

## How I Came To Receive These Teachings

### 1. **The Search**

What do I really want to tell you, dear reader, about this book, this teaching, and how I received it? I can guess at your first questions: What was it like to receive this? Did you really hear something? Were you frightened? What was it like afterwards? What do you think of it now? What is it? I will try to answer all those questions, and some others, along the way. But first I want to tell you a story, a love story, really. But not in the usual sense.

As long as I can remember, all my life, even as a very little girl, I was looking for a teacher – a wise, thoughtful person. I wanted him or her to tell me about the really important things, about life and people, about God, about the odd wonder of being among the trees or in a boat on a lake. I wanted to know what was most true and how I could find it and know it.

Teachers, Girl Scout leaders, camp counselors, and the parents of my school friends were my first candidates, but none answered my call better than my grandfather. He was no contemplative, relying instead on his great curiosity and powerful commonsense and practicality. But he listened easily to my questions and responded with candor and kindness. Then there were

my beloved books; Emerson and Thoreau were my adolescent favorites, along with Kahlil Gibran, the great Russian novelists, and a sea of poets.

A dean of women, a professor of Bible, and many more books held me in college, but I was unprepared for the intellectual superficiality of graduate school. Those five years were a long bleak time, learning I must study human beings only through their visible (and quantifiable) behavior. No meaningful teaching there, that was certain. I left the university Ph.D. in hand, but somehow battered and alone, all my deep questions ridiculed and dismissed as immature longings.

Longings they surely were. If I could not learn about what is meaningful, what was the point of an academic or scholarly life? And how would I teach my new undergraduate students? Simply making them go through the same reductionist program I had just escaped? That surely would not meet their curiosities and hungers.

A white-haired elderly beauty in London showed up in my life at just the perfect moment, just as a profound life crisis was brewing. I was in my early thirties, and for half a dozen years I went to London for a month or two each year to visit with her, in some odd mix of therapy, teaching, friendship, and deep talk. She gave me tools, better questions, and companionship. My seeking was raised to a blessed human quest. She taught me how to “read”

my dreams and decipher their clues. She loaned me many books – Jung, Rilke, Merton, Julian of Norwich, Bede, Trungpa, and more: the hermits, teachers, and healers of so many traditions. She was the admissions office and entry way to the perennial wisdom, east and west. I visited every room, stayed a while in some, and then moved on. I would dive deeply into a contemplative tradition as best I could, hoping, always hoping, this would satisfy the longing and restlessness of my heart, and that I would finally find my way home.

But it wasn't to be. A deep twenty-year immersion in Western mysticism and Catholic liturgy and spirituality, in the end, proved not to be the inexhaustible well I needed. It slipped off my shoulders like an old shawl almost without my noticing. I was very sad at the loss.

One powerful tool in Jungian dream work is active imagination. The student is taught to pick an aspect of a dream, usually an intriguing or startling figure, and then to quiet down and try to start a “conversation” with that figure. The dream figure often is surprisingly articulate and very willing to “speak” to the listening dreamer. I have been told, many students find this very difficult and quite odd; why or how can I do this? With some guided practice, most can learn to quiet the noisy internal objections and to hear what that fragment of the psyche has to “say.” Jung discovered this

approach could be great help for a client who wishes to reclaim more aspects of her psychological and personal wholeness. In his terms, dream work is the royal road to a fully mature self, and active imagination is one of the most powerful tools for proceeding down that royal road.

When I was first introduced to active imagination, in my early thirties, I discovered it was strangely and unexpectedly easy. My very active, conscious mind seemed well able to become an alert listener, very willing to “hear” from various “points of view” arising out of the unconscious. I understood it then, and now as well, as a practice perfectly suited to expand awareness of myself and others, to rein in ignorant or harmful ego-positions, and to develop a much more compassionate relationship with myself and the world. Slowly I learned there were no others that could not also reflect an aspect of myself. It seems odd to say this, but decades later, there are no strangers, only people I haven’t met yet.

So what does all that have to do with this book? I believe that this decades-long practice of dream work and active imagination prepared me to receive these teachings. It taught me how to listen without judgment, how to hold the skepticism and fearfulness to the side, and eventually, to trust that I was able to receive teachings that would be of use to others as well as for myself.

The decades of inner practice, in my thirties, forties, and fifties, were also years I studied the main contemplative traditions, first those grounded in Christian spirituality, later in earth-based practices and then, most recently, Buddhist traditions. Apparently both sides of me, my intellect and my interior, contemplative side, must be simultaneously nourished and active. That has been true all my life; even as a youngster, when I was reading Emerson I was spending long days alone exploring a local creek and wandering in the neighboring meadows.

