never have the love, security, and inner peace I so desperately desired. That voice filled my head day and night, criticizing my every move and sabotaging my search for success and happiness. I had thought that if I kept busy enough, ate enough brownies, added enough chemicals, or accumulated enough cars and clothes, I could rise above the despair and hopelessness that always seemed to pop up after a moment of joy. But it didn't work. The tape that played in my head would only get louder, showing me my faults and reinforcing my self-imposed limitations. That voice continually reprimanded me, telling me I didn't deserve love and that I would always be alone. Finally, exhausted, I would surrender to my inner tyrant, saying, "Okay, you win." I would then reach for a bag of M&M's, a cigarette, or a tranquilizer and temporarily pacify my angst. But it took only moments before the self-loathing would return and the story about how awful I was would pick up where it had left off.

In my early twenties I added men to my prescription for pain relief. Unfortunately, my relationships with men always seemed to backfire. They began with a high that held the promise of salvation and ended with a low that left me deeper in the hole than when I began. Meanwhile, my substance abuse escalated to a point where I knew I would not live much longer if I continued down that path. I spent years going in and out of drug-treatment centers, trying to straighten out my life. Then one day as I was sitting in my fourth treatment center, participating in yet another group-therapy session, a huge realization hit me. As I sat there listening to everyone share their pain, I became spellbound by their words. As other members of my group shared their trials and tribulations, their failures and disappointments, I heard a common theme—a story line—coming out of each person's mouth. I was amazed by how committed each person was to their individual painful drama, and how sure they were that their story was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I saw people in my group sacrifice love in order to pay homage and remain true to the negative story they told about their lives. I watched other people holding on, as if for dear life, to their miserable sagas, trying to convince us all of how bad and how true their stories were. Some people were proud of their stories, as if their struggles and sacrifices made them somehow superior to the rest of us. Others were drenched in self-righteousness by sheer virtue of the depth of their pain. Suddenly, in a flash of clarity, I was able to hear something underneath each person's saga: *Their stories were just that—stories, fictional tales whose repeated telling was a distraction masking a much deeper truth.*

I vividly remember one group session in particular. Jessica was a pretty, blond twenty-eight-year-old woman whose face hung low with bitterness and defeat. She began our session that day by dramatically reciting the same story she had been telling us for the past eight or nine weeks. It went something like this: "My mother doesn't love me, my father left me when I was three, my boyfriend doesn't know who I am." I sat there frustrated, wanting to pull my hair out. I just couldn't listen to that same story for one more minute. She sounded like a broken record, playing over and over and over the same bad song. I thought the least she could do was play us a new tune. I wanted to stand up and scream, "Get out of your story! Don't you get it? Can't you see you are telling yourself a story that will always end the same way?!" I wanted so badly for Jessica to see that she was keeping herself stuck inside her dead-end tale. But of course I was bound by the limitations of what I now know was my *own* story, which told me, "You don't know anything. You don't know what you're talking about, so stay in your seat and keep your big mouth shut." Obeying that voice, I slouched back into my chair and slipped back deeper into my own story. My silence was itself proof that my story had complete power over me.

Since I couldn't bear to listen to Jessica whine for one more moment, I tuned her out and turned all my attention onto myself. As Jessica's voice faded into the background, I began to hear my own internal dialog: "Nobody loves me. I can't do this. I'll never be happy. I'm too skinny and too ugly. My life doesn't matter" and the ever familiar, "No one cares about me." As I was sitting there it struck me that, like Jessica, I too was repeating the same internal dialogue over and over, reciting a version of my life I had heard a million times before. I was shocked to discover that my story line wasn't that much different from Jessica's; she was just speaking hers aloud. As I sat there -listening to myself, I heard the theme of my story, chanted like a mantra in my mind: "Poor me, poor me, poor me." Then suddenly the lights went on and I realized, "Oh, my God, my life is just a story, too."

Until that day, sitting in a treatment center in West Palm Beach, Florida, I had been asleep inside my story. I was letting my story run my life without my knowing it. Everything I did was consistent with and constricted by this story, and my actions were desperate attempts to make the prison of my story a little better, a little more palatable, a little more livable. I was always making some minor

adjustment—a new boyfriend, a new job, a new haircut— in an attempt to bury my pain and hide the "evidence" of my inadequacy. I had so mistaken my story for reality that making all these changes was like rearranging the chairs on the deck of the *Titanic*: The ship was sinking while I, blinded to the reality of the situation, was busy trying to make it look good and feel better while it was going down.

