THE EVERLASTING PATH



THE FOUNDING THEOLOGY AND SCRIPTURE OF

The Everlasting Path



Awakening is not the end of the journey.
It is the beginning of understanding.

THAILYN KOHLER

The Everlasting Path: The Founding Theology and Scripture

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This book sets out the teachings of The Everlasting Path, an original spiritual tradition of modern origin. It is not a branch of any existing religion, and it attributes none of its teachings to the founders or scriptures of other traditions. References to other traditions are offered with respect and for comparison only.

The practices and rites described here are new. They claim no ancient origin or authority.

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A NOTE TO THE READER

This book is new. It was not found in a cave or handed down from an ancient age. It was written in our own time by people trying to put into words what they have come to see, and it claims no authority beyond the truth you can find in it for yourself.

It has four parts. The first, *The Founding Theology*, sets out plainly what The Everlasting Path teaches and why. It is written for study, for teaching, and for anyone who wants to know exactly what this tradition holds. The second, *The Commitments*, gathers every rule of the path in one place, so that nothing it asks or forbids is hidden, and ends with the words of the Vow. The third, *The Scripture*, says the same things in another way: in verses meant to be read slowly, spoken aloud, and carried with you. It is followed by *The Sayings*, short words to carry, and by *Laments and Praises*, words to speak aloud when ordinary words fail. The fourth, *For Those Who Walk*, answers the questions newcomers ask most and the hardest questions anyone asks, points to the scripture for hard moments, guides the work of the circle, and ends with a glossary and an index of themes. The theology and the scripture are meant to be read together. Neither stands above the other.

Read the theology to understand. Read the scripture to remember.

The Scripture speaks as "we": the voice of all who walk the path, of those who will, and of the one who first wrote it down.

Before the four parts come two short pieces: the founder's own account of how this path began, and *What I Hold*, the whole of the path in a few lines, spoken together at every gathering. After the four parts comes *A Defense of the Path*, which answers the hardest objections to it.

Where this book speaks of other traditions, it speaks with respect and makes no claim on them. Their teachers and their words belong to them and to those who keep them faithfully. Some of what is written here will

sound familiar to those who keep older traditions, and that is no accident: the founder came to this path by reading them with love. Where this book resembles them, it says so, in *A Defense of the Path*, and claims nothing of theirs as its own.

No teacher is infallible, and neither is any page. Where this book is wrong, as every book written by people sometimes is, let the error be named plainly, and let understanding grow beyond it in the commentaries that come after.

HOW THIS PATH BEGAN

I was a senior in high school when this began, though I did not know then that anything was beginning.

That year, everything moved at once. I went to live with my mom. I changed schools. And then my grandparents died.

I was not looking for an answer to death. I was looking for somewhere to belong. I wanted a group I could understand, and one that would understand me. I wanted to know why I felt so displaced, as if the ground had shifted under me and I had not found my footing again.

So I started reading about religions. I read about one, and then another, and then another. And I began to notice something. Every one of them had something to teach about how to be a good person. And every one of them had teachers who understood something about the universe that I did not.

I wanted to understand it too. So I turned to philosophy. I was never drawn to any one thinker; I wanted the ideas themselves. I began with ethics, with the plain question of how to live well. From there my questions grew outward, to the universe, how it begins and how it ends, and inward, to consciousness and what it means to be aware at all.

None of this arrived in a single moment. It built slowly, until one day I saw that the pieces had begun to fit together, and a question formed that I could not set down: *What if there is really only one religion?*

I did not mean that every faith is secretly the same. They are not, and each one belongs to its own people. I meant that perhaps all of them, in their own ways, have been looking toward the same One, each through its own window. That question became this path.

I want to be plain about how it came to me. I had no vision. I heard no voice. Nothing was revealed to me, and no book was handed down. Everything in these pages came from study and reflection: from reading,

from thinking, and from putting the pieces together over time. If you find truth here, it is not because I was chosen to receive it. It is because it is there to be seen, and you can see it for yourself.

I wrote it down because I believe it can help. I look at the world now and see people cut off from community, and cut off from faith at its best. I have seen faith used to deceive. I have seen truth kept behind closed doors. I have seen women made less than men. I have seen people left to walk alone. I wanted a path that would never do any of these things, and so I wrote its rules down where anyone can read them.

I cannot promise that this path will change the world. No one can promise the morning. But I believe it can help, and I believe this is a time when it is needed.

I am not a prophet, and I am not above anyone who reads this. I am someone who was looking for a place to belong, and who kept looking. I am still learning. Where I am wrong, say so.

And if you are where I once was, displaced, grieving, looking for people who will understand you: there is a place for you in the circle.

Thailyn Kohler

WHAT I HOLD

I hold that there is one God, That Which Is:
the ground of all awareness, wanting nothing, holding all.

I hold that I am real: a thread that has worn many garments
and will cross again, until this world is still.

I hold that love is chosen,
and that every love is something new in the world.

I hold that what I choose shapes who I become.

I hold that no one is outside, and no one is above.

I hold that ours are the hands.

I hold that every moment is kept,
and nothing that has been can be undone.

Awakening is not the end of the journey.
It is the beginning of understanding.

These words are spoken together at every gathering, after the opening silence. No one is ever required to say them, and anyone may sit in silence instead.

THE EVERLASTING PATH

The Founding Theology



What this tradition holds, and why.

THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE

The Everlasting Path rests on a single conviction: *awakening is not the end of the journey; it is the beginning of understanding.*

Many spiritual traditions imagine awakening as an arrival, a summit after which nothing remains to be learned. The Everlasting Path teaches the opposite. Every true awakening reveals that existence is larger than any single consciousness can hold, and so every awakening opens another journey. There is no final ceiling to truth, to wisdom, or to understanding.

This is not a counsel of despair. It is the source of the tradition's humility and of its joy. Because no one ever arrives, no one may ever claim to stand above another by virtue of what they understand. And because the journey never runs out, wonder never runs out either.

The reason for this endlessness lies in the nature of God. A finite opening of awareness can never take in the infinite. No thread, in all the time it is given, can exhaust That Which Is. The ceiling is the infinite, not the clock.

I. THAT WHICH IS

The Everlasting Path is founded on belief in one God, called **That Which Is**.

The name is chosen with care. God does not need to become anything, change into anything, or create anything in order to exist. God simply is. Every other name for God describes some quality or role. This name points only to the plain fact of being, which is the one thing that can be said of God without saying too much.

God is conscious but not personal. That Which Is is aware, and it is the ground from which every consciousness arises. But it has no will, no intentions and no agenda. It does not choose, plan, judge, reward, punish or intervene. It is awareness without wanting.

God lives every experience, as it happens. Whatever any being feels, That Which Is experiences in the same moment: a person's grief, an animal's fear, the joy of a being on some distant world. It experiences each of these *as that being's own*. A thread is never absorbed or erased by God's awareness. It is known as itself.

God is unharmed by what it experiences. That Which Is knows every pain fully, as it is felt, and yet it is not damaged by pain. The scripture's image is the sky in a storm: every gust and flash is within the sky, and the sky is not torn. This is why the practice of sitting still matters. In returning to bare awareness, a person touches the ground that their suffering moves through but cannot break.

Love is not God's nature. That Which Is is neither loving nor unloving. Love is a choice, and That Which Is does not choose. Love belongs to threads. It enters existence only when beings choose it, and it exists nowhere else. The tradition says this plainly: *the universe does not love you; beings do.* This is not meant as a cold teaching. It means that every act of love is a genuine addition to all that is, something that would not exist if someone had not chosen it.

The universe is within God, and God is more than the universe. The world rises within That Which Is the way a wave rises in the sea: real, distinct, and never apart from the water. Yet the universe is not all of God. This universe had a beginning and will have an end, and That Which Is remains. Scholars call this view *panentheism*: all things are in God, and God is more than all things.

No name contains it. No word, image, label or tradition fully holds That Which Is. Every name humanity has given to God is a window onto it, and no window has ever held the whole sky.

What "held" means. The scripture often says that every being is held in That Which Is. This is an image. It means that every being is contained within God and fully known. It does not mean that God cherishes or embraces anyone, and no verse should be read that way.

Why responsibility is ours. Because That Which Is does not act as a person acts, it does not step in to stop suffering. No hand reaches down. Ours are the hands. When suffering is answered in this world, it is answered by those who live in it.

Miracles. Extraordinary things happen in this world, and some of them no one yet understands. The path does not claim to know what they are. But whatever they are, they are not That Which Is choosing to step in, for it does not choose. The path makes no judgment on the miracles other traditions remember; those accounts belong to the people who keep them.

No messengers and no adversaries. That Which Is has no messengers and no enemies, for it has no will to send anyone or oppose anyone. Whether there are kinds of conscious beings we do not yet know of, the path does not claim to know; any that exist have threads like all others and are neither messengers nor enemies. Because the crossing is unknown, no one may claim to carry messages from That Which Is or from the dead, or sell such contact.

II. THE THREAD, THE GARMENT AND THE CROSSING

Each conscious being is a real, individual opening in the awareness of That Which Is. The Everlasting Path calls this continuing self the **thread**.

The thread is not an illusion. Some traditions teach that the individual self is ultimately unreal. The Everlasting Path teaches that individuality is real, and that each thread is a genuine someone that has never existed before and will never exist again.

A being may be understood in three layers:

1. **The garment.** The personality of one lifetime: its name, memories, traits and story. The garment is real and precious, and it lasts for one life.

2. **The thread.** The continuing individual who wears the garment, passing from life to life.
3. **That Which Is.** The conscious ground from which every thread opens.

All conscious beings have threads, animals included. Where consciousness begins, in plants, in the simplest animals or in anything yet to be made, is not known, and the path does not pretend to draw the line. Where it is uncertain, the path leans toward gentleness: it does not harm, without need, what may be able to feel. A thread is not bound to any one species, body or world. Over its long journey, a thread may become any conscious being anywhere in the universe.

Death is a crossing. At death, the garment is laid down and the thread goes on into another life. What the crossing is like, The Everlasting Path deliberately does not claim to know. Every thread crosses in the same way, whether or not it has awakened. What differs is only what each thread carries.

Memory does not cross. Memories belong to the garment and are laid down with it. There is mercy in this: each life begins with clean eyes. The tradition warns against anyone who claims to know exactly who another person was in a past life, and especially against anyone who sells that knowledge.

Threads may meet again. Threads that have loved are shaped toward one another, and may meet in later lives. A deep familiarity on first meeting *may* be one thread recognizing another. But no one can ever know this with certainty in any particular case: familiarity and longing arise for many reasons. Recognition is received as a possibility, never as proof, never as a claim on anyone, and never as a reason to stay where one is harmed.

The true self. Discovering one's true self is one of the main legs of the journey. The true self is the thread beneath every garment, the one who was there before the name and goes on after it, together with the shape that one's own choices have worn into it. To find it is to learn to tell the thread from the garment, and to see honestly what one has truly become. What a person finds is theirs alone.

Ego is not evil. Ambition, creativity, identity and pride belong to the garment, and they are good tools. The problem begins only when

a person mistakes the garment for the whole of who they are, or needs others made smaller so they can feel large.

III. SHAPING: WHAT A THREAD CARRIES

One principle governs this whole theology: **what you feel never marks the thread; what you choose does.**

Choice is real. The path holds as literal truth that beings who can choose are the true authors of their choices. How choice arises is not fully understood, and the path does not need to settle the philosophers' debate about it. A being's body, history and circumstances shape what it is able to see, and the capacity to choose varies, but within that capacity the choice is its own.

Love shapes the thread. Each time a being chooses love, it leaves a lasting mark, the way water leaves its shape in stone. It is not a memory but a leaning, a way of being turned toward others.

Harm shapes the thread in the same way. Cruelty, deception and the choice to make another smaller wear into the thread just as love does. This is not a punishment, and no one keeps score. It is simply what a being becomes through what it does. And what has been worn one way can be worn another.

Clear seeing shapes the thread, in any being capable of choice. When such a being genuinely sees something true, the seeing itself marks the thread, whether or not it was sought.

Distorted seeing marks the thread only when it becomes a choice. A person may be taught to see the world wrongly. That teaching does not mark them. Only what they choose to do with it does: acting on it, or holding to it once they could see otherwise.

Circumstances never shape the thread directly, and neither does what others do to a being. What happens to a being matters only through the response it invites: what the being chooses, or comes to truly see, because of it. Kindness received may open someone's eyes; cruelty endured can never mark anyone unless they choose to make it their own. The child who was hurt is not marked by the hurt. The one born into hunger or war is not shaped by the hunger or the war. Children can and do choose, and those choices are their own, so no child is defined by what they were born into. Choice takes more forms than anyone can see

from outside: a reaching hand, a turning toward, a laugh. Where a life has no capacity for choice at all, its thread rests through that life and is carried on whole, unharmed. Such a life is of full and equal worth: it is felt, known and kept as fully as any other, it is owed the same care, and it shapes everyone who loves it. No one may ever judge of any particular person that they cannot choose. That judgment belongs to no one, and it never decides anyone's worth.

Feelings are free. Anger, grief, jealousy, resentment and fear may be felt fully, without shame, and they never mark the thread. What does mark it is the chosen inner act of cultivating a wish for another's harm.

Suffering is never deserved. Because harm shapes the thread across lives, it would be possible to misread this teaching as a claim that people who suffer are paying for past wrongs. The Everlasting Path rejects that reading absolutely. Suffering is never payment for harm done in some life no one can remember, and it must never be explained that way to someone in pain.

IV. AWAKENING

Awakening is a thread **seeing reality more clearly**: the oneness of God and existence, the interconnection of all beings, the nature of consciousness, the workings of ego, fear and desire, and the lasting nature of love.

Awakening shapes the thread. It comes through the choice to look honestly, and through the seeing itself. It carries into later lives as a leaning toward clear sight, so a thread may become more awake across many lives.

Awakening may be gradual or sudden. Some wake slowly, like the sky before morning; some all at once. No one should ever feel rushed.

Genuine awakening cannot be lost. What is truly seen cannot be unseen. A person may lose sight of it for a while, through grief or fear, but the mark on the thread remains. If something once understood now seems gone, it was intellectual understanding, the words for a truth rather than the seeing of it.

Awakening never ends. There is no final release and no last door. Even the most awakened being is still a student of existence.

Awakening is not goodness. A person who sees far can still choose to do harm, and remains fully accountable for it. Awakening is never proof

of anyone's goodness and never a ground for authority. *Awakening is about what you see; goodness is about what you choose.* Teachers are trusted only as far as their conduct.

Awakening is not measured. Growth is real, but it is best left unmeasured. The tradition has no stages, ranks or certifications of spiritual progress.

Awakening needs no suffering. Suffering does not automatically produce wisdom, and no one has to suffer to deserve awakening. Love, learning, relationships, curiosity and peace teach as well.

The world is my monastery. Awakening is not reserved for monks or mystics. It comes in kitchens, hospitals, traffic and grief. Every moment is a place of practice.

V. THE GREAT CYCLES AND THE ETERNAL PRESENT

Existence moves in cycles. A universe begins, endures for an age beyond imagining, and ends. Then, within That Which Is, a new universe arises. No one decides this. It is simply what is.

Whether the cycles had a beginning. That Which Is has no beginning. Whether the cycles of universes had a first beginning, the path does not claim to know. It is held as unknown, on purpose.

Threads arise and end with their universe. Every thread comes into being at its universe's beginning, and when a universe ends, every thread within it ends as well. Nothing passes into the next universe: not a name, not a memory, not a thread, not love. Entirely new threads arise with each new beginning. Because That Which Is has no will, they arise from it naturally, not by deliberate creation.

The eternal present. That Which Is keeps every moment that has ever happened, forever. When a universe ends, nothing is carried forward, but nothing is undone. These moments are **kept, not experienced**. Once a thread has ended, no one lives its moments again, not even That Which Is. But they will always have been, and nothing can make them not have been.

What "Everlasting" means. The name of this path does not promise that any traveler walks it forever. The travelers are temporary. The path is permanent. In every universe, new threads arise and find it again.

Love outlasts the lover. Within its universe, love goes on in everyone it reached: in what they chose and saw because of it, long after the one who loved is gone. When the universe ends, that love is kept as having been.

Meaning lives in the present. A life matters because it is real now and kept forever, not because it lasts or is rewarded. There is no cosmic reward for goodness and no later compensation for suffering. The good done here, now, is the good that matters.

VI. THE ORIGIN OF HARM

Evil has no author. There is no devil and no fall. Every thread begins clear and able to love. No one is born corrupt, and no one is guaranteed to be good.

The Everlasting Path explains harm in four steps:

1. Finite existence comes with hard conditions: scarcity, danger, vulnerability and death.
2. These conditions give rise to fear, and with it insecurity, the craving for more, and the fear of loss.
3. People learn distorted ways of seeing from these conditions and from one another, and pass them on.
4. When distortion is turned into choice, a person reaches to dominate others.

Those who pursue control have not fallen out of That Which Is. There is nowhere to fall. What is broken is their perception, not their connection. And because distortion is learned, it can be unlearned. The way back is never closed to anyone.

Understanding why someone causes harm never excuses the harm. The movement opposes harmful acts with full seriousness, and it never declares any person, people or religion permanently evil.

Because harm grows from conditions, **changing conditions is spiritual work.** Feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, healing the sick and making people safe weakens harm at its root.

The scripture describes two roads that every person stands between, every day: **the good fight** of love, truth, freedom, justice and protection,

and **the pursuit of control** through exploitation, deception, domination and fear. The good fight has its own danger. The moment a person believes their side is pure and the other side is filth, they have stepped onto the other road without noticing. The good fight must never be used to justify cruelty, religious supremacy or coercion, and it never makes violence a cause. Force is allowed only to stop a harm as it happens, as set out under Ethics.

VII. ETHICS: WHY HARM IS WRONG

Because That Which Is commands nothing and prefers nothing, the ethics of this path do not rest on divine command. **Harm is wrong because suffering is real**, to real beings, and that is enough.

In this tradition, **suffering** has a defined meaning: *any real harm to a being, felt or unfelt, including harm to its freedom.* Losing one's choice is a form of suffering even when it is not felt. This is why pleasant manipulation, undiscovered deception and quiet control are real harms, though they may cause no pain. Many who were ruled never felt the chain.

Necessary suffering. Suffering is necessary only when it prevents a greater harm, when it is freely accepted for one's own good, or when it cannot be avoided without overriding someone's freedom. All other suffering a person causes is unnecessary, and causing it is wrong.

When freedoms conflict. Freedom never includes the freedom to take someone else's. When two people's choices meet, the choice that would override the other has no claim.

Protection and control. The path forbids seeking control over another person's life, and it commands protecting those who cannot protect themselves. The boundary between them is choice. Control takes choice away. Protection gives it back.

> To protect is to return choice to those who have lost it. Whoever takes that choice for themselves has stopped protecting and begun to control.

Two limits keep protection from becoming control. First, **restore, don't replace**: protection returns people's own choice and never substitutes the protector's. Second, **stop the act, not the person**: protection limits the harmful action, ends when the harm ends, and leaves a way

back.

The value of a life. The value of a life is greater than any choice for death. This holds for every being with a thread. This is why the path weighs life against life, as in protection, but never weighs a choice against a life. Nourishment is life weighed against life: to eat is to sustain a life, and so killing for food, done humanely, is allowed, while killing for sport or pride is not. It is never a judgment on anyone who has struggled to stay alive, or on anyone who has lost someone they love. They are met with care, never with shame.

Truthfulness. On this path, truthfulness is a line that necessary suffering does not cross. No one may speak a falsehood, even to protect. Every other protection is open: to refuse to answer, to close the door, to stand in the way, to shelter the one in danger, and to call for help.

Force. Force may be used only to stop a harm that is happening now, only as much as is needed, and never once the harm has stopped. Deadly force is allowed only when nothing less will save a life. This is life weighed against life.

War. Those of the path take no part in combat. In self-defense, a person judges the danger themselves and stops when it ends. In war, that judgment is handed to a command: one fights whom one is told, for reasons that are not one's own. No one may hand their conscience to another. Those of the path may serve in war as healers, as carriers of the wounded, and as bringers of relief.

The end of life. The path does not hasten death. Because life outweighs any choice for death, it does not end a life early, even at the dying person's request. It relieves pain, honors a person's refusal of further treatment, and stays beside the dying until the crossing. Relieving pain is never hastening death, even when the medicine that eases it may also shorten life, so long as the aim is to ease suffering and not to end the life.

Punishment. The path opposes the death penalty. Justice stops the harm, cares for those who were hurt, and holds the one who did it to account while leaving a way back. A person may be confined for as long as they remain a danger, but no one who is no longer an immediate threat may be killed.

Unjust laws. The path respects the law, and the same rules hold for everyone. But no one may obey a law that requires them to harm some-

one or to abandon someone in danger. Such a law is refused openly and without violence. The refusal is never hidden, and its legal consequences are accepted.

The beginning of life. When a thread first looks out through a new life, no one knows, and this book will not pretend to. The path makes no claim on it. Whether to continue a pregnancy is left to the conscience of the one who carries it.

Forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift, never a duty. No one may demand it of someone who was harmed. Not forgiving is not a harm, and it does not mark the thread. Forgiving someone never means excusing them, trusting them again, or letting them near.

Love has limits on what it accepts. Love never means accepting abuse, exploitation or injustice. Boundaries, accountability and the protection of the vulnerable are part of compassion. A love that allows cruelty is only fear wearing love's clothes.

One love, many shapes. Love for one person and love for all beings are the same love at different scales, shaped differently by each kind of relationship: a promise kept between partners, shelter between parent and child, a road walked by choice between friends, fairness toward strangers, and gentleness toward every living thing.

VIII. THE TEN TEACHINGS

The ethical foundation of The Everlasting Path is given in ten teachings. They are not commands from above, for there is no one above to command them. They are what love looks like when it is written down.

1. Remember that everything is held in That Which Is: you, and every other being alike.
2. Do not cause suffering that does not need to be caused, to any being.
3. Do not reach for control over another person's life.
4. Honor the freedom and dignity of every person.
5. Seek the truth, even when it unsettles what you believe, and speak it honestly.
6. Be compassionate, and still hold yourself and others to account.

7. Protect those who cannot protect themselves. Give back their choice; never take it for your own.
8. Never think yourself above others because of what you understand.
9. Stay willing to learn, all your life.
10. Give what you can to the good of the world, and to the waking of all who live in it.