Then, approaching sixty, I fell into another severe personal crisis. All the known elements of my life were rocked to their foundations, and long stable parts of my daily life were suddenly in disarray. Beloved friends had drifted away, and I had left other central relationships. Work had lost its joy, and the world was shattering from human heedlessness about environmental and public health catastrophes. There was no limit to the deep reach of global corporations. And there was nothing I could do about any of it. All the icons of meaning had disintegrated. I sank into a painful and dark despair.

One day I was driving to my Pilates class (I had to try to keep my body moving while in this dreadful swamp.) and I suddenly heard myself cry out: “Isn’t there anyone out there who can help? What does all this suffering mean?”

And in a split second, a calm, resonant voice responded: “We thought you would never call for help.”

I was speechless, dumb in amazement and fear. I sat in the parking lot trembling. What had just happened? What was that “voice” and where did that sentence come from? I’m not sure I even went to the Pilates class. I know I sat in the car a long time, trying to take it in. The years of dream work probably had prepared me to hear and stay with the immediate experience. The cry for help from my deep desolation triggered what would develop into my first conscious relationship with a Teacher, a not-in-body teacher but definitely the teacher I had been actively searching for most of my life. This great adventure would emerge from that first encounter in my car.

## **2. The Problem**

I’m sitting in a refurbished science lecture hall on a late winter afternoon. It is already dark outside. It’s been a long day, and my mind is tired. It wanders away from the lurching faculty discussion of how to begin a long-term planning process. It’s complicated because we are suspended in a presidential transition. Then there is an angry-voiced objection to a new fee for staff use of the athletic facilities. I’m weary of it all. Why do I feel, after forty years here, so separate and disconnected from the faculty? Sadness

stirs in my heart, the old burden of not being an easy member of the group, but always somehow “outside.” I am *in*, but not *of*.

The Dean of Faculty is now giving his generous reviews of newly published faculty books. We all find this delicious, enjoying his recognition and praise of the faculty’s scholarly work. My mind starts to imagine him speaking of my recently published account of these wisdom teachings, my channeled book, and I cringe. I’ll never be able to do that. My gut clenches from the pictures in my mind, and my body pumps out danger signals. I dread the humiliation and dismissal, and the life time habits of hiding my interior life take over.

This is of course an *imagined* scenario, but I have lived my entire adult life ensconced within the precincts of the academy. Some parts of the academic life I have embraced whole-heartedly: the centrality of inquiry, thought, and discussion, for example, and the central task of teaching the young. What I have not embraced is the insistence that only the visible and the material are legitimate objects of study. A certain form of science has penetrated virtually every corner of the academic world, imposing its premises and methods. Reality is material, and more and more aspects of mind can be reduced to brain and body. The invisible and the immaterial must be transposed to the material or dismissed. Subjective experience is

suspect, as it cannot be observed or reproduced by someone else. It can only be studied as aberrant perceptions and behavior.

I do not wish to be an object of analysis, and I have kept the accounts of my interior life very private, shared only with a few trusted friends and colleagues. If I weren't well tenured and in the last years of my professional life, I would never consider "going public" with anything like this text. Even so, I am full of dread. I have long been an outlier. I have never been able to embrace the monopoly of scientific premises and methods for understanding human beings; it leaves far too much out and unaccounted for. Now it will become very clear how much I do not honor the taboos of the academy.

### **3. The Teacher Arrives**

The voice I heard in the car – "We thought you'd never call" – became a regular guest in my morning meditation. She really was my teacher, reframing problems, naming situations, and giving good day to day advice. I understood her to be an aspect of my own psyche, intimately personal but with a quality of objectivity and separateness that reinforced the sense of "other." At the same time, that presence was very relational and always available for dialogue. This relationship and its dialogue deepened

and shifted over the years, becoming perhaps less personal and expanding well beyond the horizons of my daily life.

I had been in the habit for nearly thirty years of sitting each morning with a cup of fresh coffee and my journal. I would write down a dream, comment on the day, or probe into some trouble or heart ache. Often I would read a brief piece of spiritual writing, and then, mediate a while. It was into this daily space I welcomed the new Teacher, and it was there I practiced the deep interior listening.

I must try to describe what listening, hearing, speaking, and voice mean. They could all be in quotation marks, as they don't quite refer to our usual everyday meanings of those words. I just don't know any better ones.

