

REFLECTIONS ON
THE TRANSFORMATIONAL
JOURNEY

POEMS BY
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Also by F. Aster Barnwell:

Hidden Treasure: Jesus's Message of Transformation,
iUniverse Inc., Bloomington Il, 2011.

Available at all major online booksellers.

The Pilgrim's Companion: A Handbook for the Spiritual
Path; Element Books, Rockport, MA; 1992.

Available at [www. AsterBarnwell.com](http://www.AsterBarnwell.com)

Meditations on the Apocalypse: A Psycho-Spiritual
Perspective on the Book of Revelation; Element Books,
Rockport, MA; 1992; 2011 Authors Guild Backinprint.com Rreprint
edition; iUniverse Inc.

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AWAKENING

In the night of my ignorance,
I reached for the light of intuition
And opened the door of my will,
To answer the knock of Faith.
From the stupor of my dreaming,
I awoke to the cold reality of reason
And clothed myself in knowledge
To combat the illness of desiring.
From the depths of my despair,
I climbed up the steps of aspiration
And sailed on the sea of humility
To the distant mountain of hope.
In the freedom of Love's protection
I ate of the Tree of Life,
And drank the wine of innocence
And exhaled sweet vapors of peace.
August, 1979



STILL BIRTH

A promise, opposed by doubt,
caught in an endless struggle for dominance
is the dream that is still born.

RENEWAL

As last winter's snow
My cares and sorrows will melt,
Mix with the rain,
And flow down the drains of time.
My bowed head will raise in hope,
In the ecstasy of expectation,
Of a renewed faith, new life,
And new purposefulness.
My todays will be happy and my yesterdays light,
The memories of sad events forgotten,
No longer to haunt and gnaw at my soul.
The sun will rise again
To light my way to new horizons
To evaporate today's showers of misfortunes
In a haze of forgetfulness.
My days will brighten,
My soul will glow the brightness of the full moon
And above it all, my prayers will rise,
And modulate from supplication to praise,
As my rekindled spirit nestles in joyfulness.
July or August 1976.

RECONSIDER

You look in the mirror and turn away.
Do you suppose the blemishes you discover
Will disappear of themselves?
Where can you hide from yourself?
And for how long will your field
Yield harvest without fresh sowing?
The pain you evade is that of your own birth;
And the sacrifice you begrudge
Is required not for another
But for your own soul's ransom—
From oblivion.
So let your mirth turn to weeping
And your gain to loss.
Fling wide the door of your heart
And acclaim your soul to its estate.

January, 1990

ANGEL OF PAIN

“Angel of Pain,” I repined,
“You have not been summoned,
No one has died,
Your place is with the bereaved.”
“Nay,” replied the angel,
“There have been many deaths
That have not been mourned.”
Perplexed, I demanded of the angel
proof of this assertion.
“Here,” said he, flinging back the shroud
that concealed the decomposing bodies
of my dearest, most cherished illusions,
“Convinced?”
“These, thy kindred died,
Having rendered service to thy soul.
They provided nurturance for thy attention;
And performed surrogate duty for thy will
awaiting the birth
Of genuine aspiration in thy heart.”
“O Angel” I replied, “it is proper and right
that tribute be paid to these servants of my soul.
Be to me a guest, and I will be to you
a welcoming and appreciative host.
What must be done, must be done.
Thy pain, though partings mark
Do also new beginnings herald.”

June 26th, 1989

GUARDIAN ANGEL

My Guardian Angel left one day
Without a word of warning or a goodbye,
Taking with it the only Light
That gave guidance to my life.
As I floundered about in the dark
To find new orientation
I stumbled upon another Light source
I never, till then, knew existed.
It was flickering, and wavering and dimming
And on the brink of going out.
I shielded its flame to protect it
From the chilling, howling winds of doubt.
It then grew steady, then strong, then glowing
In the pale yellow hue of gold;
And though it may not be as bright,
As my departed Angel's Light,
It is nevertheless mine,
My very own.

PRUDENCE

Do not proclaim
 while you are still undecided.
Do not display
 before you are fully committed.
When Faith dawns,
 fence it around with humility
 and patience,
So that its tender shoots
 are protected from the nibbling
 of critics and unbelievers.
When your seedling of Faith
 grows into a big tree,
Even those very critics
 and unbelievers,
Will find rest in the shade
 that it will spread.
August, 1979

THE JOY OF HEAVEN

There is a joy born of the Earth,
And a joy born of Heaven.
The joy of Earth—man's joy,
Poses a barrier to the work of Heaven
To spread to Earth its own joy.

