

Grounding

The philosophical foundation beneath the book

Living In the Tension: The Quest for a Spiritualized Racial Justice

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The Grounding Beneath *Living in the Tension*

This narrative clarifies why I approach the concepts in the book, *Living in the Tension*, as I do. It explains my spiritual journey and relationship to the book's foundational philosophical and metaphysical principles.

To offer a brief, one-paragraph orientation to *Living in the Tension* for context, the book explores tensions between spiritual and racial justice practices. Each chapter tackles a tension-filled issue, conceived of as a polarity that needs to be managed using a *both/and* approach, instead of a problem to be overcome.¹ The essential questions regarding each issue include: What happens if one of the “sides” of the tension is ignored? And, how can both sides be part of a *spiritualized racial justice advocacy* that allows spirituality and justice efforts to support one another? Topics include: 1) Transcendence and Race Consciousness, 2) Self-Acceptance and Self-Improvement, 3) Personal Healing and Political Action, 4) Common Humanity and Group Differences, 5) Belonging and Appropriation, and 6) Truth and Accountability. Each chapter draws on spiritual concepts, and therefore, what follows details my underlying foundation.

The two sections within this narrative include the history of the community that supported my spiritual study (and my relationship to it) and an explanation of a set of principles that guide the treatment of the tensions in the book.

The Aquarian Spiritual Center and Black Gnostic Studies

During my mid-twenties, at the beginning of my simultaneous awakening to issues of racial justice and spiritual studies, a roommate and I sat at our kitchen table with a set of texts open in front of us, mouths agape, both of us wondering what kind of crazy new world we had entered. Our mentor, Vance Aniebo, sensed in both of us a thirst for a deeper relationship to ourselves and the world, and he loved sharing what he knew. We were quickly convinced that the insight available through the material he shared was important and we committed ourselves to further exploration. Along with Vance came interactions with his friends. These African American men worked as mentors to young people in the inner city while also being DJ's, artists, and scholars in university settings. Some were part of Shade Tree Multicultural Foundation, a spiritually-based mentorship community of which Vance was a part, and some were not. Each was part of the same Los Angeles-based spiritual study group, Black Gnostic Studies, founded by Dr. Alfred Ligon, a bibliophile and metaphysician.

Dr. Alfred Ligon was an African-American waiter with the Southern Pacific Railroad for 30 years who had moved to Los Angeles from Chicago in 1936 and founded the Aquarian Library and Bookshop in Los Angeles in 1941. For years, his bookstore, offering texts on subjects ranging from occult mystery schools to theosophy to Egyptology to Gnosticism, served a primarily white clientele.² Prompted by the uprising in Watts in 1965 and the community's needs, Dr. Ligon devoted himself to creating a curriculum that, in addition to the above-named subjects, incorporated teachings from “Ancient Kemet, Jewish, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, Yoruba, Islamic, Masonic, Native American, Rosicrucian, and Masonic” traditions as well as African Diaspora cultures.³ It was in line with the Ageless Wisdom tradition⁴ and was called Black Gnostic Studies. It

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involved a twenty year course of lessons and classes that provided a “form of Black religio-cultural esoterism.”⁵ No diploma, certificate, or university degree was awarded, as Dr. Ligon understood the reward to be “who the person becomes through the study of self.”⁶ The Aquarian Bookstore was well-known as one of the few, and at times only, Black bookshops in the Los Angeles area.

This spiritual study was Afro-centric, but not intended only for Black people. Black meant “hidden,” and gnostic referred to “wisdom.” And so it was that my roommate and I, two white women, were invited to begin attending Black Gnostic Studies classes in downtown Los Angeles at the Aquarian Spiritual Center while Dr. Ligon was still alive and teaching. There we encountered two generations of members. Some of the elder students, who were now teachers themselves, held a distinctly more African Nationalist perspective, while the later generation, of whom Vance was a part, was more comfortable within multiracial settings. Regardless, we were accepted and the primarily African-American membership, both the elder and later generations, supported and welcomed us.

Taking up Black Gnostic Studies and delving into issues of race and class was initiatory, and the resulting internal and external changes felt radical. I simultaneously felt honored to be invited into the Black Gnostic community, but also scared, as ties to my white family and friends became strained. My language, values, orientation toward academics and work all shifted, and I became increasingly uncomfortable in the white world of my upbringing. My family and friends were also concerned about me and how I was being influenced.