I don't hear a sound. It is not an audible voice. Someone sitting next to me would not hear anything. Language arrives in my mind, I suppose, but it feels like hearing. It doesn't seem *my* language at all, but markedly *not* mine. Many times I have marveled at the observations and ideas, knowing I would never be able to see or think such things. They are so completely "out of the box," and literally unimaginable to me.

I usually begin with a question, comment, or request for help understanding something. Quieting my mind, I wait for the response. I am writing all this in my journal, first the question and then the response. Once

the language starts to flow, I write quickly, taking it down nearly as dictation, It is fluent, easy process. I'm relaxed and comfortable, letting the received language flow smoothly into my writing hand. It is so effortless and seamless, I'm unable to describe it any more fully. Somehow language emerges in my mind and I'm able to receive it, "hear it," as I say, though there is no sound. Writing it down seems an essential part of the process. Later, I would learn I could receive a long teaching directly on my laptop.

I am fully conscious and alert while I do this. I can answer the phone, if I must, talk briefly, and then return to that deeper interior space and continue the process. It can be very tiring, especially if it lasts more than fifteen or twenty minutes, the usual length of the morning teachings. An hour of this deep work can leave me drained and tired for hours. Sometimes I can do little more than go for a walk or listen to some music. It's as if I must resurface and then wait for my usual daily energy to be replenished.

This puzzles me. There is so much about energy I don't understand well enough. These communicating presences seem to be or reflect concentrated energy. But I know I must be able to meet or receive that energy with my own. I can't do this if I'm very tired or unwell. And I must re-charge after a session. Several times I've encountered an energy that was overwhelming in some way: too strong or too unknown, perhaps. I

instinctively said, “No thanks. Not for me, now.” And it left. This raises so many questions which I cannot answer. I think we know very little about ranges of energy, especially those that can’t be measured by our scientific instruments. We know even less about human sensitivity to energetic frequencies.

When I use the word “voice,” I am pointing to my experience of a recognizable pattern of relating and speaking. I sense the energy in some intuitive way and believe I can identify it as male or female, for example, personal or impersonal, or intimate or distant.

The most difficult question for me is, are these beings? I simply don’t know. And I don’t know how to find out. This is, after all, all coming through my mind: mind listening, mind hearing, mind directing writing, mind observing, and mind describing. Is it also mind speaking from deep within the psyche or the unconscious, as Jung would say? And is mind bounded by the individual? Or is there something also transpersonal about mind? Again, I don’t know. I can only describe how I experience this. I can do no more than report my subjective experience.

I’ve had two major Teachers the last seven or eight years, each readily available. My contact with either depends on my ability to be fully present and receptive. Each has a distinctive presence and voice. Each seems to have

a special area of expertise or wisdom. At some point, I decided I really needed to ask each one, who they were. But I was terrified to do so. Much of me did not want to know, frankly, and did not want to even broach the subject. But I finally did, in the most circumspect manner I could imagine: “Please, what shall I call you?” Not, who are you? But, how shall I name you? I think this matters a great deal, but I don’t know why.

“You may call me Kwan Yin.” I was stunned. I had been imagining this kindly, wise womanly voice as a deep wisdom figure from within my own psyche, as Jung had taught. Kwan Yin is the beloved compassionate female deity in the Buddhist lands of East Asia – China, Japan, and Korea. As a figure of popular devotion, she apparently migrated from South Asia, where she is known as the male bodhisattva, the compassionate Avalokiteshvara. She is revered as “she who hears the cries of the world,” who responds with compassion to all who suffer. Like the Blessed Mother in the Christian world, she is revered by the untutored, and countless sculptors and painters have elaborated her image.

My second Teacher was even more circumspect. His answer to my question of what I should call him was “The Tibetans call me Manjushri.” While I was a little familiar with Kwan Yin, because several friends were devoted to her in their Buddhist practice, I knew nothing of Manjushri, his

place in Tibetan Buddhism, or the traditions and practices which surround him. When he announced himself, I was at my cabin on a remote island in Lake Superior, and very far from a library. Only slowly did I gather more information about the powerful protector deity or the sword of discernment in his raised hand, ready to cut through ignorance.

Why do I believe this voice? Why do I take it seriously? Why do I pay it my full attention? Strangely, I've never asked myself that question before. The simplest answer, the one that just pops up instinctively, is that the advice "works." It has been extraordinarily helpful to me in countless ways. I'm offered a suggestion of how to resolve a conflict, a different way to interpret someone's behavior, advice on calming and re-ordering my own stressful and demanding work life, or simple reminders of a larger view or a better set of priorities. The re-framing they offer is often stunningly powerful, releasing a relentless, stuck "tangle" with a new view or a longer prospect. Then I can often relax my grip and watch for a more organic resolution to emerge.