Like a heaven of Earth,
Stands the mountaintop;
And like an earth of Heaven,
Sits the ocean's depth.

In its quietude and depth,
The ocean is to Heaven closer,
Than the mountaintop;
Just as man, in his peace,
Is to the joy of Heaven closer
Than in his own joy.

For the joy of man is as the mountain—
Earth reaching up to touch Heaven;
And his peace, as the ocean—
Heaven reaching into earth
To bring its own joy.

(August 1979).

AN APPEAL TO MY SOUL

O' tireless Soul,
Lay me down awhile to rest,
Ere I die for want of time
To comprehend the mysteries
You've divulged to me.

O' timeless Soul,
To Earth's dense abode return me
To time where I can be of use to you,
Building a bridge
Between I and thee.

O' wizened Soul,
In thy state of bliss,
Disown me never;
Even if I may dishonor thee
With forgetfulness
And expediency.

O' blessed Soul,
In thine audience with God
Commend me to Him
By whose Grace,
We shall some bright and glorious day
Look each other in the face.

(August 1979).

TRUTH VERSUS BELIEFS

But for no other purpose
 than your curiosity to relieve,
You want me to lay bare ,
 the contents of my beliefs.
Would it not make more sense
 to seek to know what I am,
And thus pave the way
 for some genuine communication?
Is not avowal of belief
 devoid of meaning,
When matched against breadth of vision
 and genuineness of Being?
And couldn't such queries lead one
 to misjudge another,
Who may not express himself
 with the art of the orator?
When beliefs become trophies
 to be placed on exhibition,
What else can they lead to
 but misunderstanding and division?
To the one who must know Truth,
 Beliefs are only propositions to be tested,
And have no further utility
 when of Truth one has tasted.

December 1979

BEING TRUE TO THE SELF

As I meditate on the adage
"To thine own self be true,"
I realized that I could not determine
To which of the many "selves" that parade as me,
I should pay this allegiance.
I saw that what I thought to comprise myself
Were of themselves robbing my very life of its fidelity.
I saw that my knowledge of myself
was really nothing more substantive
Than a quilt of butterflies' wings.
In one place, were remnants of past moments
That were themselves un-experienced;
In another, shadows of yesteryears' hopes,
Long since outgrown;
And joining them, threads of past dreams
Themselves incomplete.

I also saw that what I thought was myself
were really a coalition of its mortal enemies.
On the right, were ossified desires,
And fears, quite well preserved.
Their weapons were habits and cowardice.
There were, on the left, promises that were weathered,
And lies that were worn thin;
And for their weapons, false hopes and counterfeited pride.
I surmised that the strategy of this conspiracy
Was to keep me ever bound to a vague past
And to a fuzzy and probable future,
So that I am securely and hopelessly hidden
From the Certainty, Power, and Light
Of the Eternal Present,
Where my True Self resides,
Innocent and luminous.

As I marveled at the beauty
And effulgence of the Self,
I realized that it shall ever remain
A reality, distant from the self I knew—
The little self, ordinary and historical;
Unless there was some means of uniting us two.
Lo, I beheld with the mind's eye
That the maxim, "Man know thyself,"
Holds a greater Truth than that of being true to the self
Because one cannot be true to a self
Of which one knows quite little, if anything at all.
To know the Self, I must go to it
Since it cannot come to me.
For sandwiched between past and future
It resides in Eternity,
And I, in time.

Greed, anxiety, and guilt,
Those three brothers of darkness and keepers of time
Sought to frustrate my efforts
In gaining the acquaintance of my Beloved of the Light.
If only I could find a method
To loosen their formidable hold of death!
Perusing my thoughts under the full moon,
I saw and interpreted thus:
That in patience is knowledge of the Self found,
And in constant remembrance of that knowledge
In the domain of time and action
Is a path of Light forged to the reposed Self.
Further, by that selfsame Light
Are the brothers of death overcome,
For they thrive only in the shadows
That prevail in ignorance.

As I sought communion
With the one of my longing,
I found, at first, to my dismay
That the clarity of mind, the peace, the hope, the beauty
That I enjoyed in its presence
Lost all flavor in the stupor of my ordinary reality.
But fortunately, through the guidance of Providence,
I learned from a source of old,
The method by which I could preserve the gifts
From the Blessed One untainted.
So I gathered together all my cherished activities,
All thoughts of pleasure and pain, of gain and loss,
Of success and failure, and even of salvation!
Dedicating everything to it excluding none,
Into the fires of equanimity I placed them
As a burnt offering
And tribute of love.