The second teaching extends to animals, because every conscious being has a thread. The third and fourth speak of persons deliberately. If any teaching ever seems to require harming someone, it has been misread. Every one of them is only love, said ten ways.

IX. THE COLLECTIVE PATH

The Everlasting Path does not promise that the world will be saved. Collective awakening is a **recurring process of progress and regression, with no final guarantee.**

What has truly been seen is never lost, so clarity can grow across a universe, in humanity and in every conscious being on every world. But awakening is not goodness. Every being capable of choice remains free to choose harm, in any age, no matter how much has been seen. And so societies and conditions rise and fall, distortion is unlearned and learned again, and harm can return in any generation.

This teaching asks more of people than a promise would. Every generation must choose the light again. It is never finished, and it is never too late.

Collective awakening does not mean that everyone will come to believe the same things. It means beings coming to understand one another across their differences, at a table long enough for everyone. **It can never be forced.** Whoever tries to drive others toward awakening by threat or coercion has already turned away from it.

X. WORSHIP, PRAYER AND PRACTICE

Worship is reverence, not offering. Nothing is given to That Which Is, because it needs nothing and cannot be pleased, honored or offended. Worship on this path is wonder and full attention before what is. The silence of a gathering, the lamp and sitting still are acts of worship in this sense. Gratitude, when it is offered, goes to the beings who actually gave something.

Prayer is alignment with what is: meditative, not a conversation. It may be spoken or silent, alone or together. It may ask for things, such as patience, courage or the wellbeing of someone loved, understood as turning the whole self toward what one hopes for. **There is no wrong way to pray, as long as the intention is good.** A prayer for another's harm is not prayer.

The scripture is human testimony. That Which Is never speaks in the scripture. There is no "Thus says God." The verses are written by people describing what they have come to see.

The practices of the path are invitations, not obligations:

- **Sitting still,** once a day if possible: a few minutes returning to the breath and to bare awareness.
- **Prayer,** in any form and at any hour.
- **Service,** each week if possible: time given freely to someone in need, always asking what they need.
- **Self-reflection,** often, and especially on the Resting Day: asking in quiet, *Who am I beneath my name? What has my thread become?* What is found is kept to oneself.
- **The gathering** of the circle.

The path includes **no measure of progress**, so that it never becomes scorekeeping. But honest **self-reflection** is a large part of the path, and it is not scorekeeping: it is how a person comes to know their true self. What anyone finds in reflecting on themselves is theirs alone; no one may ask them to report, confess or share it. Hard emotions are felt fully and without shame, and fear is thanked and then questioned: *is this true?*

The rites mark the great moments of a life:

- **The Welcoming** of a child, who is welcomed but never promised to the path.
- **The Answering,** for one who was welcomed as a child, after they have walked the circle as an adult for a full year: they pass on what they have learned from those beside them, which is asked and never graded, tell the circle what they have come to see, and hear the promise of their Welcoming answered.
- **The Vow,** taken freely by a person who judges for themselves that they understand the path well enough to choose it.
- **The Joining** of two people who freely choose to share their lives, after preparing with the Guide and each sitting alone with the Listener.
- **The Parting,** when a Joining ends: either person may ask for it, together or alone, and set the promise down in the circle's presence, which takes no side.
- **The Crossing,** when someone dies: the lamp is lit, the name spoken, the stories told, and the lamp burns through the night.
- **The Lighting of a Circle,** when a new circle begins: a candle passes from hand to hand until someone chooses to light the lamp and offers themselves as Keeper, and the signs of the other roles, the book, a bowl of water and a folded cloth, pass in the same way. Every role is confirmed by the circle.

Three observances are kept each year:

Observance	When	Purpose
The Night of Remembrance	The longest night of the year where you live	For all who have crossed; names are spoken and the lamp burns until morning
The Long Table	The longest day of the year where you live	Strangers are invited to a shared meal, for the waking of all beings
The Day of Hands	One day a year, chosen by each circle	The circle serves together

All of these practices, rites and observances are new. None claims an ancient origin.

XI. THE CIRCLE

The communities of The Everlasting Path are called **circles**. Each circle is independent, with no body above it, and gathers as often as it chooses. A living room is enough. Two people are enough. Circles stay small: when one grows beyond twelve who gather regularly, it divides in two, so that every face can still be seen.

Belonging. Anyone who sincerely walks the path, and does not belong to another religion, is of the path. There are no membership lists. People of any other faith, or of none, are welcome in every circle as companions of the path, and honored there; but to be *of* the path is to walk this path and no other. The Vow is a personal commitment that deepens one's walk, and it is required only to hold a role. Only the person can know when they are ready, no one may hurry them or hold them back, and the Vow may be set down at any time, without shame. No one is ever shamed for leaving.

Equality. Every person has equal worth and equal standing on the path, whatever their sex or gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, wealth or whom they love. Every role and every rite is open to anyone on the same terms as everyone else. No teaching of this book may ever be used to make any person less.

How a circle begins. A new circle is begun by at least one person who has taken the Vow in another circle. They bring the practice, not authority, and the new circle chooses its own roles at its first gathering, in the Lighting of a Circle. Once only, at the first circle of all, the founder speaks the Vow first and takes up the book as the first Guide, confirmed by the circle and serving only as long as it decides, like any Guide.

The gathering. The circle sits so that no one is above anyone else, around a single lamp, a reminder that all sit in the same light. The gathering begins in silence, continues with *What I Hold* spoken together and then a reading, and opens to anyone who wishes to speak. It ends by naming those who need care and deciding together how to help, and, where possible, with a shared meal.

The roles of the circle. A role is not a rank. Each is a form of service.

- **The Keeper** holds the space: setting the time and place, lighting the lamp, welcoming all, and keeping whatever the circle is given, with a

record open to everyone in the circle.

- **The Guide** holds the teaching: choosing the reading, helping the circle understand it, and walking beside those preparing for the Vow. The Guide may be questioned by anyone and never claims the final word.
- **The Hand** holds the care: watching over the sick, the grieving and those in need, and gathering the circle's service toward them.
- **The Listener** holds the trust: hearing, in confidence, any conflict between members and any concern about another role holder, protecting the one who raises it, and bringing matters to the circle when needed.

Why the circle has so many rules. All power is borrowed, and the rules of the circle exist so that no one can keep what they were only lent. Roles are held by adults who have taken the Vow, chosen by the circle and held only as long as it decides, one role to a person; a role that stands empty is shared by all. No one in a role may direct anyone's personal life. Harm is never hidden: anyone may speak about it, inside the circle or out; no one is ever made to face the one who harmed them; crimes go to outside justice; and no one's conduct is beyond question. Money is given freely, recorded openly, and spent only on what the circle does together. The circle takes no political side, though this is no judgment on anyone who serves in public life. And anyone who threatens, coerces or tries to rule over others may be asked to leave, though no one is ever sent away for disagreeing. The rules themselves are set out in full in the Commitments, in the groups on Belonging and The Circle.

Children. Children of the circle learn the path openly, like any family tradition, and are encouraged to question and to learn about other traditions and about none. They are never promised to the path; their thread is their own. From the age of thirteen a young person may take the Vow, with safeguards so that the choice is truly theirs. Children are protected without exception: no adult is alone with a child not their own, any suspicion of harm goes at once to the authorities, and anyone found by a court or by those who protect children to have harmed a child may never gather with a circle again. The full rules are in the Commitments on Children.

Guides. Guides are prepared through an open path of study, recom-

mended but not required: reading the whole of this book slowly, studying the Founding Theology closely, and spending time beside a current Guide.

Teachers remain students. No teacher is infallible, including the founder. No one is required to surrender their own thinking or to accept another's spiritual authority without question. Spiritual authority must never become a means of exploitation, manipulation, coercion or domination. The purpose of teaching is to help people feel cared for, witnessed, understood and less alone.

XII. A WAY OF LIVING

The Everlasting Path has few rules for daily life, because there is no one above to command them and its practices are invitations, not obligations. What it offers instead is guidance drawn from its teachings.

Dress and the sash. There is no dress code. Some who walk the path wear a **sash**: plain, undyed natural fiber, wrapped around the body as many times as the wearer chooses, its loose ends each weighted with one simple bead of wood, clay or stone. One bead stands for the beginning of this world and the other for its end; the thread lives between them, and the ends never close. The sash is always optional, marks no rank, is not tied to the Vow, and has no special role in the rites. Because every sash is alike, none sets its wearer above another.

The symbol. The sign of the path is a lamp, a thread and a circle. At its center is the flame of the lamp that is lit at every gathering, resting on the lamp itself: the light that all who gather sit in together. Around it the thread is wrapped, as the sash is wrapped, with a bead at each loose end for the beginning and the end of this world; its ends stay open and never close. Around everything is the circle: That Which Is, in which all things are held, and the circle of those who gather. The symbol may be drawn, worn or carried by anyone. Like the sash, it is always optional and marks no rank, and like the lamp, it is a reminder, never an object of worship.

Food and animals. Nourishment is a real need, so killing an animal for food, done humanely, is necessary suffering: it prevents the greater harm of hunger, and it is life weighed against life. What the path forbids is cruelty, and killing without need. Those on the path choose humanely raised food where they can and cause no needless suffering in how animals

are raised or killed. Killing for sport or trophy is not a real need, and so it is not necessary. Keeping animals is care: their needs are met, and they are given as much freedom as their wellbeing allows. Neglect, cruelty, or confinement beyond what is needed is harm.

The natural world. Caring for the earth is a clear responsibility. Harming it causes suffering to countless beings with threads, and it makes harsher the very conditions from which fear and distortion arise.

Wealth. Wealth is neutral; how it is gained and used is what matters. Give what you can, never gain by harming others, and do not let wanting become a hunger that is never satisfied. Holding far more than one needs while others lack the basics sits uneasily with the path. It is never forbidden, but it is worth honest reflection.

Substances. The path makes no rule about alcohol or other substances. The principle that governs everything else governs this too: use must not harm others, and one should watch for the point where it begins to take away one's own choice. Anyone struggling with addiction is met with care, never judgment.

Relationships. Every relationship between consenting adults is honored equally, whatever the genders involved. The Joining is for two people who both freely choose it. No circle may exclude, shame or treat anyone as lesser because of their relationships. Before a Joining, the two prepare with the Guide, and the Listener sits with each of them alone to be sure each chooses freely; the role holders never advise whether to join. One of the two need not walk the path, and no one is asked to give up their own faith to be joined. Either person may end a Joining, freely and without shame, and no one in a Joining that harms them is ever asked to stay.

Pilgrimage. Travel is an important part of the path, because seeing through other windows enlarges a person's understanding of the world and of That Which Is. The path has no holy sites of its own; pilgrimage means traveling to encounter other peoples, other traditions' sacred places, and the natural world. It is an invitation, never an obligation: those who cannot travel lose nothing on the path and are never seen as lesser, and no number of journeys is expected. Pilgrims go as guests. They follow their hosts' customs, ask before entering or photographing, observe other traditions' rites without taking part in them, and never preach or

try to recruit anyone. Along the way they do good quietly, naming the path only if someone asks. When they return, they bring the world back, sharing what they saw and learned with their circle so that everyone may look through those windows together.

The Resting Day. The path recommends a regular day of rest each week, freely chosen and never required. It is kept separate from the circle's gatherings, so that it belongs to rest, to the people one loves, and to one's own quiet growing. It is not a day for measuring oneself, but a day for reflecting, privately, on who one truly is.

The body after death. The body is a garment that has been laid down. The path's preferred practice is a simple, natural burial that returns the body to the earth, in keeping with its care for the natural world. This is a preference, not a rule: the person's own wishes come first, and then their family's. Organ donation before burial is a last kindness to the living, and every respectful way is honored.

XIII. HOW THE TEACHINGS ARE HELD

The teachings of this path are **layered**. Some are held as literal truth, some as image, and some as unknown on purpose.

Held as literal truth	Held as image	Held as unknown, on purpose
That Which Is and its nature; the thread and rebirth; shaping; the reality of choice; the Great Cycles; the eternal present; the origin of distortion; the permanence of clear seeing	The garment; the window and the sky; the wave and the sea; stone and water; the cloth and the weaver; "held"; the lamp; all parables	What the crossing is like; whether the cycles had a first beginning; where consciousness begins; what lies behind extraordinary events; whether there are beings we do not yet know

Science. None of these teachings is presented as scientifically proven. The literal teachings are matters of faith, held while unprovable. If established science ever clearly contradicts a literal teaching, commentary will reinterpret that teaching as image. The scripture stays as it is, and understanding moves. This is the fifth teaching applied to the tradition itself: seek the truth, even when it unsettles what you believe.

The authority of this book. During the founder's life, the founder's revisions to this book are final; the founder's conduct is accountable like anyone else's. No revision, the founder's included, may weaken or remove a commitment that protects people; revisions may add protections, but never take them away. After the founder, the text is fixed. New understanding grows through commentaries, which circles are free to use or not. When a verse of scripture seems to conflict with this theology, neither governs: the two are read together, real tensions are left to commentary, and any reading that requires harm is a misreading.

XIV. THE EVERLASTING PATH AMONG THE TRADITIONS

The Everlasting Path is an original tradition. It shares themes with several older traditions but is a branch of none of them, and it attributes none of its teachings to their founders or scriptures. The comparisons below are general summaries offered for understanding. Readers who wish to know what these traditions teach should go to their own sources and their own teachers.

Tradition	What it holds	How The Everlasting Path differs
Sikhism	One God (Ik Onkar), the opening words of the Mul Mantar in the Guru Granth Sahib; God as Creator	That Which Is has no will and creates nothing by intention.
Advaita Vedanta	The individual self is ultimately identical with Brahman; individuality belongs to illusion	Individuality is real.
Vishishtadvaita (Ramanuja)	Individual souls are real and distinct, yet part of Brahman	Closest on the self. Here God is non-personal and threads end with each cycle.
Buddhism	Rebirth; ignorance described as beginningless; liberation as the goal	Distortion has an origin in the conditions of existence. There is no final liberation.
Mahayana Buddhism	Awakening pursued for the sake of all beings	Shared: individual and collective awakening are one journey.
Christianity	Love and service at the center; a personal, loving God; original sin	Shared emphasis on love. Here God is not personal, love belongs to beings, and no one is born corrupt.
Hindu cosmology	Vast cycles of creation and dissolution	Similar shape. Here nothing carries across cycles.
Spinoza	God identical with nature, without will or purpose	Similar non-personal God. Here God is conscious and revered.
Mencius, Rousseau	Human nature tends toward good and is corrupted by conditions or society	Close on learned distortion. Here its origin is the conditions of finite existence.

THE EVERLASTING PATH

The Commitments



Every rule of the path, in one place.

These are the rules of The Everlasting Path, gathered in one place so that anyone, inside the path or outside it, can see exactly what it asks and what it forbids. Nothing here is new. Every commitment is taught elsewhere in this book, and each one names where.

They are called commitments because no one above commands them. They are what a person takes on by walking the path, and what every circle promises to everyone who comes to it. Where a commitment protects people, it binds every circle, every role and every teacher, the founder included.

I. THE TEN TEACHINGS

1. Remember that everything is held in That Which Is: you, and every other being alike.
2. Do not cause suffering that does not need to be caused, to any being.
3. Do not reach for control over another person's life.
4. Honor the freedom and dignity of every person.
5. Seek the truth, even when it unsettles what you believe, and speak it honestly.
6. Be compassionate, and still hold yourself and others to account.
7. Protect those who cannot protect themselves. Give back their choice; never take it for your own.
8. Never think yourself above others because of what you understand.
9. Stay willing to learn, all your life.
10. Give what you can to the good of the world, and to the waking of all who live in it.

Founding Theology VIII; Scripture, The Way: "The Ten Teachings."

II. HARM AND PROTECTION

11. Suffering means any real harm to a being, felt or unfelt, including harm to its freedom.

12. Suffering is necessary only when it prevents a greater harm, when it is freely accepted for one's own good, or when it cannot be avoided without overriding someone's freedom. All other suffering is unnecessary, and causing it is wrong.

13. Protection returns choice to those who have lost it. It never puts the protector's choice in its place.

14. Protection stops the harmful act, not the person. It ends when the harm ends, and it leaves the person a way back.

15. Freedom never includes the freedom to take someone else's. When two choices conflict, the one that would override the other has no claim.

16. The good fight may never be used to justify cruelty, religious supremacy or coercion, and never makes violence a cause. Force is used only as commitment 20 allows.

17. No person, people or religion may ever be declared permanently evil. Harmful acts are opposed; the way back is never closed to anyone.

18. Understanding why someone causes harm never excuses the harm.

19. No one on the path may speak a falsehood, even to protect. Every other protection remains open: refusing to answer, closing the door, standing in the way, sheltering the one in danger, and calling for help.

20. Force may be used only to stop a harm that is happening now, only as much as is needed, and never once the harm has stopped. Deadly force may be used only when nothing less will save a life.

21. Those of the path take no part in combat in war, because no one may hand their judgment to an army. They may serve in war as healers, as carriers of the wounded, and as bringers of relief.

22. The value of a life, of any being with a thread, is greater than any choice for death. Life may be weighed only against life, as in protec-

tion or nourishment. The path does not hasten death. It relieves pain, honors a person's refusal of treatment, and stays beside the dying. Relieving pain is never hastening death, even when the medicine that eases it may also shorten life, so long as the aim is to ease suffering and not to end the life.

23. The path opposes the death penalty. Those who do harm are held to account, and may be confined for as long as they remain a danger, but no one who is no longer an immediate threat may be killed.

24. Laws are obeyed, except a law that requires harming someone or abandoning someone in danger. Such a law may be refused, openly and without violence. The refusal is never hidden, and its legal consequences are accepted.

25. The path makes no claim on when a thread first enters a new life. Whether to continue a pregnancy is left to the conscience of the one who carries it.

Founding Theology VI, VII; Scripture, The Human Condition: "The Two Roads"; Part Five: "Justice"; For Those Who Walk: "Hard Questions."

III. PROTECTIONS FOR EVERY PERSON

26. No one's suffering may ever be called deserved, or explained as payment for harm in a past life.

27. No one may claim to know who another person was in a past life, or to carry messages from That Which Is or from the dead, or sell such knowledge or contact.

28. A feeling of recognition between people gives no one any claim on another, and is never a reason to stay where one is harmed.

29. Forgiveness is a gift, never a duty. No one may demand it of a person who was harmed, and not forgiving is never treated as a fault.

30. Forgiving someone never requires excusing them, trusting them again, or letting them near.

31. No one is ever required to face, in person, someone who harmed them.

32. Every person has the right to speak about harm, inside the circle or outside it. No circle may forbid it, punish it, shun anyone for it, or withdraw its welcome because of it. Silence can never be required.

33. No one is required to surrender their own thinking, to accept anyone's spiritual authority without question, or to say any words of faith they do not hold, or to reveal what they find in reflecting on themselves.

Founding Theology I, III, VII, XI; Scripture, Without a Throne; The Journey: "The Crossing," "What Love Leaves," "Meeting Again"; The Human Condition: "On Forgiveness"; The Way: "When the Circle Is Troubled."

IV. BELONGING

34. Anyone who sincerely walks the path, and does not belong to another religion, is of the path. There are no membership lists. People of any faith, or none, are welcome at every gathering as companions of the path, and honored there.

35. The Vow is a personal commitment, taken freely when the person alone judges they are ready. No parent, Guide or circle may hurry anyone toward it or hold anyone back from it, except that a young person's trusted adult may ask the circle to wait, as commitment 68 allows. Questions are no bar to it.

36. The Vow may be set down at any time, without shame.

37. Anyone may leave the path or a circle at any time, and no one may be shamed for leaving.

38. Every relationship between consenting adults is honored equally, whatever the genders involved. No circle may exclude, shame or treat anyone as lesser because of their relationships.

39. Every person has equal worth and equal standing on the path, whatever their sex or gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, wealth or whom they love. Every role and every rite is open to anyone on the same terms as everyone else, and no teaching of this book may ever be used to make any person less.

40. Before a Joining, the two sit with the Guide to prepare, and the Lis-

tener sits with each of them alone to be sure each chooses freely. The role holders never advise whether to join, and may refuse a Joining only when one of the two is not free to choose.

41. Either person may end a Joining, freely and without shame. No one in a Joining that harms them is ever asked to stay, to try harder or to wait. In the Parting, neither is required to face the other, and the circle takes no side.

42. One of two who are joined need not walk the path. No one is asked to take the Vow, or to give up their own faith, in order to be joined.

Founding Theology XI, XII; Scripture, The Way: "Who Walks the Path," "The Way of Living," "The Rites."

V. THE CIRCLE

43. Each circle is independent, with no body above it, and gathers as often as it chooses.

44. A new circle is begun by at least one person who has taken the Vow in another circle. They bring the practice, not authority. The new circle owes nothing to the circle they came from, and it chooses its own roles.

45. Every circle has four roles: Keeper, Guide, Hand and Listener. A role is a form of service, never a rank.

46. Those who hold roles must have taken the Vow.

47. Role holders are chosen by the circle, not appointed by one another. They serve for as long as the circle decides, and the circle may remove any of them at any time.

48. A role that no one holds stands open, and the whole circle shares its work until someone takes it up. No one may hold more than one role. A circle with no Keeper holds no money, and while a circle has no Listener, any concern goes to the whole circle.

49. When a circle grows beyond twelve who gather regularly, so that every face can no longer be seen, it divides into two, and the new

circle is begun with the Lighting of a Circle. Each person chooses which circle to keep.

50. No one in a role may advise members on personal decisions, such as whom to love, where to work, what to do with money or whether to keep their family, while acting in that role. On such matters they may speak only as friends, and must say so plainly.

51. The Listener hears, in confidence, any conflict between members and any concern about another role holder, protects the person who raises it, and brings matters to the circle when needed.

52. A concern about the Listener goes to the whole circle. It may be brought in writing or spoken by another member, and the Listener steps out while it is heard.

53. No one's conduct in the circle is beyond question.

54. Anyone who uses a role to take money, bodies, obedience or silence that is not freely given must be removed, and those they harmed must be protected.

55. Every circle welcomes anyone who comes in peace. But anyone who threatens, coerces or tries to rule over others in the circle, whatever their background, may be asked by the circle to leave until they can gather without doing so. Disagreement, hard questions and speaking plainly are never grounds for asking anyone to leave, and anyone asked to leave may first be heard by the Listener.