It finally occurred to me that there must be more to me than the story I was telling myself. Just as I could see that Jessica, even while stuck in her story, was more than she thought she was, I realized that I too must be more than what my negative thoughts told me I was. And in that moment I surrendered to the fact that even though I had unknowingly spent years trying to fix my story, I couldn't. True, it was a part of me, but certainly it wasn't the whole me. Although I didn't have a clue as to what was beyond my story, I set out that day on a journey to understand why I had created this story and what purpose it served.

I spent the next ten years of my life examining not only my own story but the stories of others. While on this journey I learned three very important things: First, we create our life stories in our attempt to become someone or something. Second, our stories hold the key to our unique purpose in life and to its fulfillment. And third, hidden in the shadow of our story is a very special secret; once this secret is unveiled, we will stand in awe of the magnificence of our own humanity.

THE STORY. THE THEME, AND THE SHADOW

Our stories have a purpose. Even though they set our limitations, they also help us define who we are so we don't feel completely lost in the world. Living inside them is like being inside a clear capsule. The thin transparent walls act like a shell that traps us inside. Even though we have the ability to gaze outside and view the world around— us, we stay safely trapped inside, comfortable, with the familiar terrain, bound by an inner knowing that no matter what we do, think, or say, we can go no further. Our stories separate us and draw clear boundaries between ourselves, others, and the world. They limit our capabilities and shut down our possibilities. Our stories keep us apart even while we are begging to belong and fit in. They drain our vital energy, leaving us feeling tired, depleted, and hopeless. The predictability of our stories feeds our resignation and guarantees our fate. When we are living inside our stories, we engage in repetitive habits, abusive behaviors, and abrasive internal dialogues.

Like all good stories, our personal dramas always have a theme, which repeats itself over and over throughout our lives. We can decipher our unique themes by listening carefully to the conclusions we have made about the events of our lives. These conclusions shape our existence and drive our personalities. Our conclusions become our *shadow beliefs*, the unconscious beliefs that control our thoughts, words, and behaviors. Our shadow beliefs establish our limits. They tell us how much love, happiness, and success we are or are not worthy of. They shape our thought processes and define our personal boundaries. Disguising themselves as the truth, our shadow beliefs rob us of self-expression and squelch our dreams. But what's important to realize is that our shadow beliefs contain the very wisdom we need to transcend our current limitations and our discontent. They motivate us to compensate for our shortcomings and drive us to become the opposite of what we tell ourselves we are. Our shadow beliefs drive us to prove that we are worthy, that we are lovable, and that we are important. But, left unattended, these shadow beliefs turn on us, sabotaging the very things we most desire by letting their negative messages limit our lives.

WHY YOU "NEED" YOUR STORY

We stay wrapped in our stories—securely placed inside our capsules—so we can hold on to the comfort of what we know and rest in the safe and familiar feelings of being at home. When life gets difficult and we begin to confront the pain of our own limitations or the disappointment of living below our self-imposed standards, at least we can count on one thing: the predictability of our stories. Our stories give us something and someone to identify with. The worst feeling for a human being is to feel like a "nothing," that our lives and our individual existences don't matter. Most of us would much rather endure being an unlovable person than someone who is completely invisible. So, in a desperate attempt to give our lives meaning, we create and then repeat our stories; and as we cling to who we think we are, we perpetuate our dramas. Then, gradually and unwittingly, we actually become our dramas. We act out our stories and carry them around like badges of honor. We become invested in keeping our stories alive, and in the process we unknowingly become victims of the stories we created to protect our secret: We become victims of life.

When we recognize that we have identified ourselves with our stories and not with our broader, deeper, truer selves, our first impulse is to just get rid of the story. But because we have *become* our stories and have allowed them to dictate the scope and course of our lives, a scary question arises: If we aren't our stories, who are we? Outside our stories, life feels scary and uncontrollable. It reeks of unpredictability and uncertainty. We fear that if we let go of our dramas, *we* will lose our identities and whatever place we hold in the world. Who will protect us? Who will love us? To what will we belong? This is a devastating prospect for any human being. The unconscious fear that drives our stories is that if we surrender our identities, slow down, and go inside, we will be devoured by the emptiness. Our resistance to being nothing, to having nothing, and to being a nobody is at the very core of our human struggle. Our fear of nonexistence is so deep that most of us settle for a repackaged version of the self we know rather than wake up the inside of the unknown.