Day after day and year after year, the Teachers earned their authority with me through those gifts of insight, support, and kindness. Sometimes when I'm wrestling with some complex issue at the college, I suddenly remember, that probably very few of my colleagues benefit from this

extraordinarily valuable assistance. I can't even imagine any more what it would be like to manage my life all by myself, limited by ego's narrow vision and repertoire of responses.

So, the first answer is that the advice and counsel I receive from the Teachers is immensely valuable to me in my daily life. I've learned to trust deeply their unqualified support and practical wisdom. In a world where it seems virtually all authorities – from Congress and the courts to corporations, the media, and schools – are at best unreliable and at worst corrupt and self-serving, to learn to trust a wise teacher and guide is a great gift. It brings with it stability, confidence, and effectiveness.

The teaching in this book does something else as well. It offers a capacious view of reality, where greed-driven human beings are depicted with non-judgmental clarity. The terrors of our age – global poverty, environmental degradation, and rampant violent conflicts – are radically reframed. They look very different through the lens of consciousness, energetic transformation, and the fundamental facts of our interdependence. Readers often remark that the Teacher's view is so liberating, in part because it dissolves their despair and hopelessness about the world and human affairs. If the teaching did only this, and enabled more of us to continue our efforts

at reform and healing on behalf of global social justice, it would have earned its own legitimacy.

It is the third step which is so difficult. If the daily teachings are so personally helpful, and the larger teachings so powerful as a new world view, what can we say or must we think about their source, the teaching voices? You, the reader, can believe I have wrestled with that question in my journal, sitting on the rocky shore of Lake Superior looking out at the vast inland sea, or trying to explain this process to a sympathetic and curious reader. When I tried to tell several academic colleagues about this very mysterious process, I learned not to name it myself. It was better to let each name it herself. A highly respected English professor said nearly dismissively, “Oh, Penny, lots of writers describe that process. It’s called the muse!” Another writer friend circumvented the whole problem and insisted I was the author, and as such, that I had complete freedom to shape and alter the language in any way I wished. (I didn’t.) I understood in a new and chilling way Jesus’ question to his followers: “Who do you say I am?”

This is the point of breaking tension. This is where the teaching and the process of receiving it challenges profound premises of western culture and modernity itself. That would be another book, but let me make just a few observations here. If this voice emerges from my own unconscious, our

views of what a person is must be radically expanded. What is mental illness then? What does “hearing voices” signal about the brain, neural cognitive processes, or the reality of consciousness? What constitutes normal human maturation, and what potentialities lie within us?

It challenges the deep assumptions and operating procedures of contemporary science. If a phenomenon is not accessible to multiple observers, can we know anything about it? How might we learn to evaluate subjective experience, rather than to dismiss it as unreal and unworthy of investigation?

The most difficult challenge is, if this is not an intra-psychic phenomenon, arising out of my psyche, where is it located? Are there beings not-in-body, invisible to the human eye, but presenting themselves as coherent, self aware, and stable beings?

The vast majority of Americans report they believe in God, and nearly as many say the same about angels. Yet they live in the most science-permeated, pragmatic culture the world has ever known. Do they ignore that impossible dichotomy? Are they unaware of the fissure in their own mind and being? Do they completely compartmentalize these two views of ultimate reality? I don't know. We hold conferences and write books and establish charitable foundations to discuss “science and religion.” We fight

over the place of evolution in our public school curriculum. We have firm and excitable opinions about these profound questions, but few ways to ponder them fruitfully.

I can only speak of my own experience, my sense of its stunning potency and clarity, and recognize the sharp limits of my own intellectual and philosophical analytic tools. In the end, I'm left holding the opposites in great tension with each other. To resolve the conflict by silencing one side or the other seems unhelpful. I can't fully exit my western education. But there is not a shred of doubt in me, in mind or heart, that some non-human entity is communicating with me, and through me, for the benefit of others. That this is anathema to my professional world, where I have lived, taught, and flourished all my life, is a painful fact. Until this moment I've kept my inner life invisible to my academic community. Now, despite my deep fear, I've decided it is not how I want to live these last years of my life. The content of these teachings is both ancient and exquisitely contemporary. It could help many of us chart new ways to think and act. But far more significant, in the long view, is how we came to know these teachings. That is revolutionary, the deepest possible challenge to our views of most everything. This is what makes this teaching so radical. And this is also what makes the teaching transformative and life-giving.