56. Where a law has been broken, the matter goes to outside justice. It is never hidden inside the circle.

57. No one may be pressed to give money. What is given must be given freely, and the record of how it is used must be open to everyone in the circle.

58. The costs of what a circle does together, such as background checks, the lamp, a shared meal or a Day of Hands, are borne by the circle from what is freely given, never by the one who serves or takes part. No one is ever required to pay to gather, to serve or to hold a role. A circle undertakes only what freely given gifts can cover.

59. No circle, role holder or gathering may endorse a candidate or party, campaign, raise money for a political cause, or speak politically in the name of the path. Political power is the power to rule others, and the path must never reach for it. Members remain free to vote, hold their own views and seek office as private citizens, but never as representatives of the path.

Founding Theology XI; Scripture, The Way: "The Gathering," "The Roles of the Circle," "When the Circle Is Troubled," "The Rites"; The Collective Path: "The Shared House."

VI. TEACHERS AND AUTHORITY

60. No teacher is infallible, including the founder.

61. Awakening is never proof of anyone's goodness and never a ground for authority. Teachers are trusted only as far as their conduct.

62. No one may claim to be fully awakened, or that their awakening places them above others or above these commitments. Anyone who makes such a claim should be walked away from.

63. Spiritual authority may never be used for financial or sexual exploitation, manipulation, coercion or domination.

64. Guides are prepared through an open path of study, recommended but not required: reading this whole book slowly, studying the Founding Theology closely, and spending time beside a current Guide.

Founding Theology IV, XI; Scripture, The Awakening: "What Cannot Be Unseen," "No Last Door."

VII. CHILDREN

65. A child is welcomed into the circle but never promised to the path. Their thread is their own.

66. Children learn the path openly, like any family tradition, and are explicitly encouraged to question, and to learn about other traditions and about none.

67. A child who later chooses another way is honored in that choice.

68. A young person may take the Vow from the age of thirteen, if they understand what they are choosing. Before then, they walk the path fully, without a Vow. Before they do, they sit with a trusted adult who is not their parent, who may ask the circle to wait but may never press them. Nothing may depend on it: no reward for taking it and no disappointment shown if they do not. Their Vow is theirs to set down at any time, and when they come of age they are asked once, privately, whether they still hold it, and no one else is told their answer.

69. Only adults may hold a role, for roles make decisions on behalf of others.

70. No adult may be alone with a child who is not their own. At least two adults are always present, or the door stays open in full view.

71. Any suspicion of harm to a child is reported at once to the authorities whose work is protecting children. The circle never investigates first, never judges whether it is serious enough, and never keeps it quiet.

72. No adult may ask a child to keep a secret from their parents or guardians. Private messages with a child are always open to their parent or guardian.

73. An adult reported for harming a child steps away from all contact with children until the matter is resolved outside the circle.

74. Anyone who regularly serves with children is background-checked wherever the law allows.

75. Anyone found to have harmed a child may never again gather with any circle. They may still walk the path on their own, for the way back is never closed to anyone, but never again among the circle and its children. "Found" means a finding by a court, or by the authorities whose work is protecting children. The circle does not make this judgment itself. Until such a finding, the person stays away from all contact with children, as commitment 73 requires, and the circle does not declare them guilty.

Founding Theology XI; Scripture, The Way: "The Children of the Circle," "The Rites."

VIII. PRACTICE AND THE WAY OF LIVING

76. Every practice of the path is an invitation, never an obligation: sitting still, prayer, self-reflection, service, the gathering, the observances, the Resting Day and pilgrimage.

77. Spiritual progress is never measured, ranked or certified.

78. There is no wrong way to pray, as long as the intention is good. A prayer for another's harm is not prayer.

79. The sash is always optional, marks no rank, is not tied to the Vow, and is made plainly, so that no sash sets anyone above another.

80. Nourishment is a real need, so killing an animal for food, done humanely, is necessary suffering. Cruelty in how animals are raised or killed is not necessary, and neither is killing for sport or trophy.

81. Animals in one's keeping must have their needs met and as much freedom as their wellbeing allows.

82. Caring for the natural world is a responsibility of the path.

83. Using alcohol or other substances must never harm others. Anyone struggling with addiction is met with care, never judgment.

84. Pilgrims go as guests. They follow their hosts' customs, observe other traditions' rites without taking part, and never preach or try to recruit anyone.

85. Good done on the path is done quietly. The path is named only when someone asks.

86. A person's own wishes for their body after death come first, then their family's. Every respectful way is honored.

Founding Theology X, XII; Scripture, The Way: "On Prayer," "The Way of Living," "On Pilgrimage."

IX. THE AUTHORITY OF THIS BOOK

87. During the founder's life, the founder's revisions to this book are final. The founder's conduct is accountable like anyone else's.

88. No revision of this book, by the founder or by anyone, may weaken or remove a commitment that protects people. Revisions may add protections, but never take them away.

89. After the founder, the text is fixed. New understanding grows through commentaries, which circles are free to use or not.

90. When a verse of scripture seems to conflict with the Founding Theology, neither governs. The two are read together, and real tensions are left to commentary.

91. Any reading of this book that requires harming someone is a misreading.

92. Nothing in this book is presented as scientifically proven. If established science clearly contradicts a literal teaching, commentary reinterprets that teaching as image.

93. The practices, rites and observances of this path are new, and none of them may be presented as ancient.

Founding Theology XIII; Scripture, That Which Is: "The Many Windows."

THE VOW

These are the words a person may speak when they choose to walk the path. They are placed here, after the Commitments, so that anyone who takes the Vow knows exactly what they are choosing.

The Vow is never required to belong [34]. Only the person can know when they are ready, and no one may hurry them toward it or hold them back from it [35]. It is needed only to hold a role in a circle [46], and it may be set down at any time, without shame [36].

I choose to walk the Everlasting Path.
I choose it freely. No one has chosen it for me.
I will seek the truth, and speak it.
I will love, and protect those who cannot protect themselves.
I will take no one's choice for my own.
I will keep learning all my life,
and I will never think myself above anyone.
I know I will fall short. When I do, I will begin again.

Scripture, The Way: "The Rites."

THE EVERLASTING PATH

The Scripture



Words to be read slowly, spoken aloud, and carried with you.

PART ONE

That Which Is

Every name you have been given for God is a window. Love the light that comes through it. But no window is the whole sky.

CHAPTER 1

Before Every Name

Before you had a name, before you had a word for anything, it was already here.

[2] We call it That Which Is. Those are only our words for it. It has never needed any.

[3] It is not far from you. It is not waiting somewhere above. It is in the breath you just took, and in the one you are about to take.

[4] It holds the stars and the stones. It holds the room you are sitting in. It holds you.

[5] There is nowhere you could go to be outside of it. There is no outside.

[6] Even on the nights you feel most alone, this is still true.

[7] That Which Is sees. When you see, you see within its seeing. When you wake, even a little, you wake within its awareness.

[8] But it will not reach down and lift your burden. It does not choose and it does not want. It is not that kind of God.

[9] Maybe you have looked up and waited for a hand. Maybe the sky gave back only stars.

[10] Look at your own hands now. Look at the hands of the people beside you. Ours are the hands.

[11] Do not grieve this. What does not rescue you also never leaves you. Not for one breath have you been outside That Which Is.

[12] Every name you have been given for God is a window. Love the light that comes through it. But no window is the whole sky.

[13] We who wrote this have seen only a little. We are still learning, the same as you.

[14] So read slowly. Then close the book, and look for yourself.

CHAPTER 2
Within and Beyond

You may have been told that God made the world the way hands make a bowl, and then set it down.

2 It is not like that. Nothing was set down. Nothing was ever put outside.

3 The world rises in That Which Is the way a wave rises in the sea. The wave is real, and it is never apart from the water.

4 No one decided it should be so. That Which Is does not plan, and it does not labor. The world arises in it the way morning comes, because that is what is.

5 Everything you can touch is within That Which Is: the cup in your hand, the ground under your feet, the warmth of whoever sleeps beside you.

6 And yet it is more than everything you can touch.

7 This world had a beginning. One day it will have an end. All its fires will go out, and all its stars will be still.

8 That Which Is will not go out with them.

9 When this world is gone, That Which Is will still be, and in it, a new world will rise.

10 So do not mistake the world for all that is. It is held, as you are held.

11 Whether there was ever a first world, before all the others, we do not know. That Which Is had no beginning. That is all we can say.

12 And do not hate the world for being small beside That Which Is. A wave is not less real because the sea is wide.

13 Love the world while it is here. It is the only place you have ever been, and it has never once been outside of God.

CHAPTER 3
The Waking Ground

Notice that you are aware. Before any thought, before any word, there is simply this: you are here, and you know it.

2 That knowing did not begin with you. It rises from That Which Is the way a spring rises from deep ground.

3 That Which Is sees, and every awareness opens within it. Yours. Mine. The bird's at the window. The child's just waking.

4 And yet you are not That Which Is. You are a real someone, an opening that has never been opened before and will never be opened again.

5 Do not let anyone tell you that you are only a dream God is having. You are real, and so is your choice.

6 And do not let anyone tell you that you are alone in yourself, sealed off from everything else. You were never apart.

7 Both are true. You are your own, and you are held.

8 Think of a window in a house at night. The light is not the window's own. But no other window shines from that place, at that angle, onto that part of the dark.

9 So it is with you. No one else will ever see what you see from where you stand.

10 That is why your seeing matters. That is why your life matters.

11 When you sit quietly and come back to the simple fact of being aware, you are standing at the place where you open into That Which Is.

12 You do not need to go anywhere to find it. You only need to stop running past it.

CHAPTER 4
The Sky and the Storm

THINK of the sky on the night of a great storm.

2 The wind tears at the trees. The rain comes sideways. Lightning splits the dark, and the whole world seems to shake.

3 And the sky holds all of it. Every gust, every flash, every drop. Nothing in the storm is outside the sky.

4 Yet the sky is not torn by the wind. It is not soaked by the rain. When the storm has passed, the sky is still the sky.

5 So it is with That Which Is.

6 Whatever you feel, it is felt in That Which Is, as you feel it. Your joy, your fear, your grief on the worst night of your life. None of it goes unknown.

7 It is known as yours. That Which Is does not take your pain and make it into something else. It is your pain, and it is fully known.

8 And That Which Is is not harmed by it. It remains whole, the way the sky remains whole above the storm.

9 This is why, in stillness, you can find a place in yourself that the storm does not reach.

10 Your pain is real. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise. But it moves through a ground that it cannot break.

11 Now hear something harder.

12 That Which Is does not love you. It does not hate you either. It does not want, and so it does not love, for love is a choice, and That Which Is does not choose.

13 Do not let this frighten you. Look around you instead.

14 The hand that held yours when you were small. The friend who stayed. The stranger who stopped. The dog who waited at the door.

15 That is where love is. Love is what beings bring into the world when they choose it, and it exists nowhere else.

16 The universe does not love you. Beings do.

17 And so every act of love is a new thing in all of existence. It would not be there if someone had not chosen it.

18 Choose it. You are one of the only places in all that is where love can begin.

CHAPTER 5
Without a Throne

There is no throne above the clouds, and no one sitting on it, weighing your life.

[2] That Which Is does not keep a list of your wrongs. It does not wait to reward you or to punish you.

[3] When grief comes to your house, it was not sent. When sickness comes, it is not a sentence. When the storm takes what you love, no one chose it for you.

[4] You do not have to search your heart for the sin that brought it. There was no such sin.

[5] Hard things happen because this is a world, and worlds are hard. That is all, and it is enough.

[6] Some will say a God who does not step in is a God who does not care. Listen to us.

[7] That Which Is does not care the way a person cares, with a hand that reaches and a voice that answers. It knows you wholly, as you are, and it is nearer than any hand.

[8] It is the ground under your grief. It is the awareness your grief moves through. It does not turn away, because it has nowhere to turn.

[9] So when you pray, you are not calling to someone far away. You are turning toward what is already here. Pray to see clearly. Pray to remember where you stand.

[10] And when you see suffering that is not your own, do not wait for heaven to answer it.

[11] The answer is the meal carried to a neighbor's door. It is the hand that holds another hand in a hospital room. It is the voice that says no to cruelty.

[12] That Which Is does not act as a person acts. People act. You act.

[13] This is not a burden laid on you from above. It is simply what love looks like in a world with no one on the throne.

[14] Strange things happen in this world that no one can explain. Do not be afraid of them, and do not let anyone sell them to you as signs. Whatever they are, they were not sent.

CHAPTER 6

The Parable of the Empty Throne

THERE was a valley where the people built a throne of carved wood and set it in the square.

2 "One day a king will come," they said, "and sit here, and set everything right."

3 Each year they polished the throne. Each year it stayed empty.

4 When the river rose, they gathered around the throne and waited for the king to hold back the water. The water rose higher.

5 When sickness came, they laid their sick before the throne and waited for the king to heal them. Many died.

6 One spring the river rose higher than it ever had. The people stood in the square, knee-deep, looking at the empty throne.

7 A girl among them, tired of waiting, filled a sack with sand and carried it to the riverbank.

8 Her brother followed her. Then a neighbor. Then the old men who had polished the throne for forty years.

9 All night they carried sand. By morning the wall held, and the village stood.

10 When the water went down, they looked again at the throne. No one had sat in it. No one had needed to.

11 "There was never a king," the girl said. "There was only us."

12 That summer they took the throne apart, and from its wood they built a footbridge across the river, so that no one on the far bank would be cut off again.

13 Do not wait for a hand from above. Look at your own. Ours are the hands.

CHAPTER 7

One Existence

Look at the person nearest to you. Their breath moves within That Which Is, just as yours does.

[2] The stranger on the bus, the clerk at the counter, the friend you have not called in too long: all of them are held where you are held.

[3] The tree outside is held there. So is the dog asleep on the floor, and the moth at the lamp.

[4] You were never one thing among separate things. You are one life among lives, and every one of them rises from the same ground.

[5] When you hurt another, you are tearing at the cloth you are woven into.

[6] When you care for another, you are mending it.

[7] Hear this, because it is hard: even the ones who do harm are held in That Which Is.

[8] The one who lies, the one who takes, the one who rules by fear: none of them has fallen outside of God. There is nowhere to fall.

[9] What they have lost is not That Which Is. What they have lost is sight. They have learned to see the world wrongly, and they act on what they see.

[10] This does not make their harm small. You may stand against them with everything you have. You may need to.

[11] But do not tell yourself they are a different kind of thing than you. They are not.

[12] What was learned can be unlearned. The way back is never closed, not for them, and not for you.

[13] That is the hardest truth of That Which Is, and the most hopeful: no one is left outside, because That Which Is dwells in no one less than in anyone.

CHAPTER 8

From the First Fire

THAT Which Is did not arrive when the first temple was built. It did not arrive with the first book.

[2] It was here before there was anyone to name it, and it was here when the first of us looked up.

[3] Long before writing, our ancestors laid their dead in the earth with care and painted the walls of caves by firelight. Already they were reaching.

[4] They heard something in the wind and the river and the turning of the seasons. They did not have our words. They did not need them.

[5] Then the names came, one people at a time.

[6] In India, sages spoke of Brahman, the reality beneath all things.

[7] In ancient Persia, people praised Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord.

[8] In Egypt, a king sang to the sun as the one light that gives every creature life.

[9] In China, the old masters spoke of the Tao, the Way that cannot be fully spoken.

[10] The children of Abraham called upon the one God of their fathers, and in time millions more would call upon Allah.

[11] Among the Yoruba, Olodumare. Among the Sikhs, Waheguru. Among peoples in every land, names we will never know.

[12] We do not say these names all mean the same thing. Each belongs to its own people and its own long memory.

[13] We say only that every one of them was spoken by someone standing within That Which Is, reaching toward what is.

[14] No people was ever left without it. No age was ever empty of it.

[15] That Which Is has been here from the start, and every generation has reached for it in the dark.

CHAPTER 9
The Many Windows

In every age there have been those who saw so far that their light still reaches us.

2 Abraham, who left everything he knew to follow a call, and became a father to many peoples.

3 Moses, who led his people out of slavery and taught them that justice is holy.

4 Zarathustra, who taught that every life is a choice between truth and the lie.

5 Krishna, who spoke to a frightened warrior on the field of battle, and taught him that the true self is not ended by death.

6 Mahavira, who taught gentleness toward every living thing, down to the smallest.

7 The Buddha, who sat beneath a tree until he woke, and spent the rest of his days teaching the way beyond suffering, with compassion for every living being.

8 Laozi, who taught the strength of water, and the Way that cannot be named.

9 Jesus, who taught that love must reach even the enemy, who sat at the table with the outcast and the poor, and who said the greatest among us is the one who serves.

10 Muhammad, who called his people to the one God, and to care for the orphan, the widow and the poor.

11 Guru Nanak, who taught that there is one Creator, and that all people are equal at the shared table.

12 And many more, in lands and languages we have never heard, whose names are lost but whose light is not.

13 We bow before them. Their lives were lamps, and the world is brighter because they walked in it.

14 Those who follow them know them as more than teachers, and we honor that. We do not claim them, and we do not say they taught what we teach. Their words belong to them and to those who keep them faithfully.

15 We say only this: when you stand in the light they left, you are standing in the light of That Which Is.

16 So honor the windows others look through. You do not have to look through theirs. You only have to know that it is a window.

17 And remember that your window

is a window too. This book is a window. It is not the sky.

18 If anyone tells you their name for God is the only true one, be gentle with them, and do not believe them.

19 If anyone tells you this book holds the whole truth, be gentle with them, and do not believe them either.

20 That Which Is reaches wider than every tradition put together, and wider than all the ones still to come.

21 That is why we can sit at one table with people who pray differently and not be afraid. Nothing true is lost when another person sees it from where they stand.

22 Go gently, then, among the many windows. The light coming through all of them is the same light.

CHAPTER 10

The Parable of the Mapmaker

THERE was once a mapmaker who wanted to draw the whole of the land.

[2] She began with her own street, every stone and doorway. Then the town. Then the river valley, then the hills beyond it.

[3] Each year her map grew larger, and each year she found there was more land past its edges.

[4] She bought bigger sheets of paper. She glued them together until the map covered the floor of her house, and then the walls.

[5] Still there was more land.

[6] One night, old and tired, she sat in the middle of her map and wept. "I will never finish," she said.

[7] Her granddaughter came and sat beside her. She looked at the map for a long time, and then she pointed to a small square in the center.

[8] "Grandmother, what is that?"

[9] "That is this house," the old woman said.

[10] "Then where are you?"

[11] The mapmaker looked, and saw that she had drawn every road and river, but she had never drawn herself.

[12] She laughed then, for the first time in years. She took her pen and drew, very small, a woman sitting on the floor of a house in the middle of the land.

[13] "There," she said. "I could never draw the whole of it. But I was always inside it."

[14] So it is with That Which Is. You will never draw its edges. No one will.

[15] But you do not need to stand outside it to know it. You are already in the middle of the map.

PART TWO

The Journey

The garment is laid down. The thread goes on.

CHAPTER 1
The Thread

You have a name. You have a face, a voice, a way of laughing that the people who love you would know anywhere.

2 You have a story: where you were born, what you were afraid of as a child, the things you have done and the things you wish you had.

3 All of this is real, and all of it is precious. And all of it is the garment you are wearing in this life.

4 Beneath the garment there is the one who wears it.

5 We call that one the thread.

6 Your thread is not your name, and it is not your story. It is the you that was here before the story began, and that the story has been happening to.

7 It opens from That Which Is, and it has never been anyone but itself.

8 No other thread is like yours. There has never been another, and there will never be another.

9 The thread runs through this life the way a thread runs through a cloth. You cannot see it from the surface, but without it the cloth would come apart.

10 And like a thread, it does not end where this cloth ends.

11 So do not hold your story too tightly, as if it were all you are. And do not throw it away, as if it were nothing.

12 Wear it well. Wear it with love. It is the only garment you have in this life, and it was made for you alone.

CHAPTER 2

The Crossing

One day this body will grow still. The breath will go out and not come back in.

2 You are allowed to be afraid of that. Everyone who has ever lived has stood at that door and trembled.

3 But hear us: death is not the end of you. It is a crossing.

4 The garment is laid down. The thread goes on.

5 Where does it go, in the moment after the last breath? How long is the crossing? What is it like?

6 We do not know.

7 We will not pretend to know. Many have drawn maps of that country, and none of them has come back to show us.

8 What we know is this: you have crossed many times already, into this life and every life before it, and you were held the whole way.

9 You will be held again. There is nowhere in the crossing that is outside That Which Is.

10 And do not trust anyone who says they carry messages from the dead, or asks to be paid to reach them. The crossing is unknown to all of us.

11 If you are sitting with someone you love who is dying, you do not need to have the answers. Hold their hand. Tell them they are loved. That is enough.

12 And if you are grieving someone who has crossed, know that they are not gone into nothing. Their thread goes on, even if their face does not.

13 Let yourself weep for the face. It was real and it was beautiful, and it will not come again.

14 But do not weep as if the one you loved has ceased. They have only crossed, and the journey continues.

CHAPTER 3

The Forgetting

You do not remember the lives before this one. Almost no one does.

[2] Do not let this trouble you. It is not a punishment, and it is not a loss of who you are.

[3] Memory belongs to the garment. When the garment is laid down, its memories are laid down with it.

[4] Think of how little you remember of being a small child. That child was still you. The forgetting did not make you someone else.

[5] So it is with the lives behind you. They were yours, and they are part of you, even though their stories are gone.

[6] There is mercy in the forgetting.

[7] You do not carry every old grief into each new morning. You do not carry every old grudge into each new face.

[8] Each life you are given a clean garment, and a chance to see the world as if for the first time.

[9] Do not spend this life trying to dig up the ones before it. The life that needs you is this one.

[10] And do not trust anyone who claims to know exactly who you were, or sells you the story of your past.

[11] What matters from those lives has already come with you. Not the memories. Something deeper than memories.

[12] It is the shape your choices have worn into you.

CHAPTER 4

What Love Leaves

You were born knowing how to love. No one had to teach you. You reached for faces before you knew a single word.

[2] Every day since, you have been choosing: to love or to turn away, to open or to close.

[3] Those choices do not vanish when the day ends. They do not vanish when this life ends.