I spent most of my life struggling to be a "somebody," to have a purpose and a life of meaning. Yet over the years my spiritual search has taught me that in order for me to be free to be the special, unique woman that I am, I must embrace both the vastness of my Divinity and the insignificance of my humanity. I must embrace the fact that I am everything and nothing.

My rabbi, Moshe Levin, once told me a story that comes from the Talmud. A person is asked to write on a piece of paper the words *I am nothing but dust and ashes* and to place that piece of paper in his pocket and meditate upon it. He is then asked to write on another piece of paper the words *The entire Universe was created just for me* and to place it in his other pocket. As the seeker meditates on both realities at the same time, he realizes that both are true.

If we look at life from the largest perspective, we see that we are merely specks. Until we embrace our absolute nothingness and our own insignificance, we will forever be chasing the experience of being somebody. But once we surrender to the fact that we are *everything and nothing*—once we embrace both the story and beyond the shadow and the light— we become whole, integrated human beings. We open ourselves up to a world beyond that which we know. We can then have the grand experience of seeing that we belong to and are a vital piece of the entire Universe. We will be able to marvel in the realization that the entire Universe was created just for us. Then we will grasp the enormity of our true essence.

I know that for some of you this may be a difficult concept, and you may not feel ready for it or comfortable with it yet. But I promise you that if you allow yourself to open up to this idea and explore it, a new possibility will arise. When you embrace both your wins and your losses, your

frailties and your strengths, your vastness and your nothingness, you will feel safe enough to allow your Divine secret to emerge. Only by returning to the state of wholeness will you feel worthy and deserving of expressing the highest truth about yourself.

THE FALSE SELF

Our stories are like old friends. Even if they talk too much, at least we know what we are getting-an alternative that feels less threatening than connecting with a group of strangers. Most of us repeatedly choose the comfort of what we know, staying inside our limited realities, just so we don't have to face the terror of that which we don't know. But brewing beneath the surface is a deep discontent about the *false self* that we have created and the story that goes along with it. This is where the struggle begins. This discontent is always pushing us, whispering in our ears, "There has to be more than this."

In order to embrace the enormity of who we truly are and make the journey beyond our limited stories to find our true selves again, we first must face the ultimate truth and often the most painful reality: that we were never really separate from the Divine. We are a piece in a Divine puzzle. We may look separate, we may act separate, and most of us will go to our grave believing that we are separate, but our individuality is nothing but an illusion. It's a painful distraction that keeps us trapped in an endless chase for something more, better, or different than what we already have. And it's a futile chase, because it's based on the incorrect conclusion that we are somehow "flawed." In our separateness we struggle to create bigger and better versions of ourselves, trying desperately to fix what we believe is broken. We abandon our naturally Divine selves and frantically try to ground ourselves in our own unique identities. Our false self is the main character in our stories, and we mistakenly believe ourselves to be that person. It is our persona, the image we create to give ourselves a distinct identity. And our stories are our desperate attempts to make sense of our existence; to define what cannot be defined. Our stories are where our false selves reside. Our false selves are the heroes and the victims and the stars of our stories. They keep our stories intact and pacify us with a false sense of predictability and security.

SEPARATING FROM THE DIVINE

The moment we identify with our false selves, the moment we believe ourselves to be our stories, we fall out of the hands of the Divine and enter into the small illusion of "me," separate and alone. Then the game begins-the game of "Look at Me, I Am Separate from You." We engage in this charade because it allows us to hold on to the illusion that we are really separate and individual beings. Even if we intellectually understand by this point on our spiritual journey that we are all one, we continue, on an unconscious level, to fight for the separate life we are familiar with and to avoid the experience of oneness. We believe that if we face the ultimate truth-if we face our oneness- then that uniqueness we cling to will die. But facing that truth is our task, because living inside our stories and in the illusion of separateness is not really living. It's an endless game of wanting. It's a game you cannot win. It's a game of "If Only": "*If only* I were rich, famous, healthy, smarter, wiser, faster, shrewder, or younger, I would be able to win this game and find the happiness I deserve." "*If only* I knew more people, had a better job, or had my own business, I would have what I need and be happy." "*When* I get my new car, new girlfriend, or some new clothes, I will feel so." "*If only* I were appreciated, respected, loved, or seen, I fulfill my deepest desires." Or maybe your game is about rid of something. "*If only* weren't so selfish; fat, lazy, angry, tired, or broke." "*If only* my children, husband, or mother stop acting out." Or, the big ones: "When