Context here is also important. I have to acknowledge that the latter half of the 20th century saw the explosion of many New Age religions in the United States, many of which were appropriations of Eastern forms of spirituality and many of which were considered destructive. This resulted in religious scholarship critiquing how these new religions could result in narcissism, cult-like following, and narrow views.⁷ Therefore, it seems prudent to name that Black Gnostic Studies, which is not a religion, is also aligned with attributes *least* likely to result in the worrisome abuses of authoritarianism or narcissism that characterized many of the new religions.⁸ Using the language of religion scholars,⁹ Black Gnostic Studies is:

1. More *technical* than *charismatic* in that it emphasizes each individual’s inner search and development of a reflective/meditative practice to attain a higher level of consciousness. It does not depend on following an enlightened master and it is understood that individuals, through the study of esoteric curricula and internal reflection, can themselves become knowledgeable about the metaphysical world.
2. *Monistic* (as opposed to *dualistic*) in that it aligns with mystic Western traditions and most Eastern traditions that believe the universe is headed for oneness as opposed to there being a fundamental split between good/evil, saved/unsaved, with some individuals’ destinies in doubt.

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3. *Multilevel* in that it recognizes various stages of conscious awareness and is built on the fundamental belief that scripture was meant to be read symbolically.
4. *Multivocal* in that there are multiple interpretations possible of any symbolic text and culturally-specific contexts are valued.

These elements work together to allow a Black Gnostic Studies student to honor the many pathways available to work toward heightened consciousness, this set of study materials being only one culturally and context-specific example. In this way, the form of spiritual study into which I was initiated supported me in developing a sense of the metaphysical world as being knowable, interconnected, inclusive, and complex. It also supports the view that there are many viable pathways available to investigate and understand the world's mysteries and achieve transcending consciousness.¹⁰

Black Gnostic Studies taught me what other scholars and spiritual teachers also believe, that it is possible to rediscover ancient wisdom that emphasizes realization and inner transformation in a way that serves to connect us through fundamental, core principles as we each work toward increasing our conscious awareness.¹¹ It is also a study that honors the belief that different people, in different cultural contexts, will develop and follow different pathways in attempting to arrive at a similar end-state.¹²

A question may arise regarding whether Black Gnostic Studies primarily comes from an Eastern or Western approach. My deepest understanding of this study is that it seeks to break down the implications of the question. A common characterization is that Western traditions tend toward more outward action, while Eastern traditions have more concern for the inner life. This generalization is not exclusively true; one can find Eastern traditions that are activist in orientation as well as Western mystical traditions that are very inward focused.¹³

Black Gnostic Studies had early and foundational inspiration out of the Western traditions of theosophy and mystic Christianity and is rather inward focused. And, its culturally-specific context has resulted in a healthy valuing of the physical world and social responsibility to contribute to the positive flow of earthly, community life. It therefore allows for both inner and outer focus without compromising one's principles. This question of how to hold both orientations simultaneously is essential when discussing particular issues that challenge 1) spiritually oriented people who are part of traditions that favor an inner focus exclusively and 2) social justice advocates who seek to inspire active, outward participation in political work.

As a final note, being associated with a group of culturally-conscious Black men studying esoteric wisdom traditions at the very inception of my initiation provided, for me, an environment that encouraged both my spiritual and racial identity development simultaneously. This resulted in the reinforcement of my sense of self as whole and intrinsically valuable while at the same time I was challenged to take responsibility for my

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racial placement and its consequences. This dual focus has been at the heart of my journey.

Grounding Principles and Concepts

Essential concepts that orient my approach to living life as a person dedicated to both spiritual growth and social justice come out of Black Gnostic Studies. Each of the concepts acts as a guiding principle to support attempts at reconciling the tensions that arise when developing a spiritual and social justice orientation and practice.

Invisible Guidance, Initiation, and Repeated Opportunities

The “Seven Basic Truths” are a set of “Acceptances” that are at the heart of what keeps me going. The seven basic truths are the acceptance of miracles, immortality, invisible guidance, initiation, ultimate purpose, absolute justice, and repeated opportunities. Based on the writings of *Occult Philosophy*, by Marc Edmund Jones¹⁴, each of these acceptances is rich with meaning and ties together the foundations of many traditions. Certain of them are particularly important for me when engaged with any thinking or effort regarding social justice.