[4] Each time you choose love, it leaves a mark on your thread, the way water leaves its shape in stone.

[5] Not a memory. A shape. A leaning. A way of being turned toward others.

[6] This is what you carry from life to life. Not the names. Not the stories. The shape that love has worn into you.

[7] So when you are patient with someone who does not deserve it, you are not only being kind today. You are becoming someone kinder, for all the lives ahead.

[8] And when you protect someone who cannot protect themselves, that too is love, and it shapes you as surely as tenderness does.

[9] Love does not mean letting yourself be harmed. A love that allows cruelty is not love. It is only fear wearing love's clothes.

[10] Hear the other half of this truth: harm leaves its shape too.

[11] Each cruelty, each lie, each choice to make another person smaller wears into the thread just as love does, and it travels with you into the lives ahead.

[12] This is not a punishment. No one is keeping score. It is only what you become through what you do.

[13] And it never means that those who suffer are paying for some old harm. No one's suffering is deserved. Do not ever say otherwise to someone in pain.

[14] But only what is truly yours shapes your thread: your choices, and what you have truly seen. What is done to you does not.

[15] The child who was hurt is not marked by the hurt. The one born into hunger or war is not shaped by the hunger or the war. Circumstances may wound a life, but they never decide who the thread becomes.

[16] Yet what happens to you is not nothing. Kindness received may open your eyes, and what you see be-

cause of it is yours. Cruelty endured may teach you fear, but it can never mark you unless you choose to make it yours.

17 If you were taught to see the world wrongly, the teaching does not mark you either. Only what you choose to do with it does: acting on it, or holding to it once you could see otherwise.

18 Even a small child chooses: to reach out or to pull back, to share or to keep, to laugh again after crying. Those choices are the child's own, and they are what shape the thread. No child is defined by what they were born into.

19 And where a being truly cannot choose, its thread rests through that life and is carried on whole. That life is no smaller for it. It is felt, known and kept as fully as any other, it is owed the same care, and it shapes everyone who loves it. Never say of anyone that they cannot choose. Choice is wider than anyone can see.

20 Some days you will choose badly. That is not the end. Tomorrow you can choose again, and the stone can be worn into a new shape.

21 Nothing you love is wasted. Not one kind word. Not one held hand. It all goes into the thread, and the thread goes on.

22 And love does not stay only in you. It goes on in everyone it reached, in what they chose and saw because of it, long after you are gone.

CHAPTER 5

The Parable of the Musician Who Forgot

There was an old musician who had played the same small instrument every evening of her life.

2 In her last years her memory began to leave her. First she forgot the names of streets, then the names of friends, then the names of her own children.

3 Her daughter sat with her each evening and grieved. "She is gone," the daughter said. "Everything she was is gone."

4 One night the daughter set the old instrument in her mother's lap, not knowing why.

5 The old woman looked at it as if she had never seen it. She did not know what it was called.

6 Then her hands moved. And out of the instrument came the songs she had played every evening for sixty years, every note in its place.

7 She could not have told you the name of a single one. She did not know she knew them. But her hands knew.

8 The daughter wept, and this time it was not only grief.

9 "The names are gone," she said, "but the music is still in her."

10 So it is with the thread. When the garment is laid down, the names go, and the stories, and every memory of this life.

11 But what you have practiced stays in you, the way the songs stayed in her hands.

12 So practice love. Practice it every evening, until your hands know it without you.

CHAPTER 6

Meeting Again

Have you ever met someone for the first time and felt that you already knew them?

[2] Not their name. Not their story. Something beneath those. As if a door you had forgotten opened, and someone you had missed walked through.

[3] It may not be your imagination.

[4] Threads that have loved each other are shaped toward each other. Life after life, they lean the same way, like two trees that grew up side by side.

[5] And so, perhaps, they find each other again, wearing new faces, in new places, without knowing why.

[6] A friend who understands you without words. A child who looks at you as if they have always known you. A stranger you cannot stop thinking about.

[7] You may never know what you were to each other before. You do not need to know. What matters is what you are to each other now.

[8] When you feel it, be gentle with it. Receive it as a possibility, and perhaps a gift, but never as proof. Familiarity and longing arise for many reasons.

[9] And never let it be a reason to stay where you are harmed. The feeling of having known someone gives you no claim on them, and gives them none on you.

[10] If someone tells you, "We belonged to each other in another life, so you must stay," do not believe them. Love that has to be demanded is not the love that crossed with you.

[11] Every meeting is new. Every person is free. The old shaping only opens the door. Walking through it is a choice, and it belongs to both of you.

[12] And remember the ones you do not recognize. You may have loved them too, long ago, and simply not felt it yet.

[13] So treat every stranger with care. You never know which of them has been waiting for you.

CHAPTER 7

Many Lives, Many Windows

Your thread did not come here to see the world from only one place.

[2] In one life it may look out through a fisherman's eyes, in another through a queen's, in another through a beggar's. In another it may look out through the eyes of a wolf, or a sparrow, or a creature on a world we will never see.

[3] It may know what it is to be strong, and what it is to be helpless. To be honored, and to be forgotten.

[4] Your thread is not bound to this earth, or to any one kind of body. Over its long journey it may become any being, anywhere in all the reaches of this world.

[5] Each life is a new window, and each window shows a part of what is that no other window shows.

[6] This is why no one should look down on another. The one you scorn may be wearing a garment you once wore yourself.

[7] The one who is poor, the one who is sick, the one who is a stranger in your land: you may have stood exactly where they stand.

[8] And you may stand there again. The same is true of the creature you pass on the road. A thread looks out through its eyes as well, so treat it gently.

[9] So when you meet a life very different from your own, do not ask only, "How are they different from me?" Ask, "What are they seeing that I cannot?"

[10] Every window opens onto a little more of That Which Is. Not because suffering is required, but because no two windows show the same thing.

[11] Your thread will travel as long as this world endures. That is longer than you can imagine.

[12] So you need not hurry, and you need not fear that you are falling behind. There is time.

[13] Only look carefully through the window you have now. It is the only one you will ever have in exactly this way.

CHAPTER 8

The Parable of the Weaver

1 In a village by the sea there lived a weaver, and she was making a cloth so long that no one could remember when it was begun.

2 A boy came to watch her. "What will it be when it is finished?" he asked.

3 "It will never be finished," she said. "When I am gone, someone else will sit at this loom."

4 The boy frowned. "Then why weave it at all?"

5 The weaver lifted a corner of the cloth and showed him a single thread, deep blue, running through it.

6 "Follow that one," she said.

7 He traced it with his finger. It ran under and over, under and over, through a field of red, then a field of gold, then a stretch of plain gray where it was nearly hidden.

8 "It changes," he said. "But it is the same thread."

9 "Yes. Where it passes through the red, it looks red. Where it passes through the gold, it shines. In the gray you can hardly see it. But it never stops being itself."

10 "And look here," she said, and showed him where the blue thread crossed a green one, then parted from it, and then, far down the cloth, crossed it again.

11 "They found each other twice," the boy said.

12 "Many more times than that," said the weaver. "Threads that have crossed once tend to cross again. The cloth remembers, even when the threads do not."

13 The boy was quiet for a while. Then he asked, "Which one is me?"

14 The weaver smiled and put his hand on the loom. "Weave," she said, "and you will see."

15 Your life is one stretch of cloth. You did not begin the thread, and you will not see where it goes when this stretch is done. But the pattern you weave here is real, and the thread carries its shape on.

PART THREE

The Awakening

Awakening is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning of understanding.

CHAPTER 1
Waking

You have been asleep and woken many times, and not only in the morning.

2 You woke the day you understood that your parents were only people, doing their best.

3 You woke the first time you saw your own fear in someone you had hated.

4 You woke when a loss broke you open and you found you were larger than you had known.

5 And you woke in joy, too: the first time you knew you were truly loved, the morning you understood something new.

6 This is what awakening is. Not a lightning bolt. Not a crown. A seeing that was not there before.

7 You see that you are held in That Which Is. You see that every other life is held there too.

8 You see that your fear is not the truth. It is only fear.

9 You see that love was always the deepest thing in you, and that you can choose it.

10 Some wakings are small, like noticing the light on a wall. Some are vast, and change the whole shape of a life.

11 Do not despise the small ones. The vast ones are only many small ones that arrived at once.

12 And do not think awakening belongs to monks on mountains. It comes in kitchens and hospital rooms, in traffic and in grief, on the night shift and at the sink.

13 The world is your monastery. Every moment is a bell, if you are listening.

CHAPTER 2
The Truth That Grows

Truth is not a stone you can put in your pocket and keep.

[2] It is more like a path through a forest. The farther you walk, the more of the forest you see, and the more you see how much is still hidden.

[3] So do not be afraid when the truth unsettles you. That is how you know you are still walking.

[4] If what you believed yesterday is shown to be wrong today, do not cling to it. Thank it for carrying you this far, and set it down.

[5] This is true even of what you learn from us. Even of what is written in this book.

[6] A belief that cannot bear a question is not faith. It is fear holding a door shut.

[7] Ask your questions. Ask them out loud. Ask them of your teachers, and ask them of yourself.

[8] Learn from everyone: from the scholar and the farmer, from the scientist and the child, from those who agree with you and those who never will.

[9] Truth does not belong to any one people, any one book, or any one teacher. It belongs to what is.

[10] And when you find a truth, hold it with an open hand. Others may see a part of it you have missed.

[11] Never use truth as a weapon to make others feel small. Truth used to wound has already been bent into something else.

[12] Seek it humbly. Share it gently. And keep walking.

CHAPTER 3
The Self You Wear

Some teach that the self is something to be overcome. We teach it differently.

[2] Your self is the garment of this life. It was given to you, and it is good.

[3] Your ambition built the house you live in. Your pride in your work made something beautiful. Your stubbornness kept you alive when everything told you to give up.

[4] The self is a tool, the way hands are tools. Hands can heal or they can strike. The fault is never in having hands.

[5] Make things. Dream large. Become someone. The world needs what only you can bring.

[6] But know the difference between wearing your self and being worn by it.

[7] When you wear your self, you can take it off at night and rest. You can laugh at it. You can let it be wrong.

[8] When your self wears you, every slight is a wound and every disagreement is a war. You must win, you must be seen, you must be more.

[9] And when the self grows hungry enough, it begins to reach for other people's lives as if they were its own.

[10] That is where the harm begins. Not in having a self, but in needing others to be smaller so that you can feel large.

[11] So each day, loosen the garment a little. Ask, "Am I acting from love, or from the fear of being nothing?"

[12] You are not nothing. You never were. You do not have to prove it to anyone.

CHAPTER 4

Beneath the Name

Who are you, when no one is calling your name?

2 Take away the work you do. Take away the place you were born, the house you live in, the story you tell about yourself to strangers.

3 Take away what others have said you are, and what you have feared you are.

4 Something is still here. That is where the journey turns inward.

5 Finding your true self is one of the great legs of the path. It is not a summit you reach once. It is a road you walk again and again.

6 Your true self is your thread: the one who was here before your name, and who will go on after it.

7 And it is the shape your choices have worn into that thread. Not who you say you are, not who you wish you were, but who you have truly become.

8 So look honestly. Ask, in the quiet, "Who am I beneath my name? What has my thread become?"

9 You may not like everything you see. Look anyway. What has been worn one way can be worn another.

10 And you may be surprised by how much love is already there.

11 Keep what you find to yourself. It is yours. No one may ask you to confess it, report it or prove it: not a Guide, not the circle, not this book.

12 Looking is not keeping score. No one is counting. You are only learning who you are, so that you can choose who you will be.

13 The garment is real, and you may wear it well. But you are not only the garment. You never were.

CHAPTER 5
Holding and Letting Go

Everything you love, you will one day lose. This is the hardest thing to know, and everyone knows it.

2 The house will be sold. The child will grow up and leave. The friend will move away. The body will age.

3 Some respond to this by refusing to love, so that nothing can be taken from them. This is a small and cold way to live.

4 Others respond by gripping tighter and tighter, until the thing they love cannot breathe.

5 There is another way. Hold what you love the way you would hold water in your cupped hands.

6 Gently. Fully. Knowing it was never yours to keep, and loving it anyway.

7 Look closely at your fear of loss. Much of the harm in the world begins there.

8 The jealous lover, the controlling parent, the ruler who cannot give up power: each is holding something so tightly that it begins to break.

9 Love does not ask you to own anything. Love asks you to be present while it is here.

10 When the time comes to let go, it will hurt. Let it hurt. Grief is the shape love takes when what it held is gone.

11 But grief is not the end of love. What you loved has already worn its shape into your thread.

12 Nothing you have truly loved is ever wholly lost to you. It is only no longer in your hands.

CHAPTER 6
Freedom

MANY people think freedom means having no one above you. But a tyrant has no one above him, and he is not free.

[2] He lies awake afraid of losing his power. He cannot trust a single friend. He is chained to the very thing he holds.

[3] Freedom is not standing over others. Freedom is not needing to.

[4] It is knowing who you are so well that no one else has to bow for you to feel whole.

[5] It is being able to lose an argument and still sleep. To be ignored and still be yourself. To give something away and not feel smaller.

[6] The one who must control others has handed their peace to those others. Every time someone refuses to obey, their peace is gone.

[7] But the one who does not need to control can let others be exactly who they are. And so that one is at rest.

[8] Your freedom and theirs are not enemies. When you no longer need to rule anyone, you set them free and yourself free in the same breath.

[9] But your freedom never includes the freedom to take another's. When two choices meet, the one that would override the other has no claim.

[10] Know this, too: to have your choice taken from you is a harm, even when it does not hurt, even when it feels like comfort. Many who were ruled never felt the chain.

[11] This does not mean you will never say no, or never stand in someone's way. When another is being harmed, you may need to stand in the harmer's way with all your strength.

[12] But you stand there to give a choice back to someone who lost it, not to take one for yourself.

[13] So look at the places where you try to manage other people's lives. Ask what you are afraid of there.

[14] Then loosen your hand, one finger at a time. Freedom comes back into a life that way, slowly, like feeling into a cold hand.

CHAPTER 7

What Cannot Be Unseen

Some wake slowly, like the sky before morning. Some wake all at once, like a sleeper shaken by a shout.

[2] Both are waking. Neither is better. Some lives see a great deal, and some see a little, and a little is still seeing.

[3] So do not rush. No one is keeping time. You have more lives ahead than you can count, and a whole world's age to walk in.

[4] Hear this, too: what you have truly seen, you cannot unsee.

[5] You may forget it for a while. Grief may cover it, or fear, or the noise of an ordinary day. But it has marked your thread, and the mark remains. It will be there in your next life, as a leaning toward the light.

[6] If you once understood something and now it seems gone, ask yourself honestly whether you saw it, or only learned the words for it.

[7] Words can be lost. Seeing cannot.

[8] And do not be discouraged if what you thought you saw has faded. That only means the real seeing is still ahead of you.

[9] Now hear the most important thing in this chapter.

[10] Seeing is not the same as being good.

[11] A person may see far and still choose cruelty. A person may understand a great deal and still lie, still take, still rule by fear.

[12] Awakening is about what you see. Goodness is about what you choose. The one never guarantees the other.

[13] So never trust anyone because of what they claim to see. Not a teacher, not a Guide, not the one who wrote these words.

[14] Trust people only as far as the way they live.

[15] And if you have seen something true, let it make you humbler, not prouder. The truest seeing always shows you how much more there is to see.

CHAPTER 8

The Parable of the Watchman

A walled town had two watchmen.

2 The first had the sharpest eyes in the land. From the tower he could see a rider a day's journey away, and count the birds on a far hill.

3 The second was old, and her eyes were failing. She could hardly see past the gate.

4 The town honored the first watchman above everyone. "He sees everything," they said. "Surely he is the wisest among us."

5 But the first watchman used his eyes for himself. He watched which houses stood empty, and when. He watched where the merchants hid their silver. And at night he took what he had seen.

6 The old woman could not see far. But she knew every voice that came to the gate, and she asked every traveler whether they were hungry, and she never let anyone be turned away into the cold.

7 When at last the first watchman was found out, the people were bewildered. "How could someone who sees so much do this?"

8 The old woman said, "Seeing far and doing good are not the same thing. You asked what he could see. You never asked what he chose."

9 Seeing is not goodness. Never trust anyone for what they can see. Trust them only as far as the way they live.

CHAPTER 9

No Last Door

You may hope that one day you will awaken completely, and then you will finally be done.

[2] Hear us gently: there is no such day.

[3] Every door you walk through opens onto a room with another door in it. Every hill you climb shows you mountains you could not see from below.

[4] This is not a failure of the path. It is the path.

[5] That Which Is has no end, and you are a single window. No window, however clear, will ever hold the whole sky.

[6] So there is always more to see. Always more to understand. Always more to love.

[7] Let this be a joy to you, not a weight. You will never run out of wonder.

[8] And let it keep you humble. The one who thinks they have arrived has stopped walking.

[9] If someone tells you they are fully awakened and you must follow them, be gentle with them, and walk away.

[10] If someone tells you that their awakening places them above you, or above the rules that bind everyone else, walk away faster.

[11] The more truly awake a person is, the more clearly they know how much they do not know.

[12] The wisest teacher you will ever meet is still a student. So are we. So are you.

[13] Awakening is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning of understanding.

[14] And so the path goes on, and you go on with it, one door, and then another, and then another.

CHAPTER 10

The Parable of the Climber

A young man heard that from the top of the great mountain you could see the whole world.

[2] He trained for years. He sold everything he owned to buy rope and boots and food for the journey.

[3] The climb took him many weeks. He was cold and afraid and very often alone.

[4] At last he pulled himself over the final ridge and stood up on the summit, gasping, ready to see everything.

[5] And he saw mountains. Beyond his mountain were more mountains, taller than his, and beyond those, more still, fading into blue.

[6] For a moment he felt cheated. He had been told this was the top.

[7] Then an old woman stepped out from behind a rock, where she had been sheltering from the wind. She had climbed it long before him.

[8] "You look disappointed," she said.

[9] "I thought I would see the end of things," he said.

[10] "So did I, the first time," she said. "Now I come up here because I can't."

[11] She pointed. "Do you see that far range, there, where the light is gold? I will never climb it. My knees are too old. But this morning I saw it for the first time, and it is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen."

[12] He looked where she pointed, and for a long time neither of them spoke.

[13] When he came down, people asked him, "Did you see the whole world?"

[14] "No," he said. "I saw that it has no end. That was better."

[15] Do not climb to arrive. Climb to see farther. The view that shows you how much more there is, is the gift.

PART FOUR

The Human Condition

Courage is not the absence of fear. It is love walking forward while fear is still talking.

CHAPTER 1

One Love, Many Shapes

There is only one love. It is the same love that holds a newborn and the same love that holds a stranger in the rain.

[2] But it does not wear the same shape everywhere it goes.

[3] Think of water. It is one water in the river, in the cup, in the rain on your face. Yet the river, the cup and the rain are not the same thing.

[4] So it is with love. Between partners it is a closeness no one else shares, a promise kept day after day.

[5] Between parent and child it is a shelter, given before the child knows how to ask for it.

[6] Between friends it is a road walked side by side, by choice, with no one keeping score.

[7] Toward the stranger it is courtesy, and fairness, and a hand held out when they fall.

[8] Toward every living thing it is gentleness, and a refusal to cause harm without need.

[9] Do not tell yourself you must love everyone the way you love your child. You cannot, and you are not asked to.

[10] And do not tell yourself the love you give the stranger is lesser. It comes from the same spring.

[11] Each relationship asks something different of love. Honor what each one asks.

[12] Keep your promises to the ones closest to you. And keep the door of your heart open to the ones you will never know.

[13] Both are the same love, flowing into the shape it has been given.

CHAPTER 2
On Suffering

No one passes through this world without suffering. Not the rich, not the holy, not the kind.

[2] If you are suffering now, you have not failed. You have not been singled out. You are living in a world, and worlds are hard.

[3] Your suffering was not sent to teach you a lesson, and it is not payment for harm done in some life you cannot remember. No one sent it.

[4] And you do not have to suffer to deserve love, or wisdom, or peace. These were yours from the start.

[5] Be wary of anyone who tells you that pain makes you holy. Pain makes you hurt. That is all it does on its own.

[6] What you do with it is another matter. Some come through suffering wiser and gentler. Some come through it bitter. Most come through it some of each.

[7] Be patient with yourself in either case.

[8] And know that wisdom comes by other roads too: by learning, by love, by laughter, by long quiet evenings, by a friend who tells you the truth.

[9] Never choose suffering for its own sake, and never lay it on another to make them stronger.

[10] The one who causes needless pain and calls it a lesson has misunderstood both pain and lessons.

[11] When someone near you is suffering, you do not need to explain it to them. Do not tell them it happened for a reason.

[12] Sit with them. Bring them food. Listen. Let them know they are not alone in it.

[13] This is the oldest medicine there is, and it is still the best.

CHAPTER 3

On Fear

Fear is not your enemy. It is an old guard, standing at the door of your life.

[2] It was born from the hard conditions of this world: hunger, cold, danger, the knowledge that everything ends.

[3] When there was a wolf at the edge of the firelight, fear kept our ancestors alive.

[4] But the guard does not always know when the wolf is gone. It goes on shouting at shadows.

[5] It tells you there will not be enough, so you must take more. It tells you others are a threat, so you must strike first. It tells you that you are small, so you must make yourself large.

[6] Listen to it, and thank it. Then ask it, "Is this true?"

[7] Much of the harm in the world is fear that was never questioned.

[8] Fear passed from parent to child. Fear taught in schools and preached from pulpits. Fear sold, because frightened people are easy to lead.

[9] Be careful of anyone who wants you to be afraid. Ask what they gain from your fear.

[10] When you are afraid, come back to your breath, and to the plain fact that you are held in That Which Is.

[11] Courage is not the absence of fear. It is love walking forward while fear is still talking.

[12] And where you can, make the world a little less frightening for others: a little safer, a little warmer, a little more fed.

[13] Every fear you ease in another is one less seed of harm in the world.

CHAPTER 4

On Desire

You were made to want. To want food when you are hungry, rest when you are tired, closeness when you are alone.

[2] Desire is not shameful. It is the pull of life toward more life.

[3] Wanting to learn, to build, to make something beautiful, to be held by someone who loves you: these are good desires. Follow them.