Slowly, but surely, I grew
In the knowledge of the Divine Self
And realized that only in this growth
That I can really "Be my-Self";
All other expressions being shallow and false.
As the veil of ignorance thinned between us
I saw in the phase of the full moon a testimony of adoration.
She waxes in light as a tribute to her lord, the sun
To become a fully illumined disk
Reflecting solar light—a symbol of consciousness.
But then, faithfully, she returns to her lord,
To be reunited in purpose.
In like manner, I too must pay respect to the Sun of my being,
And realize that I am its agent,
And it my master,
My advocate in Heaven.

September, 1979.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH AN AWAKENED MASTER

I

I once sought out an old man, wise by repute,
And implored him to edify me on certain matters of Truth.
I wanted to know answers to many deep things
Pertaining to the purpose of life and secret of Being.
“Tell me venerable one,” I blurted out,
“How do I become like you, so wise and devout?
Can you teach me what secret knowledge you possess
That has bestowed on you such wisdom and gentleness?
Is it true that you’re an enlightened master,
And hold secrets normally reserved for the hereafter?”

II

I stopped for fear I’d said something amiss,
For he continued looking away as if I didn’t exist.
But then, slowly, he turned a gaze upon mine,
That burned into me as if it were hot lime.
“I can tell young sir, that you don’t know what you ask,
For you are requesting of me an impossible task.
Where you have obtained such information I can’t understand,
For I am every bit like you or any other man.
Furthermore, should I possess the answers you seek,
With what shall I convey them so that they are yours to keep?”

III

He then gave me a look so long and stern,
And it was enough to make the just-curious squirm.
But for me, I felt I must press this opportunity,
To learn something of the mysteries of Eternity.
“Kind Sir,” I begged, “long and hard have I looked.
I have been on pilgrimages and have read many holy books,
And unless I get answers to the questions I am asking,
I fear that soon I shall go mad with this seeking.
If you are not in a position to help my quest,
Tell me where, or to whom I must go to find some redress.”

IV

Perhaps, this last appeal made some impression on him,
For his demeanor changed from being distant and forbidding.
“Yes, your persistence tells me that you’ve looked long and hard,
And have searched in just about every direction but inward.
But if I can help in the manner you are seeking,
Who says that it will lead to any change in your being?
Everyone thinks that someone, somewhere possesses a formula,
That can bring wisdom, peace, bliss, or whatever.
Now, tell me, if life was meant only to be mental gymnastics,
Wouldn’t we be better off learning games and circus tricks?”

V

He paused long enough for me to feel the gravity of those words,
Then continued when he felt he’d struck the right chord.
“Many years ago I too was afflicted with this mental malady,
Not knowing that each one of us is a portal to Eternity.
Only when I became indifferent to the gathering of knowledge,
That I saw the quest for packaged Truths as excess baggage.
I saw that one cannot satisfy the yearning for Truth by acquisitions
And that applies just as well to our organized religions.
I saw that for “truth” to be of value it needs be True only for me,
And only then was I able to know and fulfill my personal destiny.”

VI

“But O’ wise and respected one, what of objectivity,
Don’t we need standards to judge Truth’s authenticity?
If Truth is what’s right for me and what’s right for you,
That will mean that there’s no common reality.
Furthermore, what of the standards by which God will judge,
Those who are unrighteous from those who are just?”
He must have intuited the extent of my confusion,
For he continued with this further explanation:
“There’s only one God to judge you, and to Him you need be true,
And He is none other than the Good that is in you.”

VII

At this point, I felt my long search terminating,
As years of fractured dreams and hopes were mending.
“Wise sir, please, won’t you consent to be my teacher,
And show me how to live my life to the better?
I will like to make contact with this Good that’s my own
So that I can quickly progress to my eternal home.
Teach me the art of contemplation, and deep meditation,
Teach me those virtues to which I must give expression.
I will go wherever with you and your precepts I’ll follow,
And I will be to you an exemplary disciple.”

VIII

“To consent to be such a teacher I would in my soul be a fraud,
For in the end, it’s your Self discovery I’ll retard.
If you expect outside authorities to tell you how to be
How can you ever grow in certainty and responsibility?
The purpose of existence cannot be disclosed in quick revelations,
But rather from your encounter with each of life’s situations.
Life’s purpose takes shape from the actions you express,
And you cannot conjure it forth by the beliefs you profess.
Life’s purpose is being fulfilled when you add to your Being,
And that, my young friend, is not done by acquiring.”