First, the *acceptance of invisible guidance* is often interpreted as the belief in God’s presence in one’s life or the idea of divine intervention. That interpretation may be accurate, and yet it also means more from the occult perspective. The acceptance of invisible guidance recognizes that there is a connection between all spiritual entities and humans with higher aspirations who are engaged in the shared processes of a transcendental nature. This connection furthers the advancement of all who are on the path toward self-consciousness in its many forms. It also links each one of us not only with one another, but also with all those who have trod the path before, including ancestral and divine spirit beings.

For me, accepting the reality of invisible guidance means fundamentally and in the deepest and most expansive way possible that I am not alone. No matter how challenging the road may become, all of our paths are connected. All of us who strive toward some type of ideal state with integrity, mutually and often invisibly, support one another through our shared efforts. It is profoundly comforting to consider the vast number of human souls working toward an elevated state of collective wellness; I also rest more soundly knowing that the spirits of ancestors whose work was instrumental in striving for justice also remain available for support.

Second, the *acceptance of initiation* refers to each individual’s personal responsibility to dedicate oneself to learning specific knowledge appropriate to his or her unique personality. This requires each of us to devote our lives to service to our community through our specialized capacities. In other words, we are each here to do something, and whatever that task is, we are responsible to do it with full conscious understanding of how it can support collective wellness.

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Earlier I referred to my awakening as an initiation. I do not employ that term lightly. It conveys the idea that our lives offer each of us defining moments where we have the opportunity to engage in deep inner reflection and spiritual work in order to gain skills, knowledge, and capacities that can serve the public good. Often these moments come out of challenging circumstances that feel like a death, or we may feel like survival leaves us no choice but to submit to the demands of the moment. But we do have a choice.

We may choose to run away from the challenge, rail against change, or cling to an easier, well-traveled path. People often reject initiation. But, when we accept initiation, we become different, we change, we increase our consciousness, and we support our collective progression/evolution as a result. Stories of individuals who have met their initiatory moment and have submitted to its requirements for a healing transformation and advancement in skill and consciousness inspire me. There are many who answer this call, and although each has his or her own focus, each is working for our collective betterment in some way. Oppression, prejudice, and hate are reduced as increasing numbers take up this call toward social responsibility.

Third, the *acceptance of repeated opportunities* refers to the idea of reincarnation. Important to distinguish is that within occult philosophy this does not suggest one returns to earth in a “lesser” form after some failing in a prior human existence. This is, on the contrary, an evolutionary concept. Beyond the idea of cycles of recurrence, this idea infers a progression of movement toward self-realization. In the terminology of mystic Christianity, one might say one reaches salvation through the epitomizing of the Christ.¹⁵ As a concept, this way of seeing reincarnation is inherently aspirational and inclusive while recognizing the extraordinary nature of the achievement. Each person is ultimately headed toward self-realization at one’s own rate of development, but conscious attention is required to make it happen.

The idea that consciousness grows and expands over cycles of Earth experience, ever-reaching for a culminating moment where one’s consciousness is elevated to the level of the Christ or Buddha figure also comforts me. One might understandably ask why and whether it feels out of reach and wildly beyond my own current capacities. Yes, it does. But, ending racism, sexism, homophobia, internalized superiority, and the institutional social, economic, educational, and political structures that keep them in place feels equally out of reach. Knowing I am now, and will for lifetimes to come, be part of a movement toward justice is the long view. It is the radical equivalent of those who say social justice work is a marathon, not a sprint.

Human Evolution

The concepts outlined above from occult philosophy also go hand in hand with a way of seeing evolution that prompts me to see social justice work as absolutely essential for my spiritual practice and as sacred work. Let us consider the life cycle of one human’s earth experience. Think of it like a “V.” The way I see it, a single “V” is one human incarnation from spirit into matter (downward), with an upward return to spirit upon death. So, there is a “descent” into the physical world and then an “ascent” to spirit. The different

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end point symbolizes that we should end our life with more consciousness. We should have learned something new about life through that single earthly life.

The framing that guides me, however, is more expansive and refers not to just one human life cycle, but to a grand set of cycles.¹⁶ Thus we have an extremely long series of “V”s. In this way of seeing our evolution, we choose each time and location for our birth based on selecting the environment best suited for the learning we need at that time. We then use that learning to contribute to the collective.