I finally arrive at body weight or find my life purpose, I will be content." This is an unwinnable game. It is a trap, an endless maze with no way out.

We work day and night trying to manipulate, strategize, and figure out ways to win the "If Only" game. But the game lives inside our stories. It was developed to keep us occupied and busy and give us a reference point for our individual identities. But if we are willing to look, we will see that the game is nothing more than a decoy, hiding what is real, covering up our true essence. To end this struggle, we must see that much of what we believe about ourselves is a story. For most of us, it is a disempowering tale. We created our stories in order to give ourselves an identity and protect the sacredness of our true essence. And we will need our stories and the secret they hold to lead us back into the presence of our Divinity and to unfold the purpose of our lives.

EMBRACING YOUR STORY

Our stories have a Divine purpose. They are a real and necessary part of our personal evolutions. Until we understand the importance of our stories, we will stay trapped in the vicious cycle of trying to fix parts of ourselves that aren't broken. Hidden within our personal dramas is important information, pearls of wisdom for us to extract that hold the key to fulfilling our unique contributions to the world. Our stories contain the exact ingredients we need to become the people we always longed to be. Inside each of our stories is a Divine recipe for a most extraordinary life.

The first step in uncovering your recipe is to realize that you created your story not only to protect yourself but, unknowingly, to gather the wisdom and experiences that are necessary for you to realize your life's purpose. You created your story in order to learn the lessons it had to teach. You are like a master chef. You have spent your life in the kitchen, cooking up pain, joy, triumph, and failure in order to gather the ingredients necessary to manifest your most extraordinary self. But your story-with all its drama and all its unprocessed pain-conceals this recipe.

Most of us get so distracted by the drama of our stories that we no longer remember that we have a Divine purpose here. We are so committed to the pain of our personal histories and to making others wrong that we don't even realize that all of our pain has a purpose. This bears repeating: All of our pain has a purpose! It is here to teach us, guide us, and give us the wisdom we need to deliver our gifts to the world. Most of us use our traumas and our wounds to beat ourselves up, to stay stuck, and to keep ourselves small. But when our pain and disappointment are examined and used as learning tools, they impart sacred life lessons that can be taught to us only in this way.

You are here to contribute your own unique flavor and serve the world in a way that only you can. One of my son's kindergarten teachers, Mrs. Knight, demonstrated this principle to her class. On the first day of school, Mrs. Knight handed all the children who walked into class a piece of a jigsaw puzzle with a number on the back. As she called up each student by his or her number, each brought their piece of the puzzle and Mrs. Knight placed it in the correct position of the cardboard frame that held the puzzle together. There were twenty children and twenty pieces of the puzzle. When Mrs. Knight finally called number twenty you could see the entire picture on the puzzle except for one missing piece, which prevented all of us from seeing the beauty of the entire picture. The little boy who had received piece number nineteen was missing from class that day, and in order for the entire picture to be revealed, the class needed his contribution. Thus Mrs. Knight beautifully illustrated to the children how important each of them was to completing the whole.

I sat there with tears in my eyes thinking about how each and every one of us represents a vital contribution to the whole of humanity. Each of us has an important piece to contribute to the picture of life. When we are stuck in the past, hating our lives, our stories, and ourselves, it is impossible to claim our piece of the puzzle and put it in its destined place. Until we make peace with our stories, it's impossible for us to extract the ingredients we need to express our Divine selves. All of our drama—each of our experiences, the parts of ourselves that we love and the parts that we hate—is what makes our piece unique. Some of us got the middle piece of the puzzle, some the end, while others got the big round piece. There is no other piece of the puzzle just like yours. None. There are similar ones, but nothing like yours. Your unique contribution lies dormant waiting for you to collect all the experiences you need to fulfill your piece of the puzzle. Every day you call forth experiences perfectly suited to gathering the wisdom required to produce your unique recipe, your piece of the puzzle.