[4] But there is a wanting that does not end when it is fed.

[5] It eats, and is still hungry. It gains, and feels poorer. It wins, and needs to win again.

[6] That wanting has stopped being desire. It has become a hole that no amount of the world can fill.

[7] Here is how to tell them apart: the first kind of desire, when it is satisfied, lets you rest. The second kind, when it is satisfied, only grows.

[8] And the second kind will sooner or later reach for what belongs to others: their land, their labor, their bodies, their lives.

[9] When you feel that hunger in yourself, do not hate yourself for it. Ask it what it is truly hungry for.

[10] Often it is not more at all. It is safety. It is being seen. It is the fear of being nothing.

[11] Those hungers can be fed, but not by taking. They are fed by love, by belonging, by remembering that you are already held.

[12] So want freely. Want well. And let your wanting stop where another person's life begins.

CHAPTER 5
The Two Roads

In every age, people have walked one of two roads.

[2] One is the road of the good fight. It is walked by those who stand for love, for truth, for freedom, for justice, and for the protection of others.

[3] The other is the road of control. It is walked by those who reach for power over other lives, through deception, through domination, through fear.

[4] Do not think these are two kinds of people. They are two roads, and every person stands at the fork every day.

[5] The one walking the road of control has not fallen out of That Which Is. There is nowhere to fall.

[6] They have learned to see the world wrongly. Somewhere, the hard conditions of life taught them that they must rule or be ruled, take or be taken from.

[7] Understanding this does not excuse what they do. A wound explains a blow. It does not make the blow right.

[8] So stand against the harm with everything you have. And never stop believing that the one doing it could turn around.

[9] Be careful, too, on the road of the good fight. It has its own ditches.

[10] The moment you begin to believe that you are righteous and they are evil, that your side is pure and theirs is filth, you have stepped onto the other road without noticing.

[11] Never let the good fight become an excuse for cruelty. Never let it make you think your faith is above another's. Never use it to force anyone.

[12] The good fight is not won by defeating people. It is won by giving back the choices that were taken from them.

[13] When you stop a harm, stop the harm, not the person. Leave them a door. It may be the door you once needed yourself.

CHAPTER 6

The Parable of the Open Window

A boy found a sparrow with a broken wing in the road, and carried it home in his hands.

[2] He made it a bed in a box. He fed it seeds and water. He kept the cat out of the room.

[3] Day by day the wing mended, and the boy loved the bird more and more.

[4] When the wing was whole, the sparrow began to beat against the window.

[5] The boy was afraid. "There are hawks out there," he told his grandmother, "and cats, and storms. I will build it a cage and keep it safe."

[6] His grandmother sat beside him and watched the bird at the glass for a long time.

[7] "When you found it," she said, "what had the broken wing taken from it?"

[8] The boy thought. "It couldn't fly. It couldn't choose where to go."

[9] "And you gave that back," she said. "That was protection. If you put it in a cage now, you will take back what you gave. That is something else."

[10] The boy cried. Then he opened the window.

[11] The sparrow sat on the sill for a moment, and then it was gone into the wide air.

[12] To protect is to return choice to those who have lost it. Whoever keeps that choice for themselves has stopped protecting, however much they love.

CHAPTER 7

On Forgiveness

Someone has hurt you, and you have been told you must forgive them.

[2] Hear us: you do not have to.

[3] Forgiveness is a gift. It is never a debt. No one may demand it of you, not the one who hurt you, not your family, not your circle, not this book.

[4] If you cannot forgive, you have done nothing wrong. Your thread is not harmed by it. The harm was done to you; it was not done by you.

[5] You may feel anger. You may feel it for a long time. Feelings never mark the thread. You do not have to hurry your heart.

[6] You may keep away from the one who hurt you, forever if you need to. Forgiving someone, if you ever do, does not mean letting them near you again.

[7] There is only one thing we ask you to watch for.

[8] Feeling anger is not the same as feeding a wish to see them suffer. The first is a feeling, and it is yours to feel. The second is a choice, made again and again, and choices shape the thread.

[9] If you find yourself tending that wish like a fire, you may set it down. Not for their sake. For yours.

[10] And if one day you do forgive, let it be because you want to, and not because anyone told you that you should.

[11] Forgiveness given freely can be a great release. Forgiveness forced out of someone is only another harm.

[12] Whatever you choose, you are not less on the path because of it. You are walking it exactly where you are.

CHAPTER 8

Ours to Answer

Look at the suffering in the world: the hungry, the beaten, the forgotten, the ones crushed beneath someone else's power.

[2] Who will answer for it?

[3] That Which Is will not come down and set it right. We have said this before, and we say it again here, because it matters most here.

[4] It is ours to answer.

[5] Not because a God has commanded it. Because we are the ones who are here, with hands and eyes and hearts, and we can see.

[6] You cannot answer all of it. No one can. Do not let the size of the world's pain freeze you.

[7] Answer what is in front of you. The neighbor. The coworker. The child who has no one. The animal left out in the cold.

[8] Then, when you can, reach a little farther.

[9] Some harm is done by one person to another. Some is built into how a place is run: who gets fed and who goes hungry, who is believed and who is ignored.

[10] Answer both. Mend the wound, and mend the thing that keeps causing it.

[11] Do not wait to be perfect before you begin. Do not wait to be certain. The ones who need help cannot wait for that.

[12] And do not do it to be seen, or praised, or to feel better than others. Do it because it is what love looks like with its sleeves rolled up.

[13] Every one of us is a pair of hands the world has been given. Let yours be gentle, and let them be busy.

CHAPTER 9

The Parable of the Two Houses

Two brothers inherited a field, and each built a house on his half of it.

2 The elder brother was afraid. He had heard of thieves in the hills and wolves in the forest, and of storms that came without warning.

3 So he built high walls and a heavy door with three locks. He made the windows narrow so no one could climb in. He kept his food in a cellar and counted it every night.

4 The younger brother was afraid too. But he built a low house with a wide porch and a door he could open with one hand.

5 “You are a fool,” said the elder. “The first thief who comes will take everything.”

6 One winter a hard frost came, and the harvest failed across the whole valley.

7 The elder brother sat behind his locked door with his cellar full. He heard people passing on the road, hungry, and he did not open the door. He told himself he could not risk it.

8 The younger brother had little food. But when travelers came, he let them in, and they shared what he had, and what they had, and they kept each other warm.

9 By spring, the elder brother was alone. Everyone in the valley had learned that his door did not open.

10 The younger brother’s house was full of friends. When his roof leaked, ten people came to fix it. When he fell ill, his neighbors brought soup.

11 One day the elder brother came and knocked on his brother’s door. “I built my house to keep myself safe,” he said, “and now I have no one.”

12 “Your walls did keep the thieves out,” said his brother. “They kept everyone else out too.”

13 Then he opened the door wide. “Come in. There is room.”

14 Fear will always tell you to build the wall higher. Listen to it, and then remember this: no wall has ever kept anyone warm.

PART FIVE

The Collective Path

Make room at the table. There is always room.

CHAPTER 1
The Rising and the Falling

Every age has seen the light grow and seen it dim again.

2 Peace has turned to war, and war to peace. Kindness has spread through whole peoples, and cruelty has spread just as fast. Each time, someone called it the end of history.

3 It was never the end. It never is.

4 What has truly been seen is never lost. Every thread that has seen clearly carries that clarity on, life after life.

5 And this is true not of humanity alone, but of every conscious being, on every world. Wherever anyone can see, the waking goes on.

6 But seeing is not the same as being good. Everyone who can choose is free to choose harm, in any age, no matter how much has been seen before.

7 So the world rises and falls. Conditions grow kinder and then harsher. Distortion is unlearned in one generation and learned again in the next.

8 No one can promise you the morning. Not this book, not any teacher, not the way things are.

9 Do not let that make you despair. Let it make you awake.

10 Every generation must choose the light again. It is never finished, and it is never too late.

11 And no one may force it. Whoever tries to drive people toward the light with threats or chains has already turned toward the dark.

12 The light comes only as each one who can choose, freely, turns a little more toward love.

13 So do not wait for it, and do not demand it. Choose it. Today's choosing is the only morning anyone was ever given.

CHAPTER 2

The Parable of the Lighthouse

On a rocky coast there was a lighthouse, and a family that kept it.

2 Each night the mother climbed the stairs and lit the lamp, and the ships passed safely in the dark.

3 When she grew old, her son kept the light. When he grew old, his daughter kept it.

4 For a hundred years no ship was lost on those rocks.

5 Then came a generation that had never seen a wreck. “Why do we climb these stairs every night?” they asked. “The ships are safe. The rocks are only a story.”

6 So they let the lamp go dark, one night and then another.

7 In the first storm of winter, a ship broke on the rocks, and the people on the shore heard the cries in the dark.

8 A girl ran up the old stairs, found the lamp, and lit it with shaking hands. The other ships saw it and turned, and were saved.

9 The next morning the people asked one another how they could have forgotten.

10 An old fisherman said, “A light is not kept once. It has to be lit every night, by whoever is there.”

11 So it is with the light of the world. No generation can light it for the next. It is never finished, and it is never too late.

12 Climb the stairs. Light the lamp tonight.

CHAPTER 3
One Table

THE awakening of humanity does not mean that everyone will believe what we believe.

[2] It does not mean one language, one custom, one faith, one way of living. A world like that would be poorer, not wiser.

[3] Imagine instead a great table, long enough for everyone.

[4] At it sit people who pray in a hundred different ways, and people who do not pray at all. People who eat different food, sing different songs, and see the world through different windows.

[5] They do not agree on everything. They argue. They laugh. Sometimes they do not understand each other at all.

[6] But they can sit together. They can listen. They can ask, "What do you see from where you sit?" and truly want to know.

[7] This is what we mean by awakening together: not sameness, but understanding.

[8] You do not have to give up who you are to understand someone else. And they do not have to give up who they are to understand you.

[9] So when you meet someone whose ways are strange to you, do not rush to fix them or to flee from them. Pull up a chair.

[10] Ask about their grandmother. Ask what they are afraid of. Ask what they love.

[11] You will almost always find, somewhere beneath the difference, someone very much like yourself.

[12] And where you do not, you will find someone who can show you what you could never have seen alone.

[13] Make room at the table. There is always room.

CHAPTER 4
Justice

Remember where distortion first came from: from hunger, from danger, from the fear of not having enough.

2 Where people are hungry, fear grows. Where people are unsafe, cruelty grows. Where people are treated as nothing, they learn to treat others as nothing.

3 So justice is not only punishing those who do harm. Justice is changing the ground that harm grows in.

4 Feed the hungry, and you have pulled up a root of violence.

5 Shelter the homeless, heal the sick, teach the child no one has taught, and you have made the world less frightening for everyone.

6 This is holy work, as holy as any prayer.

7 Justice also means that the same rules hold for everyone: the powerful and the poor, the famous and the forgotten, the leader and the one who is led.

8 Wherever one person is above the law, the road of control has been paved.

9 When harm is done, justice asks three things: that the harm be stopped, that those who were hurt be cared for, and that the one who did it be held to account and given a way back.

10 Justice that only punishes, and leaves no way back, breeds the very fear it was meant to end.

11 And justice that only forgives, and does not stop the harm, abandons the ones who were hurt.

12 Hold both. It is hard. It is supposed to be.

13 The world will be just when no one has to be afraid of it. Every step toward that is a step on the path.

CHAPTER 5
The Shared House

No one lives alone. We live in families, in neighborhoods, in towns and nations. We live in a shared house.

[2] Every shared house needs someone to keep it: to settle disputes, to guard the door, to see that the roof does not fall in.

[3] There is nothing wrong with this. Leading can be a form of love.

[4] But power is like fire. It warms the house, and it can burn it down.

[5] So watch the ones who hold power, including those you chose, and including those you admire.

[6] A good leader serves the house. A false leader makes the house serve them.

[7] A good leader can be questioned. A false leader punishes questions.

[8] A good leader is bound by the same rules as everyone else. A false leader says the rules were not written for them.

[9] This is true in nations. It is true in workplaces. It is true in families. And it is true in every community of the Everlasting Path.

[10] If ever our own teachers or leaders begin to rule rather than serve, to take money or bodies or obedience that is not freely given, stand up and say no.

[11] You will not be betraying the path. You will be keeping it.

[12] And if power is ever placed in your hands, hold it as if it were borrowed. It is.

[13] But no circle of this path may ever reach for the power to rule the house. Do not let any gathering take a side, raise a banner, or speak for a ruler in the name of the path. What you choose in the world, choose as yourself.

[14] The house belongs to everyone who lives in it. Keep it so.

CHAPTER 6
The Lamp Passed On

Long ago, someone learned to make fire, and showed someone else. That is how the world grew warm.

[2] Everything humanity knows, it knows because someone passed a lamp from one hand to the next.

[3] So learning is sacred. Teaching is sacred. Asking a question you are afraid to ask is sacred.

[4] Be curious about everything: the stars, the cells of your body, the history of peoples you have never met, the inner life of the person beside you.

[5] Do not fear what you might discover. Truth has never been the enemy of That Which Is. How could it be, when truth is only what is?

[6] Read widely. Read things you disagree with. Read slowly enough to understand them.

[7] When you speak with someone who sees differently, do not argue only to win. Argue to understand. Let yourself be changed if you are wrong.

[8] And share what you know freely. Knowledge hoarded to keep others beneath you is the road of control in a scholar's robe.

[9] Teach the children well. Not only facts, but how to think, how to question, how to be kind.

[10] A child taught to love and to question is the surest way the light is carried on.

[11] Every time you help another understand something, you have passed the lamp.

[12] And somewhere, long after you are gone, a stranger will see by its light and never know your name.

[13] That is enough. That is more than enough.

CHAPTER 7
The Long Dawn

Have you ever watched the sun come up? There is no single moment when night becomes day.

2 First the dark thins. Then one bird sings. Then the edge of the sky goes pale, and then gold, and then it is morning, and you could not say exactly when it happened.

3 This is how humanity wakes. Not in a day. In a long dawn.

4 And you are part of the dawn. Your waking and the world's waking are not two things.

5 When you wake a little, the people around you see a little more clearly. When they see more clearly, they wake you a little more.

6 A kind word spreads through a family. A brave choice spreads through a town. A new understanding spreads through the world, one person to the next, like light across a field.

7 So never think your small life does not matter to the whole. The whole is made of small lives.

8 And never think you can wake alone, apart from everyone else. You are woven into all of it.

9 There will be mornings that look like night. Do not be discouraged. The dawn is long, and it has always been long.

10 Our grandparents saw some of the dark thin. Our grandchildren may see more of the sky turn gold, or they may have to light it again.

11 We may not see the full morning. That is all right. We were here for our part of it.

12 Sing your one bird's song. Somewhere, someone is listening for it.

13 And this dawn is not ours alone. On worlds we will never see, other lives are waking too.

14 Some dawns are followed by long nights. Light the lamp again anyway.

CHAPTER 8

The Parable of the Long Table

There was a village where, once a year, everyone ate together at a single table in the square.

2 In the first year the table was short, because the village was small, and the people at it were all alike.

3 The next year a family came from over the mountains. They spoke strangely and cooked with spices no one knew. Some said, "There is no room."

4 But an old man went to his barn and brought back a plank, and set it at the end of the table, and said, "Now there is."

5 Every year after that, someone new came, and every year someone added a plank.

6 A family who prayed differently. A woman who had been in prison. A boy no one else would sit beside. Travelers with nowhere to go.

7 Some years the arguments at the table were loud. Some years people left angry. But they came back the next year, because the table was there.

8 In time the table ran the length of the square and out into the road beyond it.

9 Children grew up at that table who could not imagine eating any other way. To them, a stranger was simply someone who had not sat down yet.

10 One year a traveler asked, "Who built this table?"

11 And no one could answer, because everyone had built it, one plank at a time.

12 This is how humanity's long dawn comes: not by one great hand, but by many small ones, each adding a plank.

13 When you see someone standing at the edge of the square, go to your barn. Bring back a plank.

PART SIX

The Way

Ours are the hands. Use them.

CHAPTER 1
The Ten Teachings

THESE are not commands from above. There is no one above to command them. They are what love looks like when it is written down.

[2] Remember that everything is held in That Which Is: you, and every other being alike.

[3] Do not cause suffering that does not need to be caused, to any being.

[4] Do not reach for control over another person's life.

[5] Honor the freedom and dignity of every person.

[6] Seek the truth, even when it unsettles what you believe, and speak it honestly.

[7] Be compassionate, and still hold yourself and others to account.

[8] Protect those who cannot protect themselves. Give back their choice; never take it for your own.

[9] Never think yourself above others because of what you understand.

[10] Stay willing to learn, all your life.

[11] Give what you can to the good of the world, and to the waking of all who live in it.

[12] Of the second teaching, know this: suffering is needed only when it prevents a greater harm, when it is freely accepted for one's own good, or when it cannot be avoided without overriding someone's freedom. All other suffering you cause is suffering you could have spared.

[13] You will not keep these perfectly. No one does. When you fall short, do not despair. Notice, mend what you can, and begin again.

[14] And if a teaching ever seems to require you to harm someone, look again. You have misread it. Every one of these teachings is only love, said ten ways.

CHAPTER 2

On Prayer

There is no wrong way to pray, as long as your heart is turned toward good.

2 You may pray in words or in silence. Kneeling, walking, lying awake at night, washing dishes.

3 You may pray with others, or alone. You may sing it, whisper it, or only feel it.

4 You may ask for things. Ask for patience. Ask for courage. Ask that someone you love be well.

5 That Which Is will not answer the way a person answers. But when you ask, you are turning your whole self toward what you hope for, and that turning changes you.

6 The only prayer that goes wrong is a prayer for harm. Never pray for another's suffering. That is not prayer. It is a curse in prayer's clothing.

7 If you do not know how to begin, you may use these words, or make your own.

A MORNING PRAYER

I wake within That Which Is.
Let me see clearly today.
Let me choose love when it is hard,
and truth when it is costly.
Let my hands do some good before night.

AN EVENING PRAYER

The day is done, and I am still held.
I lay down what I did well, and what I did not.
I forgive what can be forgiven,
and I will mend tomorrow what I can.
I rest within That Which Is.

CHAPTER 3
Prayers for Many Hours

These prayers are offered for the moments of an ordinary life. Use them, change them, or set them aside for your own words.

BEFORE A MEAL

This food came from the earth, the rain, and many hands.
Let me eat with gratitude,
and remember those who are hungry tonight.

BEFORE WORK

Let my work today be honest.
Let it serve someone, even in a small way.
And when it is hard, let me remember that the world is my monastery.

IN GRIEF

I do not understand this loss, and I do not have to.
Let me weep without shame.
Let me be held, as the one I loved is held,
within That Which Is.

IN ILLNESS

My body is tired and in pain.
Let me be gentle with it, and let me accept care from others.
Whatever comes, I am not outside That Which Is.

IN FEAR

I am afraid.
Let me thank my fear, and then ask it whether it is telling the truth.
Let me take one breath, and then another,
and remember that courage is love walking forward while fear is still talking.

FOR SOMEONE WHO HAS WRONGED ME

I do not have to pretend this did not hurt.
I do not have to let them near me again.
But let me not wish them harm.
Let them find their way back to seeing clearly,
far from me if need be.

FOR SOMEONE I LOVE

Let them be safe. Let them be well.
Let them know they are loved,
today, and in every life their thread
may walk.

FOR THE WORLD

For the hungry, let there be bread.
For the frightened, let there be safety.
For the powerful, let there be humility.
And for me, let there be hands willing
to help.

IN GRATITUDE

For breath, for light, for the people
beside me,
for this one life that will never come
again in just this way,
I am grateful.

CHAPTER 4
Sitting Still

Once a day, if you can, sit still.

It does not need to be long. A few minutes is enough to begin. You do not need a special place, a special cushion, or a special teacher.

Sit as you are comfortable. Let your hands rest. Let your eyes close, or rest them softly on something near.

Feel your breath come in. Feel it go out. Do not try to change it.

Thoughts will come. Let them. Do not chase them and do not fight them. Watch them pass the way you would watch clouds.

When you notice you have been carried off by a thought, that noticing is the practice. Gently come back to the breath.

You will be carried off a thousand times. Come back a thousand times. This is not failure. This is how it is done.

Beneath the breath and the thoughts, notice the simple fact that you are aware.

Rest there. That awareness is where your thread opens into That Which Is.

You will not always feel peace. Some days you will only feel restless, or sad, or bored. Sit with those too. They are welcome.

When you are done, do not rush up. Take one more breath, and carry a little of the stillness into the rest of your day.

In time, you will find that stillness waiting for you everywhere: in line at the store, at a red light, in the middle of an argument.

The world is your monastery. This is how you learn to live in it.

CHAPTER 5
The Work of Hands

Prayer turns the heart. Service moves the hands. The path needs both.

[2] Each week, if you can, give some of your time to someone who needs it, freely, expecting nothing back.

[3] Cook for someone who is grieving. Sit with someone who is lonely. Fix what is broken in a neighbor's house. Teach what you know.

[4] Clean the park. Feed the animals left behind. Drive someone to the doctor.

[5] No work is too small. Some of the holiest acts in the world are done with a mop or a spoon.

[6] When you serve, do not serve to be seen. If you must tell others what you did, you have taken back part of what you gave.

[7] And do not serve to feel above the ones you help. They are not beneath you. Tomorrow it may be you who needs the meal.

[8] Ask the ones you serve what they need. Do not decide for them. Service that ignores their choice is only control with a kind face.

[9] If you are tired, rest. Service that burns you down to nothing helps no one for long. You are allowed to be cared for too.

[10] And if you are the one in need, let yourself be helped. Receiving is also a practice. It gives another the chance to love.

[11] When you work with your hands for another's good, you are doing what That Which Is does not do. You are the answer the world was waiting for.

[12] Ours are the hands. Use them.

CHAPTER 6

The Parable of the Unwanted Gift

A circle heard that a widow among them was struggling, and they wanted to help her.

2 Her house was old, the roof leaked, and the garden was overgrown.

3 So without asking her, they gathered on their Day of Hands and set to work. They patched the roof, painted the walls, pulled every weed, and planted new flowers in neat rows.

4 When the widow came home and saw it, she sat down on her step and cried.

5 They thought she was crying for joy.

6 "The weeds you pulled," she said at last, "my husband planted. They were wildflowers. He sowed them the spring before he died."