This allows me to believe human beings are purposefully moving through a cyclical process of incarnating into an intelligently-created physical world. Through this process a unique spirit inhabits a human body during each incarnation.¹⁷ Much learning and development has and will continue to occur through repeated incarnations into human form. And in this way of seeing evolution, humans are not the only ones learning.

As a mythologist, Michael Meade’s work locates links between the various traditions of the ancients, and one particular insight speaks to the question of evolution and human purpose. Essentially, the idea is that “inside people is where god learns.”¹⁸ Carl Jung calls forth a similar idea when, in *Answer to Job*, he suggests that God becomes conscious through the experience of waging with the Devil and witnessing Job negotiate the various trials and tribulations set before him.¹⁹

There are a number of psychological consequences that come with conceiving of human evolution and purpose on Earth in this way. For me, first, this extends the “long view” of purposeful work, allowing me to embrace what is present in life on Earth as both meaningful and consequential, but with the caveat that from a spiritual perspective, each life is but a blip in the larger scheme of the descent/ascent process. This perspective supports detachment and depersonalization while keeping me actively attending to social justice issues.²⁰

Second, it makes my participation in Earthly life, and justice efforts, paramount. These ideas mean a human being’s work here is to fully incarnate into life and spiritualize it through increased consciousness (learning through experience).²¹ By doing so, I add to the conscious development of what some term the “universal God”, or “Creator”, the “universal good”, or the intelligence underlying all creation. It makes all of what each person does meaningful, to the degree that it is used to build conscious awareness (which involves becoming increasingly clear about how each person can be a better human to one another).

Fate and Destiny

My beliefs about large-scale, human evolution support my understanding of how social justice work serves the global collective. But, I also benefit from more personally relatable guidance regarding my specific purpose during this life cycle. The concepts of fate and destiny are part of this foundation. Popular conceptions of fate and destiny often involve collapsing the two together and viewing life’s pathways as predetermined. As with

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everything learned through initiation into esoteric streams of thought, a more nuanced understanding became useful. This included recognizing astrology as a way to investigate one's personal relationship to the world.

Surprising no one more than myself, insights from esoteric astrology provided a deep level of meaning-making that allowed me to bring voice and image to deep-seeded and long-confounding personal struggles. For example, when faced with two people in front of me with two conflicting stories, I have enormous difficulty deciding in favor of one over the other. I generally can see both sides. Additionally, for most of my life, I have been attracted to symmetry and balance, clean straight lines and linearity. Thoughts override emotion, and I prefer clear pathways and avoid confusion.

My personal insight into how these patterns affect my racial justice work came after a visit with a seasoned astrologer who used my birth information to develop my natal chart. A natal chart is a "stylized map of the universe" that has the person of focus at the center. It uses the time and location of a person's birth to chart a map that offers insight into that individual's personality and potential. The chart shows the positions of the sun, moon, planets, and sometimes other celestial bodies at the time of the person's birth.²²

After analyzing my chart, the astrologer named and explained inner tensions imprinted within me that had been surfacing repeatedly for years, like those mentioned above. For two hours he talked about planetary aspects and relationships, angles and implications. The result was in no way a statement about definite locations and outcomes of specific events I would or had experienced, but instead was a revelation of general tendencies of which I should be aware. What he said resonated strongly. I was making connections about my fate and destiny. It makes sense that my search for symmetry, balance, and holding two people's truths as equally viable are a part of my fundamental orientation. These are some of my fated concerns, and they affect how I relate to people, my job, and my racial justice work. How I choose to live out these concerns, to which issues they are consciously applied, and to what end, becomes my destiny.

Michael Meade, in *Fate and Destiny: The Two Agreements of the Soul* offers a number of statements about fate and destiny and how the ancients have understood them throughout time. I offer the variety of quotes below because each contains a seed of some unique thought, the collection of which provides insight into what the words fate and destiny might mean.

Fate and destiny are an archetypal pairing within each soul; they form a dynamic tension that makes each life meaningful and purposeful.

Fate inscribes an area or territory that we are bound to enter. Destiny involves finding a way out or a way through exactly those areas and aspects that constrain the vitality of our lives.

Trouble is another word for fate; what troubles us the most is what we are fated to one day face.