THE PROCESS

The Secret of the Shadow will guide you to see that "the story of you" does not begin to define who you truly are. It's a small part of you that keeps you trapped in repetitive patterns and limits the amount of love, inner peace, and success you can receive. In order for you to see your whole self and to view your true magnificence, you must step outside your story. Stepping out of our stories allows us to let down the perfectly constructed walls that surround our open hearts. In order to live outside our stories, we must heal our wounds and make peace with our past. We must uncover the pain and embrace the flaws and inadequacies that come with our humanity. Until we come to terms with who we are and why we are here, and understand the tremendous lessons that life is teaching us, we will remain trapped inside the smallness of our own personal dramas.

In order to transcend your story, you must be willing to experience the daily struggle of your personal existence. For only when you can be with your life exactly as it is do you have the choice to change its direction. To live a life outside the confines of your story, you will first learn to clearly define all the ways you keep yourself separate, encapsulated in your story. You will develop the willingness to come to terms with all the ways you avoid acknowledging accepting with love the nothingness that lies within you. You will learn all the ways you try to define yourself so that no one will mistake you for someone else, the ways you seek to fill up your so you won't have to feel the deep void, the emptiness, that lies beneath your wanting.

This book will show you how to use your story, to get value from all your traumas and shortcomings, to gain wisdom from your wounds. It will give you the process by which to extract your unique recipe and unleash the secret that lies hidden in the shadow of your story. Now is the time to explore how you can use your story to enrich your life and the lives of others. That's why you have it. But you will only be able to use it when you are ready to step outside the story called "You."

The Secret of the Shadow is about discovering your true essence. It will serve as a guide that will lead you back home—where, deep within, you know you belong. Standing in the presence of your true essence, unencumbered by your story, you will know yourself as the totality of the Universe—both the nothingness of your smallest self and the fullness of your humanity. Stepping outside your story, you will discover that the "you" you have always desired to be does not live inside your story. Once outside, you will see that the lives of your dreams, and the fulfillment of your deepest desires, are waiting for you. Here you will feel compelled to share with the world the secret that has been

hidden in the shadow of your story. Then you will know what it is like to stand in the glory of your most magnificent self.

HEALING ACTION STEPS

1. Begin by buying a beautiful journal, and title it, "The Great and Mysterious Story of Me." Commit to using this journal as a place to record the feelings, thoughts, and insights that arise as you do the exercises outlined in this book. As you do these exercises, try not to edit or censor yourself; instead, allow yourself to freely express whatever is on your mind or in your heart.

2. Choose a time when you can be alone, and make yourself comfortable. Create a space that is free from distractions, and have your journal nearby. Close your eyes, and as you do, take a few slow, deep breaths, feeling yourself go deeper inside with each breath. Allow yourself to relax completely, to fall still, and devote the next few minutes to your spiritual growth and self-discovery. Take another slow, deep breath, and allow your awareness to rest gently in the area of your heart. As you breathe, feel yourself connecting with your inner being—the essential aspect of you that has been with you every moment of your life. Imagine that you are watching a movie of your life. See yourself on the day you were born; notice the faces of those who cared for you as an infant. Picture yourself in your early years, learning to walk and talk. Recall the years you spent in school, seeing the faces and hearing the voices of those who touched you—for better or for worse—during your formative years. Allow this movie to keep playing on the screen of your consciousness, and let yourself feel and remember your loves, losses, disappointments, challenges, and achievements. Trust that whatever is coming to your mind is perfect. Breathe deeply as you reflect on the many experiences you have had in the time you have been on this earth.

Consider that each of these experiences, and every one of your life's events, has unfolded in harmony with a Divine plan. Open up to the possibility that every person, event, and incident has been drawn into your life in order to awaken you to your own inner wisdom. Reflect on the idea that you have been born with a unique contribution to make and that every experience of your life has in some way been training you to deliver your special gift to the world. Take another deep breath, and when you are ready, slowly open your eyes and spend a few minutes journaling about whatever thoughts or feelings are present within you.