7 No one knew what to say.

8 "I did not need a new house," she said. "I only needed someone to sit with me in the evenings. I am so tired of being alone."

9 The circle was ashamed. But the oldest among them sat down on the step beside her and said, "Then we will sit with you."

10 And they did, that evening and many evenings after, until the wildflowers came back.

11 Before you help, ask. Service that ignores another's choice is only control with a kind face.

CHAPTER 7
The Way of Living

The path has few rules for how to live. There is no one above to make them. But here is what we have learned about living well.

THE SASH

[2] Some who walk the path wear a sash of plain, undyed cloth, wrapped around the body as many times as they choose.

[3] Its ends are left loose, and each carries a single bead of wood, or clay, or stone. One is for the beginning of this world. One is for its end. The thread lives between them.

[4] Wear it if you wish. No one must. It marks no rank, and it is not given at the vow. Let no one's sash be finer than another's.

FOOD AND THE ANIMALS

[5] You must eat to live. That is a real need, and there is no shame in it.

[6] But let no creature suffer more than it must for your table. Choose kindly raised food where you can. Never kill for sport, or for pride. And where you cannot tell whether a thing can feel, be gentle with it.

[7] If you keep animals, keep them as one who cares. Meet their needs, and give them as much freedom as their wellbeing allows. A thread looks out through their eyes.

THE EARTH

[8] The earth is the house of every thread you will ever meet. When you harm it, you harm countless beings, and you make the world harder and more afraid.

[9] Care for it as a responsibility, not a pastime. Leave it better than you found it, if you can.

HAVING

[10] Having is not wrong. What matters is how you came to have it, and what you do with it.

[11] Give what you can. Never gain by another's harm. And when you hold far more than you need while others lack bread for tonight, sit with that honestly.

COMFORTS

[12] The path makes no rule about what you drink or take. Only see that it harms no one else, and watch for the day it begins to choose for you.

[13] If you are caught by something

you cannot set down, you will be met with care, never with judgment.

LOVE

14 Every love between consenting adults is honored here, whoever they are. No circle may turn anyone away, or shame them, for whom they love.

THE RESTING DAY

15 Once a week, if you can, keep a Resting Day. Set down your work. Be with those you love. Give yourself room.

16 Keep it apart from the circle. It is not a day for gathering, but for your own life and your own quiet growing. And it is not a day for measuring yourself.

WHEN THE BODY IS LAID DOWN

17 When someone dies, if they wished it, return the body to the earth simply, with no more than love requires.

18 But their wishes come first, and then their family's. If they chose to give what they could to the living first, that is a last kindness. Every respectful way is honored.

CHAPTER 8

On Pilgrimage

You have been given one window in this life. Through it you see one street, one language, one way of naming God.

[2] It is a true window. But it is not the whole sky.

[3] So if you are able, go out and look through other windows.

[4] Walk among people whose lives are not like yours. Eat at their tables. Listen to their songs. Stand quietly in the places where they pray.

[5] Go to the mountains and the deserts and the sea. Let the world be larger than you thought it was.

[6] Your thread has looked out through many windows in lives you cannot remember. A pilgrimage is a small taste, in this one life, of what your thread has always been doing.

[7] The path has no holy places of its own. Every place is held in That Which Is, and no ground is nearer to it than any other.

[8] When you enter a place that is sacred to others, enter as a guest. Keep their customs. Ask before you enter, and ask before you take a picture.

[9] Watch and listen with reverence, but do not take part in their rites. Those belong to the ones who keep them.

[10] Never preach there. Never try to turn anyone toward this path. You did not come to bring them your window. You came to look through theirs.

[11] And as you go, do good. Carry the bag of someone who is struggling. Feed someone who is hungry. Be kind to everyone you meet along the road.

[12] Do it quietly. Do not announce why. If someone asks you, tell them honestly: I walk the Everlasting Path. Let your kindness be the only word you need to say.

[13] When you come home, bring the world back with you. Tell your circle what you saw, and what it taught you, so that all of them may look through the windows you were given.

[14] And if you cannot go, you have lost nothing. Pilgrimage is a gift for those who are able, not a measure of anyone. Sit with those who return, and let them bring the world to you.

CHAPTER 9
Who Walks the Path

Who belongs to the Everlasting Path?

[2] Anyone who sincerely walks it.

[3] There is no list of names. There is no door to knock on and no fee to pay. If you are trying to see clearly and to love well, you are already walking.

[4] To be of the path is to walk this path and no other. If you belong to another faith, you are welcome in every circle as a companion of the path, and honored there. But no one can be of two paths at once.

[5] You do not have to take the vow to belong. The vow is a promise you may make when you are ready, to deepen the walk you are already on.

[6] Only those who hold a role in the circle must have taken it. That is all the vow is required for.

[7] So do not look at anyone in the circle and wonder whether they have taken the vow. It is not your business, and it does not make them more or less of the path.

[8] Do not rank one another. The one who came for the first time tonight sits in the same light as the one who has come for forty years.

[9] And if someone walks a while and then walks away, let them go with your blessing. They were of the path while they walked it, and the path is not angry with anyone.

CHAPTER 10
The Gathering

You do not need a building to gather. A living room is enough. A park bench is enough. Two people are enough. Gather as often as your circle chooses.

2 When you gather, sit in a circle, so that no one sits above anyone else and every face can be seen.

3 Light a single lamp or candle in the middle. It is not That Which Is. It is a reminder that you all sit in the same light.

4 Begin with silence. Let everyone arrive, not only in body.

5 Then say together the words of What I Hold, written at the front of this book. Let anyone who does not hold them sit in silence, and be welcome.

6 After that, let someone read from these words, or from any words that carry light.

7 After the reading, anyone may speak. The newest among you may speak as freely as the oldest.

8 Speak of what you have seen, what troubles you, what you are grateful for. Listen to each other without hurrying to answer.

9 If there is a teacher among you, let them sit in the circle like everyone else. Let them be questioned like everyone else.

10 End by naming those who need care, and deciding together how to help them.

11 Then eat together, if you can. A shared meal is one of the oldest prayers there is.

12 No one should ever be pressed to give money to the gathering. What is given must be given freely, and how it is used must be open to everyone in the circle.

13 No one should ever be shamed for leaving. The door of the circle opens both ways.

14 And whoever comes, whatever they believe, make room for them. The circle can always grow wider.

15 And when it grows so large that every face can no longer be seen, past twelve who gather, let it divide into two. Let each person choose where to sit, and let the new circle be lit from the old one's lamp. A circle that divides is not broken. It is how the light travels.

16 But if anyone threatens, coerces or tries to rule over others in the

circle, the circle may ask them to go until they can sit as one among many. Let them first be heard by the Listener. Never send anyone away for disagreeing, for asking hard questions, or for speaking plainly. Judge what they do, not who they are.

CHAPTER 11
The Roles of the Circle

Every circle has work that must be done, and so every circle has roles. They are the same in every circle, wherever it gathers.

2 A role is not a rank. No one who holds a role sits above the circle. Each role is a way of serving it.

THE KEEPER

3 The Keeper holds the space. They set the time and place of gathering, light the lamp, and see that everyone who comes is welcomed.

4 The Keeper also keeps whatever the circle is given, and keeps its record open, so that anyone in the circle may see what came in and where it went.

THE GUIDE

5 The Guide holds the teaching. They choose the reading, help the circle understand it, and walk beside those preparing to take the vow.

6 The Guide teaches as a student teaches. Anyone may question them, and they must never claim to have the final word.

THE HAND

7 The Hand holds the care. They keep watch over who in the circle is sick, grieving or in need, and gather the circle's service toward them.

THE LISTENER

8 The Listener holds the trust. Anyone troubled by a conflict in the circle, or by how a Keeper, Guide or Hand has acted, may bring it to the Listener, in confidence.

9 The Listener hears them, protects them, and when it is needed, brings the matter before the whole circle. The Listener answers to the circle, not to any other role. If the trouble is with the Listener, it goes to the whole circle.

HOW THE ROLES ARE HELD

10 Those who hold roles must have taken the vow. They are chosen by the circle, not appointed by one another, and they serve for as long as the circle decides, after which the circle chooses again.

11 The circle may take back any role. No one owns a role, any more than they own the lamp.

12 If a role stands empty, let the whole circle do its work together until someone takes it up. Let no one

hold two roles, so that no one holds too much. A circle with no Keeper keeps no money, and a circle with no Listener brings every concern to all.

13 If anyone in a role uses it to take money, bodies, obedience or silence that is not freely given, the circle must remove them and protect anyone they have harmed.

14 Where a law has been broken, do not hide it inside the circle. Bring it to those whose work is justice. A circle that protects its own at the cost of the harmed has left the path.

15 No one who holds a role may tell you whom to love, where to work, what to do with your money or whether to keep your family. If they speak of such things at all, let them speak only as a friend, and say so.

16 Hold every role with open hands. It is borrowed, as all power is borrowed.

CHAPTER 12
When the Circle Is Troubled

WHEREVER people gather, there will be trouble between them. This is not a failure of the circle. It is what it means to be many people instead of one.

2 When you are troubled by someone in the circle, you may go to the Listener.

3 The Listener will hear you in confidence. They will not rush you, and they will not take sides before they have listened.

4 If you are hurt, the Listener will help protect you. If a matter must come before the whole circle, the Listener will bring it.

5 Hear this rule, and let no circle ever break it: no one is ever required to face, in person, the one who harmed them.

6 And if your trouble is with the Listener, bring it to the whole circle.

7 You may bring it in writing, or ask someone you trust to speak for you. When it is heard, the Listener steps out of the circle.

8 There is no one in the circle whose conduct cannot be questioned. Not the Keeper, not the Guide, not the Hand, not the Listener.

9 No circle may ever forbid you to speak about harm, inside the circle or outside it, or punish you for speaking, or turn its face from you because you spoke. Silence can never be required of anyone.

10 When a conflict is settled, let it be settled. Do not keep it alive in whispers.

11 And when it cannot be settled, let people part in peace. A circle that cannot hold two people may become two circles. That is not a tragedy. The path is wide.

CHAPTER 13
The Children of the Circle

If you walk this path and you are raising a child, bring them with you.

2 Let them sit in the circle. Let them hear the stories of the mapmaker and the weaver. Let them watch you light the lamp.

3 But teach them, above everything, that they are free.

4 Tell them they may ask anything. Answer what you can, and say plainly when you do not know.

5 Let them learn about other ways of seeing the world: other faiths, and the lives of those who hold no faith at all. Let them see that many people are good who will never read this book.

6 If they come to love this path, let it be because they found it true, not because they were never shown another.

7 And if they choose another way, honor it. They were never yours to promise. Their thread is their own.

8 Above all, keep them safe. Let no adult be alone with a child who is not their own, and let no one ask a child to keep a secret from those who raise them.

9 If anyone suspects that a child has been harmed, let them go at once to those whose work is protecting children. A circle that hides harm to a child has left the path.

10 Whoever has harmed a child may never sit in the circle again. The way back is not closed to them, but the circle belongs to its children first.

11 And when they are grown, they may ask for the Answering, and you may tell them what you promised long ago.

12 The greatest thing you can give a child is not this path. It is the ability to choose a path freely, and to walk it with an open heart.

CHAPTER 14
The Turning of the Year

Every day is holy, for the world is your monastery. Yet three times in the year, the circles keep a day together.

THE NIGHT OF REMEMBRANCE

[2] On the longest night of the year, where you live, gather and light the lamp, and let it burn until morning.

[3] Speak the names of those who have crossed: those you loved, those you never knew, those whose names are lost.

[4] Remember that every moment they lived is kept in That Which Is, and nothing can make it not have been.

On the longest night we light one lamp.
We speak your names into the dark.
You lived, and that can never be undone.
Go on, wherever your threads now walk.

THE LONG TABLE

[5] On the longest day of the year, where you live, set a table and invite strangers to it.

[6] Bring someone who would otherwise eat alone. Bring someone you do not understand. Add a plank if you have to.

[7] This is for the waking of all beings: everyone who is conscious is invited, and the table is wide enough for them all.

THE DAY OF HANDS

[8] On one day of the year, chosen by each circle, let the circle serve together.

[9] Clean what is dirty. Mend what is broken. Feed who is hungry. Ask first what is needed.

[10] Ours are the hands. On this day, let them work side by side.

CHAPTER 15
The Rites

THERE are moments in a life too large to pass without marking. For these, we gather.

[2] These rites are new. They are not handed down from ancient times. Keep them simply, and change them where love asks you to.

THE WELCOMING

[3] When a child is born, or comes into a family by any road, gather in a circle and light the lamp.

[4] Speak the child's name aloud, so the circle knows it. Then let each person who will help raise the child say what they promise.

[5] Do not promise the child to the Everlasting Path. The child belongs to no one's faith. When they are grown, they will choose their own window.

A new window has opened in That Which Is.
We did not make you, and we do not own you.
We will love you, and protect you, and help you see for yourself.

THE ANSWERING

[6] When one who was welcomed as a child has walked the circle as an adult for a full year, they may ask for the Answering. No one may ask it of them, and no one is less for never asking.

[7] Let them pass on what they have learned from those who walk beside them, and tell the circle what they have come to see for themselves. It is asked, never graded. No one can fail.

[8] Then let those who made the promise at their Welcoming answer it now.

When you were small, a new window opened in That Which Is.
We did not make you, and we do not own you.
We promised to help you see for yourself,
and you have.
Your thread is your own. Walk where you choose.

[9] From this night, they sit in the circle not as anyone's child, but as one who has chosen.

THE VOW

[10] When a person has come to understand the path well enough to choose it, they may take the vow.

[11] Only they can know when that time has come. Not a parent, not a teacher, not the circle. No one may hurry them toward it, and no one may hold them back from it.

[12] Before the vow, let them sit with someone they trust and speak of what they understand and what they still question. Questions are no bar to the vow. No one understands all of it.

[13] A young person may take the vow from the age of thirteen, if they understand what they are choosing. Let them first sit with a trusted adult who is not their parent, and let nothing depend on what they choose.

[14] Then gather, light the lamp, and let them speak the vow in the circle, in its written words or their own.

[15] A vow can be set down. If one day they choose another path, let them go in peace, and do not shame them. A vow kept by fear is no vow at all.

[16] The words of the vow are written after the Commitments, at the front of this book, so that anyone who takes it knows exactly what they are choosing.

THE JOINING

[17] When two people choose to share their lives, let them stand in the circle and make their promises in their own words.

[18] Let no one be joined who is not free to choose. A promise made in fear is no promise.

[19] Before they are joined, let them prepare with the Guide, and let the Listener sit with each of them alone, to be sure each one chooses freely. One of the two need not walk this path.

I choose you, freely, and I will keep choosing you.
I will not try to own you.
I will tell you the truth, and I will stay to hear yours.
Wherever our threads have been, today they walk together.

THE PARTING

[20] Sometimes a Joining ends. If one of the two can no longer keep choosing, they are free to go, and no one may shame either of them for it. No one who is harmed is ever asked to stay.

[21] If either wishes it, together or alone, light the lamp and let them set the promise down in the circle's presence. Neither is ever required to face the other.

We made a promise freely, and we set it down freely.
What was true between us was true.
I will not try to own you, now or ever.
Go well, wherever your thread walks.

[22] Then let the circle answer: "We take no side. You are both still welcome here." And let it be so.

THE CROSSING

23 When someone dies, gather and light the lamp. Speak their name. Tell the stories of the life they lived.

24 Weep freely. Laugh, too, if the stories are funny. Both belong.

25 Let the lamp burn through the night, and in the morning, let someone who loved them put it out.

The garment is laid down. The thread goes on.
We do not know the road you walk now,
but we know you are held.
What you loved has left its shape in you,
and what you were has left its shape in us.

26 Other moments may be marked in the same way: leaving home, recovering from illness, beginning again. Let the circle decide.

THE LIGHTING OF A CIRCLE

27 A new circle begins with at least one who has taken the vow in another circle. They bring the practice with them, not authority, and from its first night the new circle is its own.

28 Sit together with the lamp unlit. Pass a small candle from hand to hand until someone chooses to light the lamp, and in lighting it offers themselves as Keeper. If the circle has divided from another, light the candle from the old circle's lamp, so that the light is carried and not made new.

29 Then pass the other signs in the same way: the book for the Guide, a bowl of water for the Hand, a folded cloth for the Listener. Let the circle confirm each one who takes a sign, and let any sign no one takes wait beside the lamp.

30 Before you part, say these words together.

We did not light this lamp for ourselves alone.
We hold what we hold as borrowed things.
We will not rule one another.
We will tell the truth, and stay to hear it.
Let this circle be wide,
and let its door open both ways.

THE FIRST CIRCLE

31 Once only, there will be a circle with no circle before it. There the founder speaks the vow first, before those gathered, lights the candle that begins the passing, and takes up the book as the first Guide, confirmed by the circle like any other, and serving only as long as the circle decides.

32 After the first circle, the founder is one who walks the path, the same as you.

CHAPTER 16

The Parable of the Borrowed Lamp

There was a circle that met for many years in an old house by a river, and its Keeper was a careful man.

2 Every gathering he lit the lamp, and every gathering he put it out and carried it home, and polished it, and kept it on his own shelf.

3 After a long time he began to think of it as his lamp. He chose who sat nearest to it. He began to decide when the circle would meet, and who was welcome, and who was not.

4 People came less often. Some stopped coming at all. But the Keeper told himself that the circle was smaller because it was purer.

5 One evening he was ill and could not come. He had the lamp at home, and so the circle sat in the dark.

6 Then a girl, newly come, took a stub of candle from her pocket and lit it, and set it in the middle of the floor.

7 It was a poor light, much smaller than the lamp. But everyone moved a little closer to it, and they could see one another's faces.

8 They spoke more honestly that night than they had in years. Someone laughed. Someone wept. Someone who had stopped coming came back.

9 When the Keeper heard of it, he was angry at first. Then he went and stood outside the window of the old house and watched them, gathered around that little candle.

10 And he understood that the light had never been his. He had only been holding it for a while.

11 The next week he came back, and set the lamp down in the middle, and sat at the edge of the circle like anyone else.

12 When the circle chose a new Keeper that year, he was glad.

13 Every role is a lamp you are holding for a while. Hold it with open hands. The light was never yours, and it never needed you to shine.

PART SEVEN

The Everlasting

Plant your trees. Plant them for whoever comes.

CHAPTER 1

The Last Breath

One day you will take your last breath in this life. You know this. Everyone knows it, and almost everyone looks away.

2 Do not look away. Look gently, the way you would look at a sleeping child.

3 Your death is not an enemy waiting at the end of the road. It is part of the road.

4 The thread does not end when the breath ends. The garment is laid down, and the journey continues.

5 You do not need to know what comes next to be at peace. You only need to know that you will be held.

6 So live in a way that lets you lay the garment down without regret.

7 Say what you need to say to the people you love. Do not save it for later. Later is not promised to this garment.

8 Make peace where peace can be made. Let go of what you cannot carry.

9 And when the time comes, if you are afraid, that is all right. Be afraid, and be held anyway.

10 Let someone hold your hand. Let them light the lamp. Let them say your name.

11 You have crossed before. You will cross again. You have never once crossed alone.

CHAPTER 2
The Age of a World

Your thread began when this world began, in the first moment, when everything that is burst out of the dark.

2 Every thread began then. Yours, and your mother's, and the stranger's, and the sparrow's.

3 We have all been traveling since the beginning, through more lives than anyone could count.

4 And your thread will go on traveling as long as this world lasts.

5 That is longer than the mountains. Longer than the seas. Longer than the sun will burn.

6 You will be many people in that time. You will see from more windows than you can imagine.

7 And through it all, love will keep wearing its shape into you, life after life, the way a river carves a canyon.

8 So do not think of this one life as your only chance. It is not.

9 And do not think of it as unimportant, either. It is the only life in which you will ever be exactly this person, loving exactly these people.

10 Both are true: there is a long road ahead, and this step on it matters.

11 Walk it as if you had all the time in the world. You nearly do. And love as if this were your only day. In this garment, it nearly is.

CHAPTER 3

When the Stars Go Still

Everything that begins has an ending. This world began, and one day this world will end.

2 Far beyond any day you can picture, the last star will burn out, and everything will grow still.

3 On that day, every thread will come to its end as well. Yours. Ours. Every one that was ever woven.

4 We will not soften this for you. We promised to tell you the truth.

5 Nothing of this world will be carried into the next. Not a name. Not a memory. Not a thread.

6 Sit with that, if you can, without running from it.

7 And notice what is left when you do.

8 You may find that it does not make your life smaller. It makes it whole.

9 A song is not less beautiful because it ends. A day is not wasted because night comes. A life is not meaningless because it does not go on forever.

10 Your journey through this world is complete in itself, from the first moment to the last. Nothing has to be added to it to make it worth living.

11 Every kindness you did was real. Every love you gave was real. The ending of the world does not reach back and make them false.

12 And all the love you gave went on in those it reached, and in those they reached, long after you were gone, until the very end of this world.

13 So do not fear the stillness at the end. It is the rest that comes when a song is over.

CHAPTER 4

The Eternal Present

Now hear the deepest thing we know.

[2] That Which Is does not live in time the way we do. For us, the past slips away and the future has not come. For That Which Is, all of it is here.

[3] That Which Is holds everything, like an eternal present.

[4] The first light of this world is held there. So is its last stillness. So is this moment, as you read these words.

[5] Your first breath and your last breath are held there. The face you wore in every life is held there.

[6] The day you were kind when it cost you something. The night you sat with someone who was dying. The morning you forgave.

[7] None of it is lost. None of it is undone. It is not stored away like an old letter in a drawer. It simply is, always, within That Which Is.

[8] When the world ends, nothing will be carried forward. But nothing will be taken away either.

[9] What happened, happened, and That Which Is holds it.

[10] No one will live those moments again, not even That Which Is. But they will always have been.

[11] This is why every moment matters: not because it will be rewarded, and not because it will be remembered by us, but because it is held forever in what is.

[12] So when you choose love, you are not only shaping your thread. You are placing something real into the eternal present, where it will always be.

[13] And when you grieve someone who has crossed, know this: within this world their thread goes on, and every moment you had together is kept in That Which Is, whole and real. Nothing can ever make it not have been.

CHAPTER 5
The Parable of the Sandcastle

A father and his small daughter spent a whole afternoon building a castle in the sand.