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Our fate in life may include aspects of our family, but it also includes unique qualities that are present before we are born into the world of time and place.²³

Putting it all together, fate is the terrain I walk while incarnated in this human body as myself. It is what I bring into the world as issues to navigate and/or resolve. So, the generalized, patterned, deeply personal, and long-standing struggles reflected back to me from the astrologer describe something of my fate, my trouble, my inner terrain.

But, how could I understand more deeply its implications for my life? How could that shape my destiny, where I am headed? I took the natal chart, along with the mythic interpretations, and was helped by my mentor, Vance, to hold it against a process of identifying my life's "cross," the fated cross I bear in the world. Four points of the chart, four planetary angles with their degrees, matched up with symbolic imagery located within Dane Rudyard's *An Astrological Mandala*.²⁴ And, there I had it, laid out in front of me. The four points of the cross involved the questions: What I am to do (destiny)? Where am I headed spiritually through that doing (also destiny)? Why me? And, how will I accomplish my task? What I love about this symbolic approach is that it offers archetypal understanding, but leaves the details for the individual to fill out as life is lived.

Within Meade's understanding, neither fate nor destiny is held as a fixed or exact predictor. Meade again provides some useful language.

Fate can mean 'it is written,' yet the inner story that our fate inscribes is a living text and breathing record that is open to interpretation and subject to change.

When life is fully lived fate functions more as an oracle needing interpretation than a pre-determined outcome. Shifting fate and finding the destiny within it is part of the art of truly living and of living truly.

...fate is more a story line than a completed script, more a pattern woven into the soul than a fixation of the mind, more a drama seeking to unfold from the center of our lives.²⁵

This resonated for me. My story line involves very specific tensions and struggles that emerge for me no matter where I go and with whom I interact. It is up to me to figure out what to do with my personality struggles and the degree to which those tensions can be transformed.

Here is where I began to get a glimpse of how this relates to racial justice. My fate lets me know how I show up to the dance of life, with what kind of style and with what predispositions. My fate involves both on a cultural level the fact that I am born with white skin and all that comes with it and intra-psychically that I am constantly striving both for deeper meaning and balance. These themes follow me everywhere. My fate has provided experiences that have made each salient and meaningful. Taking them up

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consciously, they now irrevocably shape how I approach the world. They shape how I approach advocacy. Therefore, my destined actions toward social justice will assuredly continue to carry forth these fated themes of deep, psychological investigation and a search for harmony and connection.

Spirit and Soul

Another set of terms that tend to be collapsed into one another are “spirit” and “soul.” I offer some definitions and discussion here to tease them apart because one’s definition of, and relationship to, these concepts can result in significant psychological (and therefore behavioral) consequences.

A common understanding of the word spirit is conveyed by Deepak Chopra when he says spirit means “to breathe, to inspire, to be inspired is to be breathed by the breath of God.”²⁶ The important questions are how this helps me understand how to relate to the world in which I live and how spirit is related to soul. To inquire into these questions I turned to three sources.

I first turned to a close friend and founder of Shade Tree, Orland Bishop, who after completing his twenty years of Black Gnostic Studies, became one of the main teachers for the ongoing classes. Orland has been an important confidant, guide, and influence in my thinking for almost 20 years. Even though there have been innumerable and extensive in-depth conversations between us on these topics over the years, Orland sat with me for formal interviews so I might more responsibly include his insights in the book. During two, two hour audio-taped sessions he responded to myriad questions I had struggled with during these parallel journeys of spiritual and racial justice practice development.

During these interviews, Orland stated that spirit is the universal power that,

puts itself into darkness so that light can emerge. It puts itself into matter so that truth can emerge. It puts itself into the task. It does not allow an objective interest. It is a freedom to say, given this, what do I do? So, it’s a creative act of transmutation of personality, the elements of materiality, to the degree that the potential within those things becomes actualized. It’s an energy...It’s evolutionary...an evolving of matter into its knowing.

Spirit, then, is the energy underneath our development that is both invested in our work in terms of providing support, but an energy that is also objective in terms of final outcome. Evolution is its direction, wherever that may lead.

I asked specifically what soul is and how it works. According to Orland, each person comes to the Earth with a unique soul agreement, a primary understanding of what the soul is to accomplish on Earth. Therefore, each person’s soul is “aimed at an individuating task.” But, he went on to say that on Earth each person does the work of this task within a collective, as there are others who are seeking similar goals and who have a common will. Each person therefore must find community in order to fulfill their individual task. Part of one’s soul’s work, therefore, is locating people with whom to do

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their work. In this way, making relationship with others and supporting them to follow their soul's path is part of what makes it possible to affect civilization more consciously.