IX

All the while he spoke, he looked at me so understandingly,
That I felt quite acutely, his deep compassion for me.
When he resumed his discourse, his voice became quite urgent,
And I knew what he was saying was for more than my encouragement;
“Eternity is before me now in that very spot you are standing,
It is not found in the pursuit of secret rites and disciplines.
To contact it, put your virtue, goodness, your very soul on the line,
And your search, to this very heart of yours confine. `
If after you’ve done all that and eternity does not manifest,
God is bound by his own Law to ‘descend’ and do the rest.”

X

What he was saying was the product of the moment,
And for me, this was a here-to-fore novel event,
For so many I had sought out in the past sounded so pedantic,
Their teachings sounding somewhat rote and not personally validated.
So, although I did not want to appear as a glutton for knowledge,
I did not know whether there'd be a repeat of this privilege.
So I asked him about the Yogas, including Hatha and Tantra,
And about all those illustrious gurus in India.
“And how about the Serpent Goddess of whom I've heard so much,
Doesn't one have to petition for her mystic touch?”

XI

He told me so many things, some I'll never remember,
But the following disclosures will be with me forever:
“To be a child in purity and innocence is noble,
But to be one in understanding is to court trouble.
All conscious striving is Yoga, and the essence of Tantra is surrender,
And in the eternal scheme, the one complements the other.
To seek the Goddess you speak of is to invite self-deception,
For in the realm of subtleties you'd find her kingdom.
One must not try to pursue her, but rather to entice her,
By establishing alliances with powers that are far greater.”

XII

It has now been many years since this memorable encounter,
And despite daily challenges, life's flow is much smoother,
For in a secret chamber of my heart, I have discovered life's treasure,
And when I give away of it, it grows ever the more without measure
This treasure is the Good in me which was hidden from view,
And by giving it exposure it has in turn set me free.
There's nothing that I need that it cannot provide,
And in times when darkness threatens, it has been my guide.
Ever since I've found it I've lost all desire to roam,
For it has enabled me to make Philadelphia my home.

August, 1979

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPERATIVE
or
THE LOWLY PLACES

The promises of a transformed life enchants and seduces.
It entices and beckons, and makes us mad with desire.
We step forward with our illusions and lofty expectations,
 only to find reality to be different.
After we've left all the familiar things that give us security —
We find ourselves completely alone
And disconsolate.

Perhaps what we are really called to do
 Is to transform the disappointments!
Anyone can go after an assured outcome,
Devise the appropriate strategy
 to take advantage of an opportunity that is certain!
But how many can transform disappointments?
How many can smile in the face of adversity?
How many can say to Life, or to God:
“Thank you for letting me experience
the full range of my humanity:
the ecstasy and the despondency,
the triumph and the despair,
the successes and the frustrations.
And thank you for the visions
as well as the broken dreams,
the benediction as well as the aloneness?”
The transformational imperative urges us forth
 on the promise of something grand,
But once it's assured of our commitment,
It leaves us all alone
 to transform the lowly places.

July, 1986

LIFE'S TRUE ELIXIR

As I reflect back on my own passage,
I remember how terrified I was.
I was incapable of Life's fullness;
So the ground had to be prepared.
I was addicted to respectability and propriety
So these were the very things
That Life tore from my back.
I had only known achievements,
So I had to be humbled;
I had not yet learned compassion ,
So I had to suffer.
I had not known how to heal;
So I had to be wounded.
To receive the gift of my Self,
I had to withdraw all the projections
I'd made onto the world,
And become freed of my own expectations
Of how I thought my life ought to be.
Life does not know half measures.
After passing us through the great winepress
of suffering and despair,
We are fermented in the cauldron of
unknowing and uncertainty.
But from this (eventually) emerges
Life's true elixir,
 The taste of which is peace,
The fragrance of which is
 A benediction to all.

1989

MY BELOVED

My Beloved came without my bidding;
It came, even as I spoke with the woman
who was accusing me of being unfeeling.
I listened to the woman's accusations,
But there was no power in her words,
For she was attacking only an image
She herself had created.

My Beloved knows and understands me
And came to defend me against the woman.
It caressed me with bliss,
Which flowed in and around me.
It touched the woman too,
Silencing her!

Circa 1987