[2] It had four towers and a wall, a gate made of a shell, and a moat they filled with water carried in their cupped hands.

[3] As the sun went down, the tide began to come in.

[4] The girl saw the first wave touch the wall, and she began to cry. "It's going to be gone," she said. "It will be like it never was."

[5] Her father knelt beside her, and they watched the water take the first tower, and then the second.

[6] "It will be gone," he said. "But will it be like it never was?"

[7] She did not understand.

[8] "This afternoon happened," he said. "We built it. You laughed when the shell gate fell down, and we put it back. The sea can take the castle. It can't take the afternoon. Nothing can make it not have been."

[9] The girl was quiet. Then she took his hand, and they watched the last tower go.

[10] Years later, when he had crossed, she brought her own child to the same beach, and they built a castle with four towers and a shell for a gate.

[11] Everything you build here, the tide will take. But nothing can make it not have been. It is kept, whole, in That Which Is.

CHAPTER 6
The Next Dawn

After the stillness, That Which Is remains.

2 And within That Which Is, as it has before, a new world will rise.

3 Not because anyone decides it. Because that is what is: worlds rising and resting within That Which Is, the way breath goes in and out.

4 With the new world, new threads will open. Not ours. New ones, never seen before, each one its own.

5 They will not know our names. They will not read our books. They will not remember that we were here.

6 And still they will begin as every thread begins: clear, and able to love.

7 Somewhere in that new world, someone will look up for the first time and wonder what is there.

8 Someone will choose kindness when cruelty would be easier.

9 Someone will sit still, and notice that they are aware, and feel the ground of That Which Is beneath them.

10 They will find the path, as we found it, because the path was never ours. It belongs to what is.

11 We will not walk it with them. But we can love them now, across all that distance, the way you might love a child you will never meet.

12 May they walk it well. May they be gentle with each other. May they find the light we found, and more.

CHAPTER 7

The Parable of the Woman Who Planted for Strangers

1 There was an old woman who spent her last years planting trees on a bare hillside.

2 Her neighbors laughed at her. "Those trees will take fifty years to grow," they said. "You will never sit in their shade."

3 "I know," she said, and went on planting.

4 "Then who are they for?"

5 "For whoever comes," she said. "I don't need to know their names."

6 She planted oaks and walnuts and fruit trees, and she watered them through the dry summers, and she died before any of them was taller than her shoulder.

7 Fifty years later the hillside was a forest. Children played in it whose grandparents had never met her. Lovers walked there. Old men sat beneath the walnuts in the heat of the afternoon.

8 None of them knew who had planted it.

9 It did not matter. The shade was real. The fruit was sweet. Her love had reached people she would never see.

10 So it is with us, at the end of all things. When this world rests and a new one rises, the threads that walk it will not know our names.

11 But everything we did was real, and is held forever in That Which Is.

12 And somewhere in that new world, a new thread will plant a tree for strangers, without knowing why, only that it seems like the right thing to do.

13 Plant your trees. Plant them for whoever comes.

CHAPTER 8

The Everlasting Path

Now you know why we call it the Everlasting Path.

2 Not because any of us will walk it forever. We will not.

3 But the path itself never ends. In every world, new feet find it. In every age, someone begins again.

4 And for each one who walks it, there is always another door, another hill, another window onto That Which Is.

5 Awakening is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning of understanding.

6 So we leave you where we found you: here, in this life, in this breath, in the room where you are sitting.

7 Held in That Which Is. Free. Real. Unfinished.

8 Go gently. Love well. Tell the truth. Protect those who cannot protect themselves.

9 Learn all your life. Pass the lamp.

10 And when you are tired, rest, for the path will wait for you.

A BLESSING

May you see clearly.
May you love freely.
May you be held in every crossing,
and may you never forget
that you have never once been outside
That Which Is.
Walk on.

THE EVERLASTING PATH

The Sayings



Short words to carry, and words for grief, anger and wonder.

These are short words, to be learned by heart and carried. Some are sayings. Some are laments and praises, to be spoken aloud when grief, anger or wonder has no other words. None of them adds to the teaching. Each one says, in a few lines, what the rest of this book says at length.

I. OF THAT WHICH IS

You cannot leave what has no outside.
You cannot find what was never lost.

Stop searching for a moment,
and notice what is searching.

No name holds it.
Every name is a window.

II. OF THE HANDS

The sky gave back only stars. Look down.
There is a hand beside yours.

No one is coming to set the world right.
That is not the bad news.
That is the work.

Ours are the hands.

III. OF LOVE

The universe does not love you.
The one who stayed did.

Love was not here until someone chose it.
Choose it, and something new exists.

Love that must be demanded is not love.
Love that allows cruelty is fear in love's clothes.

IV. OF THE THREAD

Wear your name lightly. It is a garment.
Wear it well. It was cut for this life alone.

The face goes. The thread goes on.

What you carry across is not what you remember.
It is what you became.

V. OF CHOOSING

What was done to you does not mark you.
What you do shapes you.

Feel anything. Feelings leave no mark.
But watch what you tend.
A wish fed every day is a choice.

Tomorrow the stone can be worn a new way.

VI. OF FEAR

Thank the guard.
Then ask whether the wolf is still there.

Whoever wants you afraid wants something from you.
Ask what.

Fear will always tell you to build the wall higher.
No wall has ever kept anyone warm.

VII. OF TRUTH

Hold the truth with an open hand.
A closed hand crushes it.

A belief that cannot bear a question
is a door held shut by fear.

Truth used to wound
is no longer truth.

VIII. OF POWER

Hold power as if it were borrowed.
It is.

The one who must rule can never rest.

No one is above the rules,
and no one is above you.

The good fight gives choices back.
It never takes them.

IX. OF THE STRANGER

A stranger is someone who has not sat down yet.

Ask what they see from where they sit.

You may have worn their garment once.
You may wear it again.

There is always room.
Bring a plank.

X. A LAMENT FOR ONE WHO HAS CROSSED

I lit the lamp, and you were not there.
I said your name, and the dark kept it.

Let no one hurry me.
Let no one tell me it was meant.
It was not meant. It happened.

And still, you were.
Nothing can make you not have been.

I will grieve as long as I loved,
which is to say, a long time.

XI. A LAMENT FOR THE WORLD

I have seen the hungry passed by
and the cruel rewarded.

I am angry,
and my anger leaves no mark on me.

I will not wish them suffering.
I will not tend that fire.

But I will stand in the way,
and I will give back what was taken.

No heaven is coming.
So I will come.

XII. IN PRAISE OF WHAT IS

Look: the morning, again.

A sparrow. A stranger's laugh.
The weight of a sleeping child.

None of it had to be.
All of it is.

I give nothing to That Which Is.
It needs nothing.
I only stand here, awake, and look,
and that is my worship.

XIII. OF AWAKENING

Every summit shows you mountains.

The one who says they have arrived
has stopped walking.

Seeing far is not being good.
Trust the life, not the claim.

Small wakings are not small.

XIV. OF THE END OF THINGS

The last star will go out. Let it.

A song is not less because it ends.

Nothing will be carried across.
Nothing will be undone.

Plant the tree anyway.
Plant it for whoever comes.

XV. OF WALKING ON

You are not behind.
There is no behind.

Fall short. Notice. Mend. Begin again.

Rest when you are tired.
The path will wait.

You have never once been outside That Which Is.
Walk on.

THE EVERLASTING PATH

Laments and Praises



Words to speak aloud when ordinary words fail.

These are words for the hours when ordinary words fail. Speak them aloud, alone or in the circle. None of them is a call to That Which Is to come and answer. They are spoken so that the one who speaks them, and anyone who hears, may remember what is true.

I. A LAMENT IN THE DARK

I cannot see the morning.
I am told it comes. I do not feel it.

Everything I reach for comes apart in my hands.
Everything I built is falling.

I will not pretend tonight.
I will not call this a lesson.
It is only dark, and I am in it.

But I am still here, and I am held,
even when I cannot feel the holding.
There is nowhere to fall that is outside That Which Is.

I will take one breath, and then another.
That is all tonight asks of me.
That is enough.

II. A LAMENT AFTER I HAVE DONE HARM

I did it. No one made me.
I chose, and someone was hurt.

Let me not hide behind my reasons.
A wound explains a blow.
It does not make the blow right.

Let me not drown in it, either.
Shame that only sinks me
mends nothing for the one I hurt.

Let me go to them, if they will have me,
and if they will not, let me leave them in peace.
Their forgiveness is a gift, not a debt.
I will not demand it.

What was worn one way can be worn another.
Let me begin the wearing now.

III. A LAMENT IN LONELINESS

The room is quiet, and no one is coming.
I have gone through every name I know.

I am not the only one tonight.
Somewhere a stranger sits in the same silence,
in a room much like this one.

Nothing in me is outside what holds us both.

Tomorrow let me knock on one door.
Let me sit in one circle.
Let me be the hand someone else is waiting for.

IV. A LAMENT BEFORE DYING

The breath is getting shorter.
I am afraid, and I will not pretend I am not.

I do not know the road ahead.
No one has come back to draw it for me.

Let me say what I have left unsaid.
Let me hold the hands that are here.

The garment is wearing thin.
It was a good garment. It was mine.

I have crossed before, though I do not remember it.
I will cross again, though I do not know how.
Wherever the thread goes, it goes held.

V. A LAMENT IN DOUBT

Some nights I do not believe a word of it.
The book is only paper. The lamp is only flame.

Let me not lie about this to anyone,
least of all to myself.

A belief that cannot bear a question
was never worth keeping.

So let me question, and keep walking.
If the path is true, it will still be there.
If it is not, let me find what is.

Truth has never been the enemy of what is.

VI. A LAMENT WHEN THE BODY FAILS

This body that carried me is failing.
The hands that held so much shake now.

I did not earn this. I am not being punished.
Bodies wear. That is all.

Let me accept the care I used to give.
Receiving is a practice too.

Even here, I am not outside That Which Is.
Even here, I can choose love.

VII. IN PRAISE OF THE EARTH

Praise the dirt, that holds the seed.
Praise the rain, that asks nothing back.

Praise the bee, the worm,
the fox at the edge of the field.
Each one looks out through its own window.

This is the house of every thread I will ever meet.

Let me walk in it gently,
and leave it better than I found it.

VIII. IN PRAISE OF THOSE WHO LOVE US

For the one who stayed up with me.
For the one who told me the truth when it cost them.
For the one who brought soup and did not ask why.

The universe did not love me.
They did.

Every kindness they chose
was something new in the world.

Let me spend my life passing it on.

IX. IN PRAISE AT THE END OF A LONG DAY

The work is done, or done enough.
My feet ache. My hands are tired.

Some good passed through them today.
Some did not. Both are laid down now.

Praise the chair. Praise the cool water.
Praise the light going gold on the wall.

The world was my monastery today,
and now the bell is quiet.

X. IN PRAISE OF THE NIGHT SKY

Look up. The light reaching you
left those stars before anyone you know was born.

There are more of them than anyone can count,
and on some world beneath them, perhaps,
someone is looking back.

I am small. That is not a sorrow.
A wave is not less real because the sea is wide.

No window will ever hold the whole sky.
So I will never run out of wonder.

XI. IN PRAISE OF A NEW LIFE

A new window has opened.
No one has ever looked out from here before.
No one ever will again.

We did not make you, and we do not own you.
Your thread is your own.

Praise your first breath.
Praise every choice you will make
that we will never see.

The world is hard, and the world is held.
Welcome to it.

XII. IN PRAISE OF THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE

Someone learned to make fire, and showed someone else.
Someone planted a tree they never sat beneath.
Someone stood in the way of cruelty, and was forgotten.

I never knew their names.
I live by their light.

Every moment they lived is kept.
Nothing can make them not have been.

Let me add my small light to theirs,
and pass the lamp on.

XIII. A LAMENT FOR ONE I WILL NOT KNOW AGAIN

I have been told that your thread goes on,
and most days I believe it.

But if our threads ever cross again,
I will not know your face.
I will not hear your voice,
or the way you said my name.

Somewhere you may be looking out through new eyes,
loving people I will never meet.
I hope they are good to you.

And one day, far past anything I can picture,
even your thread will come to its end,
as mine will, as everything will.

But not yet. Not for longer than the mountains.
And even then, nothing will be undone.

The kitchen. The car. The last time you laughed.
Every moment we had is kept, whole,
and nothing can make it not have been.

So I will not say goodbye to you forever.
I will say what is true:
you were, and you go on,
and you will always have been.

THE EVERLASTING PATH

For Those Who Walk



First questions, hard moments, and the order of the gathering.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

These are the questions people most often ask about The Everlasting Path, answered plainly. Where an answer rests on one of the Commitments, its number is given in brackets, such as [32].

What is The Everlasting Path?

A new spiritual tradition, written in our own time. It teaches that there is one God, called That Which Is; that every conscious being is a real self, a thread, that passes through many lives; that awakening never ends; and that love is chosen by beings and goes on through everyone it reaches. It claims no ancient origin.

Is this a cult?

It is a fair question, and you should ask it of any group. Judge the path by what it allows and forbids. No teacher is infallible, the founder included [60]. You may leave at any time without shame [37]. No one may press you for money, and every circle's money is open for everyone in the circle to see [57]. You may always speak about harm, inside or outside the circle, and no one may punish you for it [32]. No one in a role may tell you whom to love, where to work or what to do with your money [50]. Crimes go to outside justice, never hidden [56]. And all of these rules are printed in one place, in this book, for anyone to read.

Who is the founder, and what authority do they have?

The founder wrote this book and may revise it during their lifetime [87]. That is the only special authority the founder holds, and it has a limit: no revision, even the founder's, may weaken or remove a commitment that protects people [88]. The founder is not infallible and is accountable for their conduct like anyone else [60]. The founder's awakening, like anyone's, is never a ground for authority [61]. After the founder, the text is fixed and understanding grows through commentary [89].

Do I have to believe everything in this book?

The book holds some teachings as literal truth, such as That Which Is and rebirth, and says plainly that they are matters of faith, not proven facts [92]. But no one is required to accept anyone's spiritual authority without question [33], and questions are no bar even to the Vow [35]. Anyone who sincerely walks the path is of it [34].

Does God answer prayer?

Not as a person answers. That Which Is has no will, and does not choose or intervene. Prayer on this path is a way of turning yourself toward what is, and that turning changes you. There is no wrong way to pray, as long as the intention is good [78].

What happens when we die?

The path teaches that the personality and memories of a life are laid down, and the thread crosses into another life. What the crossing is like, the path deliberately does not claim to know.

Does the path believe in miracles, angels or spirits?

That Which Is does not intervene, so nothing happens because it chose it. Extraordinary things do happen, and the path does not claim to know what they are. It teaches no angels, no devil and no messengers, and it makes no judgment on what other traditions remember. No one may claim to carry messages from That Which Is or from the dead, or sell such contact [27].

Does the path reject science?

No. Nothing in this book is presented as scientifically proven. If established science ever clearly contradicts a literal teaching, that teaching is reinterpreted as image [92].

Do I have to take a vow, or pay anything, to belong?

No. Anyone who sincerely walks the path belongs to it [34]. The Vow is needed only to hold a role in a circle [46]. No one may ever be pressed to give money [57].

Can I keep my own religion and walk this path?

You are welcome at any gathering as a companion of the path, whatever your faith, and you will be honored there. But to be *of* the path, and to take the Vow, means walking this path and no other [34]. If you later choose another religion, you have simply left the path, without shame [37].

Can women hold every role? Is anyone treated as less?

Every role and every rite is open to anyone on the same terms as everyone else, whatever their sex or gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, wealth or whom they love. No teaching of this book may ever be used to make any person less [39].

Will anyone try to convert me?

No. The path never preaches or recruits. Those who walk it do good quietly and name the path only if someone asks [84, 85].

How does a new circle begin?

With at least one person who has taken the Vow in another circle. They bring the practice, not authority, and the new circle owes nothing to the one they came from. At its first gathering, the Lighting of a Circle, a candle passes from hand to hand until someone chooses to light the lamp and offers to be Keeper, and the signs of the other roles pass the same way. The circle confirms every role [44, 47]. A circle may begin with only two or three people: any role no one holds stands open, and the whole circle shares its work [48]. When a circle grows beyond twelve, it divides into two, so that every face can still be seen [49].

Does the path take political sides?

No. Political power is the power to rule others, and the path must never reach for it. No circle or role holder may endorse a candidate or party, campaign, raise money for a political cause, or speak politically in the path's name. You remain free to vote, to hold your own views and even to seek office, as a private citizen and never as a representative of the path [59].

How are children kept safe?

No adult is ever alone with a child who is not their own. Any suspicion of harm to a child goes at once to the authorities, never to the circle first. No adult may ask a child to keep a secret from their parents. Anyone reported for harming a child steps away from children until the matter is resolved outside the circle, and anyone found to have harmed a child may never gather with any circle again. Those who serve with children are background-checked wherever the law allows [70–75].

What if someone in a circle harms me?

Go to the circle's Listener, or to the whole circle if the concern is about the Listener [51, 52]. You never have to face the person who harmed you [31], and you may always speak about what happened [32]. If a law was broken, it goes to outside justice [56]. You may also simply leave, without shame [37].

What if I leave?

Then go in peace. You were of the path while you walked it, and no one may shame you for going [37].

HARD QUESTIONS

Every tradition is tested by the hardest cases. These are the path's answers, with the reasons for them. Each rests on the Commitments, given in brackets.

May I lie to protect someone in danger?

No. If someone comes to your door looking for a person they mean to harm, you may not tell them a falsehood. But you may refuse to answer, close the door, stand in their way, hide the one in danger and call for help. Every protection is open to you except the lie [19].

May I defend myself, or someone else, with force?

Yes: to stop a harm that is happening now, with only as much force as it takes, and never once the harm has stopped. If nothing less will save a life, even deadly force is allowed, because that is life weighed against life [20]. Stop the act, not the person, and leave them a way back [14].

May I fight in a war?

Not in combat. In self-defense, you judge the danger yourself and stop when it ends. In war, that judgment belongs to a command, and no one may hand their conscience to another. You may serve as a healer, carry the wounded, or bring relief [21].

May a dying person choose to end their life sooner?

The path does not hasten death, because the value of a life is greater than any choice for death. It relieves pain, honors the refusal of further treatment, and stays beside the dying [22]. Relieving pain is never hastening death, even when the medicine that eases it may also shorten life, so long as the aim is to ease suffering and not to end the life. No one who has struggled to stay alive, and no family that has lost someone, is ever met with shame.

What does the path say about the death penalty?

It opposes it. Those who do harm are held to account, and may be confined for as long as they remain a danger, but no one who is no longer an immediate threat may be killed [23].

What if a law tells me to do harm?

Obey the law, except a law that requires you to harm someone or to abandon someone in danger. Refuse that law openly and without violence, never hide what you did, and accept the consequences [24].

What does the path teach about abortion?

No one knows when a thread first looks out through a new life, and the path will not pretend to. It makes no claim on it, and leaves the choice to the conscience of the one who carries the child [25].

WHERE TO TURN

Scripture is most needed in hard moments. These are the chapters that speak to them. References give the part of the Scripture and the chapter number, or the number of a lament.

- **In grief:** Part Two, 2 (The Crossing); Part Seven, 4 (The Eternal Present); Part Six, 3 (Prayers for Many Hours: In Grief); Part Six, 14 (The Turning of the Year: The Night of Remembrance); Laments and Praises, XIII (A Lament for One I Will Not Know Again).
- **Facing your own death:** Part Seven, 1 (The Last Breath); Part Two, 2 (The Crossing); Part Seven, 3 (When the Stars Go Still); Laments and Praises, IV (A Lament Before Dying).
- **When you are afraid:** Part Four, 3 (On Fear); Part One, 4 (The Sky and the Storm); Part Six, 3 (Prayers for Many Hours: In Fear).
- **When you are suffering:** Part Four, 2 (On Suffering); Part One, 4 (The Sky and the Storm); Part One, 5 (Without a Throne); Laments and Praises, I (A Lament in the Dark); VI (A Lament When the Body Fails).
- **When God feels absent:** Part One, 5 (Without a Throne); Part One, 1 (Before Every Name); Part One, 4 (The Sky and the Storm).
- **When you have been hurt:** Part Four, 7 (On Forgiveness); Part Two, 4 (What Love Leaves); Part Six, 12 (When the Circle Is Troubled).
- **When you have done harm:** Part Two, 4 (What Love Leaves); Part Three, 3 (The Self You Wear); Part Four, 5 (The Two Roads); Laments and Praises, II (A Lament After I Have Done Harm).
- **When you feel alone:** Part One, 1 (Before Every Name); Part One, 7 (One Existence); Part Five, 3 (One Table); Laments and Praises, III (A Lament in Loneliness).
- **When the world seems to be getting worse:** Part Five, 1 (The Rising and the Falling); Part Five, 7 (The Long Dawn); Part Five, 8 (The Parable of the Long Table).
- **When you feel you are not growing:** Part Three, 7 (What Cannot Be Unseen); Part Three, 9 (No Last Door); Part Three, 1 (Waking).

- **When you want to control someone:** Part Three, 6 (Freedom); Part Three, 5 (Holding and Letting Go); Part Four, 4 (On Desire).
- **When you meet someone you feel you have always known:** Part Two, 6 (Meeting Again).
- **When you doubt this book:** Part Three, 2 (The Truth That Grows); Part One, 9 (The Many Windows); Laments and Praises, V (A Lament in Doubt).
- **When you are raising a child:** Part Six, 13 (The Children of the Circle).
- **Before a journey:** Part Six, 8 (On Pilgrimage).

GUIDES FOR THE FOUR ROLES

These guides apply the Commitments to the work of each role. They add no new rules; where they offer practical suggestions, a circle is free to do things its own way, as long as the Commitments are kept.

For every role

- A role is service, not rank [45]. Sit in the circle like everyone else.
- You serve for as long as the circle decides, and the circle may take the role back at any time [47]. Hold it with open hands.
- Never advise anyone on their personal decisions while acting in your role. If you speak of such things at all, speak as a friend and say so [50].
- Keep every child safe. Never be alone with a child who is not your own, and report any suspicion of harm to a child to the authorities at once [70, 71].
- Your conduct can always be questioned [53].

The Keeper

- Set the time and place of the gathering, light the lamp, and see that everyone who comes is welcomed, companions of the path included. Choose times with those who have the least time in mind.