I then asked about spirit's relationship with soul. Orland replied, "Spirit liberates the boundaries of soul consciousness to become actualized." Again, spirit acts as the energy, but here, as related to soul, spirit releases the capacity for the soul to do its work of becoming more conscious and fulfilling its task on Earth. In response, I wondered aloud if it meant that soul and spirit need each other. To this, he replied,

Mind is to matter as soul is to spirit. Mind orients matter to allow it to meet certain needs. I know if I'm cold I put on a shirt. So mind allows matter to know what it has to do to meet its momentary needs... Soul allows spirit to meet its momentary needs. It's an inverse. It's a reflection. As above, so below... Spirit is always willing to become matter.

For the sake of this work, what guides me most is the idea that the two, spirit and soul, function together to allow for human consciousness to evolve in ways that are particular to each person, and that the fulfillment of each person's soul agreements depends on people being in connection with one another.²⁷

I also know that a significant amount of Orland's thinking has been informed by concepts found in Anthroposophy, a spiritual science oriented around the work of Rudolph Steiner.²⁸ Steiner is therefore my second source, as his writing makes distinctions between three aspects of soul from an evolutionary standpoint. According to Steiner, humans first developed the Sentient Soul, which can be called the "darkest depths of the soul" and this is the site of basic emotions such as "fear, horror, anxiety, and hope." From there, humans began developing the Rational, Perceptive, or Intellectual Soul. This is the "center of our soul life" and is "responsible for ego development." It is this aspect of soul that brings in and assimilates information from the outer world and allows the ego to work through and find equilibrium between the pulls of the inner and outer world. This is the site where "inner truth arises." The final aspect, currently being created as part of the "long view" of evolution described above, is the Consciousness Soul. This aspect moves beyond the ability to reflect inwardly and leads to the ability to have a "clear ego consciousness" where there is a real, objective knowing of the world. This is a massive work in progress for humanity.²⁹

The continuing theme that emerges through reading Steiner and discussions with Orland is that the deep basis for why people need each other as human beings is because one's soul development depends on all people working together within the world. Further, one's soul and spirit are working in cahoots with one another. Both require the external, material world as part of the evolutionary process. It is not a mistake, a fatal flaw, that humans are manifested on the physical plane. Physicality is purposeful.

Given that, a question I wondered about was how to understand the common spiritual effort to transcend physical nature. A lecture by Steiner discusses various ways people demonstrate attempts at liberation from, and engagement with, the world.³⁰ This helps

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me see how the tension felt between (1) *seeing physicality as purposeful* while simultaneously (2) *seeking liberation from the constraints of human form* is an important aspect of soul work.

Steiner indicates that humans are called to work toward equilibrium, a balance between the two poles of liberation and engagement. People should neither “allow ourselves to be excluded from all that the Earth signifies”, nor should people become so entangled that freedom of discrimination is lost. Steiner goes on, in a later lecture, to describe the soul’s three different types of knowledge: imaginative, inspirational, and intuitive.³¹ The explanation provides evidence that one is not limited to taking an either/or approach to one’s development of more advanced cognitive faculties. His approach, therefore, holds that there are pathways available other than the outer path (leading only toward the sense world) or the inner path (leading toward mystical unity), but there are paths that lead toward both goals equally.

A third source that is more symbolic and poetic also helps clarify the distinctions between spirit and soul. Pulling together threads from ancient tales that connect with Ageless Wisdom,³² Meade writes:

The soul is another kind of body, a subtle body that partakes of both spirituality and physicality. As the third element in the trinity of existence, soul fills the space between spirit and matter, it grounds the spirit while animating the body and helping to refine the senses.

Soul is the connecting principle of life, the “both-and” factor, the unifying third between any opposing forces....when life becomes more polarized than it need be and things become more divided than they should be, it is the way of the soul that is missing and needed to heal the divisions and make things whole again.

For our soul instinctively knows where and how we should sink our feet into the mud of creation and grow our roots down. Spirit may seek peak experiences and the heavenly heights; but soul would have us incarnate fully and would help us to grow deep roots that allow the spirit of our life to branch out.

In contrast to the tendency of spirit to unify under a single idea or singular image of the divine, the soul thrives on diversity and multiplicity.³³

These last two points get at the heart of why this question of spirit and soul are so meaningful for the book. My sense is that many who look toward spirituality and healing practices in modern culture do so in a way that leaves soul neglected. For the sake of transcending the pain and difficulty experienced within U.S. society, many people aspire to leave it behind rather than engaging it more fully in order to be part of transforming it. This has tremendous implications for social justice work.

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Conclusion

I provide this story of my personal journey into spirituality and social justice because both spiritually-oriented people and social justice advocates oftentimes quickly reject one another based on differing belief systems. The orientation of “both/and”, the idea that two seemingly contradictory things can both be true at the same time, can help reconcile the tensions between the principles held by spiritual and activist communities. Also helpful is recalling Steiner’s words, that “so-called contradictions, when they come from experience and a deeper knowledge of the matter...lead us gradually to a living grasp of things, because life itself is developing towards harmony.”³⁴ With the full scope of my spiritual/philosophical foundation explained, I hope readers will join me in reflecting on how we can approach cultivating the “both/and” in ways that further our collective efforts to evolve, expand consciousness, and build a just society.

Notes

1. Johnson, Barry, *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvables Problems*, (Middleville, MI: Polarity Management Associates, 1996), 24.
2. Hopkins, R., *All the Lights the Light*. (UCLA: Department of Special Collections, online). Some historical information about Dr. Alfred Ligon was taken from interviews conducted by a doctoral student at UC Santa Barbara, Ranford B. Hopkins, in 1982 as part of a research project that was then titled “Leadership and the Growth of the Afro-American Community of Los Angeles, 1900-1965. The full transcripts are posted online at: http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb4g5009q6&brand=calisphere&doc.view=entire_text.
3. Johnson, H. T., *Aquarian Spiritual Center, South Central, Los Angeles*. (Claremont Graduate Institute: Institute for Signifying Scriptures, online). Some historical information about the Black Gnostic Studies was gleaned from an article posted on the website for the “Institute for Signifying Scriptures” at Claremont Graduate Institute, written by T. Hasan Johnson. Professor Johnson was, at the time I met him, one of Vance’s friends and a frequent attendee at the Aquarian Spiritual Center. Dr. Johnson’s article can be found at: <http://www.cgu.edu/pages/7609.asp>. Information about Dr. Ligon, the Aquarian Spiritual Center, and Black Gnostic Studies that was not found either through the online transcripts (see previous note) or through Dr. Johnson’s article came from oral interviews with Orland Bishop, member and teacher of Black Gnostic Studies.
4. McLaughlin, Corinne & Davidson, Gordon, *Spiritual Politics: Changing the World from the Inside Out*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1994), 15.

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5. Johnson, H. T., *Aquarian Spiritual Center, South Central, Los Angeles*. (Claremont Graduate Institute: Institute for Signifying Scriptures, online)
6. Hopkins, R., *All the Lights the Light*. (UCLA: Department of Special Collections, online).
7. Anthony, D., Ecker, B., & Wilber, K., *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation*. (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1987).
8. Anthony, D., Ecker, B., & Wilber, K., *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation*. (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1987), 43.
9. Anthony, D., Ecker, B., & Wilber, K., *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation*. (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1987), 36-93
10. McLaughlin, Corinne & Davidson, Gordon, *Spiritual Politics: Changing the World from the Inside Out*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1994), 18.
11. Tolle, E., *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2005) 16-17; Anthony, D., Ecker, B., & Wilber, K., *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation*. (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1987), 335. "As you go to the more esoteric, inner level the Western and Eastern ideas seem to be more about the same kind of thing...scholars who argue that there's a perennial wisdom common to all of the traditions, that they are really essentially the same." And, p. 345, "In Needleman's opinion, whatever may be the scholar's view, the various mystical traditions converge toward the same transcendent truth, although their convergence can only be apprehended transrationally and described symbolically, mythically."
12. Anthony, D., Ecker, B., & Wilber, K., *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation*. (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1987), 336. "each tradition is in a cultural environment that it's dealing with...each tradition has a unique context in which it's trying to lead people to the universal truth."
13. Anthony, D., Ecker, B., & Wilber, K., *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation*. (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1987), 334. "Everything that's great in the East you can find in the West, and vice versa. You can

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find very activist orientations in the East, and socially oriented movements and so forth...I suppose you could say the East has been more concerned with inner life and the West more with outward action. That's a very simplistic generalization, but on the whole, you could say that with lots of qualification."

14. Jones, M. E., *Occult Philosophy*. (Boulder CO: Shambala, 1948), 109-118.

15. Ellis, E., quoted within *Soul Work: Anti-racist Theologies in Dialogue*, Bowens-Wheatley, M. & Palmer Jones, N. (Eds.). (Boston, MA: Skinner House, 2003), 71. Ellis suggests to her dialogue partners that they "allow others to name and define Christianity for us and then we reject *that*, instead of acting with respectful, intelligent freedom and defining a Jesus movement for ourselves." In this vein, I believe participating in Black Gnostic Studies has helped me create a different understanding of God, Jesus, and Christ. This allows me to now consider myself Christian in a mystical sense, even though I am aware that it does not match the mainstream understanding.

16. Heindel, M., *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception or Mystic Christianity*, (Oceanside, CA: The Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1974), 72. This issue of humans having an "indwelling spirit which dictates the thoughts and actions of each individual human being" is in contrast to animals which are also on their own developmental trajectory, but currently, by and large, exist with an undifferentiated "group-spirit". Specific examples of the closest of our domesticated animals provide evidence that there are leaders even within the animal kingdom who are developing personality. Dog and cat lovers who have enjoyed close relationship with their pets may find agreement on this.

17. Heindel, M., *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception or Mystic Christianity*, (Oceanside, CA: The Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1974), 197. As with the earlier points made, all of us are on this trajectory, even while those who take up specific spiritual initiations might end up a bit farther along, a bit faster. A key point for me is that no one is left out that is in any way striving for increased consciousness.

18. Meade, M., *Fate and Destiny: The Two Agreements of the Soul*. (Seattle, WA: Greenfire Press), 83. "Inside people is where god learns."

19. Jung, C. G., *Answer to Job*, R.F.C. Hull (Translator), (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973) (first published 1952).

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20. When I use the term “detachment” and “depersonalization” I am speaking of the ability to recognize that although any particular issue I face relates to me, it is not solely about me in this precise moment or lifetime. These concepts are used not to imply an effort to escape responsibility. Instead, they are a way of observing a situation, recognizing that my ego investment may need to be lessened so that I may more fully respond to the situation and, thus, act accountably.
21. McLaughlin, Corinne & Davidson, Gordon, *Spiritual Politics: Changing the World from the Inside Out*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1994), 18.
22. Definition derived from wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natal_chart
23. Meade, M., *Fate and Destiny: The Two Agreements of the Soul*. (Seattle, WA: Greenfire Press, 2010), 2, 4, 6, 25.
24. Rudyard, D., *An Astrological Mandala: The Cycle of Transformations and its 360 Symbolic Phases*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974).
25. Meade, M., *Fate and Destiny: The Two Agreements of the Soul*. (Seattle, WA: Greenfire Press, 2010), 4, 32.
26. Cohen, W. & Cohen, J. L., *Race and Reconciliation in America*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 149.
27. McLaughlin, Corinne & Davidson, Gordon, *Spiritual Politics: Changing the World from the Inside Out*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1994), 46.
28. Steiner, R. *Transforming the Soul, v.2* (Rudolph Steiner Press: Hillside House, Forest Row, UK), 46. three aspects of soul – sentient soul, rational soul, and consciousness soul
29. McLaughlin, Corinne & Davidson, Gordon, *Spiritual Politics: Changing the World from the Inside Out*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1994), 205.
30. Steiner, R. *Transforming the Soul, v.2* (Rudolph Steiner Press: Hillside House, Forest Row, UK), 42.
31. Steiner, R. *Transforming the Soul, v.2* (Rudolph Steiner Press: Hillside House, Forest Row, UK), 56.

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32. McLaughlin, Corinne & Davidson, Gordon, *Spiritual Politics: Changing the World from the Inside Out*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1994), 204.
33. Meade, M., *Fate and Destiny: The Two Agreements of the Soul*. (Seattle, WA: Greenfire Press, 2010), 118-121.
34. Steiner, R. *Transforming the Soul, v.2* (Rudolph Steiner Press: Hillside House, Forest Row, UK, 2006), 109.