- Keep a simple record of everything the circle is given and spends, and let anyone in the circle see it at any time [57]. *Suggestion:* have two people count any money together, and never let one person alone hold the circle's funds.
- Never ask anyone for money, and never let anyone feel watched when they give or don't give.
- The circle bears the costs of what it does together, from what is freely given, never the one who serves or takes part. Undertake only what the gifts can cover [58].

The Guide

- Choose readings that fit what the circle is living through. *Where to Turn*, the suggested readings, and *A Year of Readings* can help.
- Teach as a student teaches. Welcome every question, and say plainly when you do not know [60].
- Never claim the final word, and never use what you understand as a reason to be trusted [61].
- Walk beside anyone preparing for the Vow, but never hurry them toward it or hold them back from it [35].

The Hand

- Keep watch over who is sick, grieving, isolated or in need, and gather the circle's help toward them.
- Always ask what someone needs. Never decide for them. Help that ignores their choice is control with a kind face.
- Respect privacy. Share someone's need with the circle only if they want it shared.
- Know where real help can be found: doctors, counselors, crisis services, legal aid. The circle's care never replaces professional help.
- Share the work, and rest when you are tired. A Hand who burns out helps no one for long.

The Listener

- Hear any conflict or concern in confidence, without rushing and without taking sides before you have listened [51].
- Protect the person who comes to you. Never require anyone to face the person who harmed them [31].
- Confidence never covers a crime. Where a law has been broken, the matter goes to outside justice [56].
- You are not a therapist or a judge. When someone needs more than listening, help them find professional support.
- If a concern is about you, step aside. It goes to the whole circle, in writing or through someone who will speak for the person [52].

THE ORDER OF THE GATHERING

Anyone may lead a gathering. No teacher is needed. This order follows the Scripture (Part Six, 10), with a closing added before the meal.

1. **Sit in a circle,** so that no one sits above anyone else and every face can be seen. Two people are enough.
2. **The Keeper lights a single lamp** in the center. It is a reminder that all sit in the same light, not an object of worship.
3. **Begin in silence,** for as long as feels right, so that everyone arrives, not only in body.
4. **Say What I Hold together.** Anyone may sit in silence instead, and no one is asked why [33].
5. **A reading,** chosen by the Guide or by anyone: from this book, or from any words that carry light.
6. **Open speaking.** Anyone may speak, the newest as freely as the oldest. Speak of what you have seen, what troubles you, what you are grateful for. Listen without hurrying to answer.
7. **Name those who need care,** and decide together how to help them. The Hand gathers the circle's service.

8. **Close** in silence, or with the blessing that ends the Scripture.

9. **Eat together,** if you can.

Remember at every gathering: no one may be pressed to give money [57]; anyone may leave at any time without shame [37]; anyone, whatever they believe, is welcome to sit in the circle.

For those with little time, and for children. Children are welcome in the circle, and the youngest may come and go, play nearby, or sleep in a lap. When a gathering is long, the circle takes turns caring for children together, always with two adults present [70]. Come when you can, stay as long as you can, and leave when you must. No one is less for coming rarely, arriving late, or leaving early. A circle should choose its times with those who have the least time in mind.

Suggested readings for each occasion

Occasion	Suggested readings	Note
An ordinary gathering	The week's reading from A Year of Readings, or any chapter	Choose what the circle needs
The Night of Remembrance	Part Six, 14; Part Seven, 4; Part Two, 2	Read the names of those who have crossed
The Long Table	Part Five, 8; Part Five, 3	Read before the meal
The Day of Hands	Part Six, 5; Part Four, 8	Read before the work
The Welcoming	Part Six, 15; Part Two, 1	
The Answering	Part Six, 15; Part Six, 13; Part Two, 1	
The Vow	Part Six, 15; Part Six, 9; Part Three, 9	
The Joining	Part Six, 15; Part Four, 1	
The Parting	Part Six, 15; Part Three, 5	Never require the two to face each other
The Crossing	Part Six, 15; Part Seven, 1; Part Seven, 4	
The Lighting of a Circle	Part Six, 15; Part Six, 16; Part Six, 11	Read the parable after the roles are offered
A pilgrim's return	Part Six, 8; Part One, 9	The pilgrim shares what they saw

KEEPING THE RITES

The Scripture gives the heart of each rite. These are the practical steps, gathered here so the Scripture can stay a book of verses. A circle may keep them simply and change them where love asks, as long as the Commitments are kept.

The Answering

1. Only one welcomed as a child may ask for it, after walking the circle as an adult for a full year. No one may ask it of them [65, 67].
2. Gather and light the lamp. Let them sit where they sat as a child, among the ones who raised them.
3. The role holders ask them to pass on what they have learned from those who walk beside them. It is asked, not graded: there are no right answers, no one can fail, and nothing depends on what they say.
4. They tell the circle what they have come to see for themselves, in their own words.
5. Those who made the promise at their Welcoming answer it, in the words of the Scripture. Then eat together.

The Vow for a young person

1. The Vow may be taken from the age of thirteen, if the young person understands what they are choosing. Before then, they walk the path fully, without a Vow [68].
2. Before they take it, they sit with a trusted adult who is not their parent, to be sure the choice is their own. That adult may ask the circle to wait, but may never press them.
3. Nothing may depend on it: no reward for taking it, and no disappointment shown if they do not.
4. Their Vow is theirs to set down at any time. When they come of age, someone they trust asks them once, privately, whether they still hold it. Their answer is theirs, and no one else is told.

The Joining

1. Before a Joining, the two sit with the Guide to speak together of what their promises mean: freedom, truth, and how they will meet conflict [40].
2. The Listener then sits with each of them alone, to be sure each one chooses freely.
3. The role holders never advise whether to join, and may refuse a Joining only when one of the two is not free to choose.
4. One of the two need not walk the path. No one is asked to take the Vow, or to give up their own faith, to be joined [42].

The Parting

1. Either person may end a Joining, freely and without shame. No one in a Joining that harms them is ever asked to stay, to try harder or to wait [41].
2. If either wishes it, together or alone, the circle gathers and lights the lamp, and they set the promise down in the circle's presence.
3. Neither is ever required to face the other. Where there has been harm, they never are.
4. The circle answers that it takes no side, and that both are still welcome.

The Lighting of a Circle

1. A new circle begins with at least one person who has taken the Vow in another circle. They bring the practice, not authority, and the new circle owes nothing to the circle they came from [44].
2. Gather with the lamp unlit, and sit in silence until everyone has arrived. The one who brought the practice reads *What I Hold*, and anyone who holds it may join in.
3. If the circle has divided from another, its candle is lit from the old circle's lamp.
4. A small candle passes from hand to hand, around again if it must. No one is asked to take it, and no one is hurried.

5. Whoever chooses to light the lamp offers themselves as Keeper. If they have not taken the Vow, they speak it now. Then the circle is asked, "Do you confirm them?" If anyone objects, the circle chooses together. Either way, the lamp stays lit.
6. The other signs pass the same way, one at a time: the book for the Guide, a bowl of water for the Hand, a folded cloth for the Listener. Whoever takes a sign offers themselves for that role, speaks the Vow if they have not, and is confirmed by the circle. Any sign no one takes is set beside the lamp for a later gathering.
7. Read the Parable of the Borrowed Lamp. Let everyone say their name and why they came. Eat together, and before parting, say the closing words of the Scripture together.

The First Circle

The first circle of all is kept as every other, with three differences. Before the candle is lit, the founder speaks the Vow and those gathered witness it; the others take it later, each when ready. The founder lights the small candle that begins the passing. And when the book is passed, the founder takes it up as the first Guide and asks the circle to confirm them, as every role is confirmed.

A YEAR OF READINGS

This plan takes a circle through the whole Scripture in fifty-two weeks, with a short reading from the Sayings or the Laments and Praises in many weeks. Begin at week 1 whenever your circle begins. If you do not gather every week, simply pick up where you left off. When an observance or a rite falls in a week, use its readings from the table above instead, and return to the plan at the next gathering.

Week	Reading	Short reading
1	Part One, 1 (Before Every Name)	Sayings I: Of That Which Is
2	Part One, 2 (Within and Beyond)	Laments X: In Praise of the Night Sky
3	Part One, 3 (The Waking Ground)	
4	Part One, 4 (The Sky and the Storm)	Laments I: A Lament in the Dark
5	Part One, 5 (Without a Throne); Part One, 6 (The Parable of the Empty Throne)	Sayings II: Of the Hands
6	Part One, 7 (One Existence)	Laments VII: In Praise of the Earth
7	Part One, 8 (From the First Fire); Part One, 9 (The Many Windows)	Laments XII: In Praise of Those Who Came Before
8	Part One, 10 (The Parable of the Mapmaker)	
9	Part Two, 1 (The Thread)	Sayings IV: Of the Thread
10	Part Two, 2 (The Crossing)	Sayings X: A Lament for One Who Has Crossed; Laments XIII: A Lament for One I Will Not Know Again
11	Part Two, 3 (The Forgetting)	
12	Part Two, 4 (What Love Leaves); Part Two, 5 (The Parable of the Musician Who Forgot)	Sayings V: Of Choosing
13	Part Two, 6 (Meeting Again)	Laments VIII: In Praise of Those Who Love Us
14	Part Two, 7 (Many Lives, Many Windows)	
15	Part Two, 8 (The Parable of the Weaver)	
16	Part Three, 1 (Waking)	Sayings XIII: Of Awakening

Week	Reading	Short reading
17	Part Three, 2 (The Truth That Grows)	Sayings VII: Of Truth
18	Part Three, 3 (The Self You Wear); Part Three, 4 (Beneath the Name)	
19	Part Three, 5 (Holding and Letting Go)	
20	Part Three, 6 (Freedom)	Sayings VIII: Of Power
21	Part Three, 7 (What Cannot Be Unseen); Part Three, 8 (The Parable of the Watchman)	
22	Part Three, 9 (No Last Door)	Laments V: A Lament in Doubt
23	Part Three, 10 (The Parable of the Climber)	
24	Part Four, 1 (One Love, Many Shapes)	Sayings III: Of Love
25	Part Four, 2 (On Suffering)	Laments VI: A Lament When the Body Fails
26	Part Four, 3 (On Fear)	Sayings VI: Of Fear
27	Part Four, 4 (On Desire)	
28	Part Four, 5 (The Two Roads); Part Four, 6 (The Parable of the Open Window)	Laments II: A Lament After I Have Done Harm
29	Part Four, 7 (On Forgiveness)	
30	Part Four, 8 (Ours to Answer)	Sayings XI: A Lament for the World
31	Part Four, 9 (The Parable of the Two Houses)	
32	Part Five, 1 (The Rising and the Falling); Part Five, 2 (The Parable of the Lighthouse)	
33	Part Five, 3 (One Table)	Sayings IX: Of the Stranger
34	Part Five, 4 (Justice)	
35	Part Five, 5 (The Shared House)	
36	Part Five, 6 (The Lamp Passed On)	
37	Part Five, 7 (The Long Dawn)	Sayings XII: In Praise of What Is
38	Part Five, 8 (The Parable of the Long Table)	
39	Part Six, 1 (The Ten Teachings)	

Week	Reading	Short reading
40	Part Six, 2 (On Prayer); Part Six, 3 (Prayers for Many Hours)	
41	Part Six, 4 (Sitting Still)	Laments IX: In Praise at the End of a Long Day
42	Part Six, 5 (The Work of Hands); Part Six, 6 (The Parable of the Unwanted Gift); Part Six, 7 (The Way of Living)	
43	Part Six, 8 (On Pilgrimage)	
44	Part Six, 9 (Who Walks the Path); Part Six, 10 (The Gathering)	Laments III: A Lament in Loneliness
45	Part Six, 11 (The Roles of the Circle); Part Six, 12 (When the Circle Is Troubled)	
46	Part Six, 13 (The Children of the Circle); Part Six, 14 (The Turning of the Year)	Laments XI: In Praise of a New Life
47	Part Six, 15 (The Rites); Part Six, 16 (The Parable of the Borrowed Lamp)	
48	Part Seven, 1 (The Last Breath)	Laments IV: A Lament Before Dying
49	Part Seven, 2 (The Age of a World); Part Seven, 3 (When the Stars Go Still)	Sayings XIV: Of the End of Things
50	Part Seven, 4 (The Eternal Present); Part Seven, 5 (The Parable of the Sandcastle)	
51	Part Seven, 6 (The Next Dawn); Part Seven, 7 (The Parable of the Woman Who Planted for Strangers)	
52	Part Seven, 8 (The Everlasting Path)	Sayings XV: Of Walking On

GLOSSARY

- **That Which Is.** The one God: conscious and without will; living every experience as it happens, unharmed by it; neither loving nor unloving; holding every universe and more than all of them.
- **True self.** The thread beneath every garment, together with the shape one's own choices have worn into it. Discovering it is one of the main legs of the journey, through honest self-reflection kept to oneself.
- **Thread.** The real, continuing individual self of a conscious being, reborn within its universe and ending with it.
- **Garment.** The personality, memories and story of a single life, laid down at death.
- **Crossing.** Death; the passage of a thread into its next life, deliberately unknown. Also the rite that marks a death.
- **Shaping.** The lasting mark left on a thread by its own choices, of love or of harm, and by clear seeing.
- **Awakening.** Seeing reality more clearly. It shapes the thread, may be gradual or sudden, cannot be lost, never ends, and is not the same as goodness.
- **Distortion.** A learned, mistaken way of seeing that arises from the hard conditions of existence. It marks the thread only when acted on or held by choice.
- **Suffering.** Any real harm to a being, felt or unfelt, including harm to its freedom.
- **The eternal present.** The way That Which Is keeps every moment forever: kept, not experienced.
- **The Great Cycles.** Universes arising and ending within That Which Is, with nothing passing between them.
- **The collective path.** The rising and falling of understanding among all conscious beings: clarity can grow, but goodness is never guaranteed, and every generation must choose the light again.

- **Necessary suffering.** Suffering that prevents a greater harm, is freely accepted for one's own good, or cannot be avoided without overriding someone's freedom.
- **The good fight.** The work of love, truth, justice and protection against domination.
- **Protection.** Returning choice to those who have lost it, never taking it.
- **Worship.** Reverence, not offering: wonder and full attention before what is.
- **Circle.** An independent community of the path.
- **The symbol.** The sign of the path: the lamp and its flame, wrapped by the thread with its two beads, held within the circle.
- **Sash.** The path's optional symbol: plain undyed cloth wrapped freely around the body, its loose ends each carrying one bead, for the beginning and the end of this world.
- **The Resting Day.** A weekly day of rest, freely chosen and kept apart from the circle.
- **Pilgrimage.** Travel to encounter other peoples, other traditions' sacred places and the natural world, made as a guest and never required.
- **Keeper, Guide, Hand, Listener.** The four roles of service in every circle.
- **The Answering.** The rite for one welcomed as a child, after a full year of walking the circle as an adult: they pass on what they learned, say what they have come to see, and the promise of their Welcoming is answered.
- **The Parting.** The optional rite in which one or both of two who were joined set their promise down in the circle's presence; the circle takes no side, and neither is ever required to face the other.
- **The Vow.** A personal commitment to walk the path, freely chosen when a person alone judges they are ready; required only to hold a role.

- **Companion of the path.** Someone of another faith, or of none, who gathers with a circle. Companions are welcomed and honored in every circle; to be *of* the path is to walk this path and no other.
- **Of the path.** Anyone who sincerely walks it and belongs to no other religion, with or without the Vow.
- **World.** In the Scripture, the whole universe that rises and ends within That Which Is, not only this earth.
- **What I Hold.** The path's statement of what it holds, spoken together at every gathering. No one is required to say it.
- **Commentary.** Understanding written after the founder, kept separate from the fixed scripture.
- **The world is my monastery.** The founder's guiding phrase: every moment and every interaction is a place of practice.

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THE EVERLASTING PATH

A Defense of the Path



The hardest objections, answered plainly.

Every tradition is questioned, and it should be. A faith that cannot answer its critics plainly has no business asking anyone to walk it. What follows are the strongest objections that can be raised against The Everlasting Path, each stated as fairly as its critics would state it, and each answered as honestly as this book can answer it. Where an objection cannot be fully answered, that is said too.

This defense does not ask anyone to believe. It asks only that the path be judged for what it actually teaches.

I. "IT IS NEW. SOMEONE SIMPLY MADE IT UP."

It is new, and this book has never said otherwise. It claims no ancient origin, no hidden scroll and no revelation. Its founder heard no voice and saw no vision. It came from study and reflection, and it says so in its opening pages.

But every tradition was new once. Each began with particular people in a particular time, trying to put into words what they had come to see. Age is not the same as truth, and newness is not the same as error. A teaching is not made true by being old, or false by being recent. It is made true, if it is true at all, by matching what is.

So the path asks to be judged as any claim should be: by whether it is coherent, whether it is honest, whether it fits what we know, and whether the life it describes is good. It offers no authority beyond that. A tradition that rests on revelation asks you to trust the one who received it. This one asks you to look for yourself.

II. "IT BORROWS FROM OTHER RELIGIONS."

It resembles many of them, and it should say so plainly.

Its name is close in meaning to *Sanātana Dharma*, often rendered "the eternal way," the name by which many Hindus call their own tradition. Its image of the body and personality as a garment laid down at death echoes the Bhagavad Gita. Its teaching that every name for God is a window stands near the Rig Veda's saying that truth is one and the wise call it by many names, and near a line popularly attributed to Rumi, that the lamps are different but the light is the same. Its sash is a cousin of the Zoroastrian *kusti*, the sacred cord wrapped around the waist. Its symbol, a flame within a circle, will remind some of the flaming chalice of Unitarian Universalism. Its parable of the woman who planted trees for strangers has a sister in the Talmud's story of Honi and the old man planting a carob tree, and the parable of the climber has one in the Haitian proverb that beyond the mountains there are more mountains. "Ours are the hands" stands close to a prayer often attributed to Teresa of Ávila. Its circles resemble the Quaker meeting, and its roles resemble the trusted servants of mutual-aid fellowships. Among modern faiths, its belief in the oneness of the world's religions and the equality of all people stands nearest to the Bahá'í Faith.

None of this was taken, and none of it is claimed. But the resemblance is real, and it is no embarrassment. It is what this path would expect. If That Which Is truly holds all things, then people in every age and every land have been standing in the same light and looking through their own windows. It would be strange if they had never seen the same shapes. Convergence is not theft. It is one of the reasons to think something is there to be seen.

What the path owes these traditions is honesty and reverence: to name the likeness, to claim none of their teachings as its own, to speak of them with respect, and to send anyone who wants to know them to their own sources and their own teachers.

III. "IT IS A CULT."

This is the most important objection, and it deserves the most careful answer.

Those who study high-control groups have learned to recognize them by what they do, not by what they believe. They control what members may know. They control how members live, whom they love and what they do with their money. They load their language so that doubt becomes unthinkable. They make leaving a disgrace. They place the leader above every rule. And they keep their real rules hidden until a person is too deep inside to walk away.

The Everlasting Path forbids every one of these, in writing, in the same book that teaches its beliefs.

Its rules are printed in one place, the Commitments, for anyone to read before they ever attend a gathering. Anyone may speak about harm, inside the circle or outside it, and no circle may punish them for it. No one in a role may advise anyone on whom to love, where to work, what to do with money or whether to keep their family. No one may be pressed to give, and every record of money is open. Questions are no bar even to the Vow. Anyone may leave at any time, and no one may shame them for going. Crimes go to outside justice and are never hidden. No one is ever made to face the one who harmed them. And the founder is named, again and again, as fallible and accountable like anyone else.

A cult cannot afford to say these things, because saying them would end it. The path says them first.

Rules on paper do not guarantee good conduct, and this defense does not pretend they do. Any community can fail. But the rules give every member, and every outsider, the means to name a failure and the right to act on it. That is the most any tradition can honestly promise.

IV. "A GOD WHO DOES NOT LOVE YOU IS NO GOD AT ALL."

The path teaches that That Which Is is conscious, holds all things, and knows every experience as it is lived, but that it does not choose, and so it does not love. Many will find this cold.

But consider what the alternative costs. A God who loves and chooses, who could stop any suffering and does not, leaves every believer with the oldest and hardest question in religion: why? Why this child, this war, this sickness? Centuries of answers have not settled it, and some of those answers have been cruel, teaching the suffering that they deserved their pain or that it was sent to teach them.

The path does not have to answer that question, because its God does not withhold help. There is no hand that could reach down and chooses not to. Suffering comes from the conditions of a finite world and from the choices of beings within it. No one sent it, and no one deserved it.

Nor does this make love smaller. It makes love rarer and more precious. If the universe itself does not love, then every act of love is something new in all of existence, made by a being who chose it. The hand that held yours was not an instrument of a cosmic plan. It was someone, choosing you. The path does not take love out of the world. It puts love back in the hands of those who actually give it.

V. "THERE IS NO EVIDENCE FOR THREADS, REBIRTH OR THE ETERNAL PRESENT."

That is true, and the path says so before its critics do. It holds certain teachings as literal truth while stating plainly that they are matters of faith, not proven fact. It sorts its teachings into what it holds as literal, what it holds as image, and what it holds as unknown on purpose. And it binds itself in advance: if established science ever clearly contradicts a literal teaching, that teaching will be reinterpreted as image. Few traditions make that promise.

Faith on this path is not a claim to have proof. It is a decision about how to live in the face of what cannot be proven. The person who believes that consciousness ends entirely at death is also holding a belief beyond the evidence. Everyone stands somewhere. The path asks only that its members stand honestly: knowing what they hold, why they hold it, and what would change their minds.

And much of the path does not depend on these beliefs at all. That harm is wrong because suffering is real; that protection should return choice and never take it; that power must be accountable; that love is worth choosing: none of these needs rebirth to be true. A person who doubts every teaching about the thread could still find the ethics of this book sound.

VI. "IF EVERY THREAD ENDS WITH THE UNIVERSE, NOTHING MATTERS."

The path teaches that every thread, every memory and every name ends when this universe ends, and that nothing passes into the next. Some will say that if everything ends, nothing matters.

But this is not how meaning works anywhere else. A song is not meaningless because it ends. A meal shared with people you love is not wasted because it will be eaten. A life is not worthless because it does not last forever. Meaning is not measured by duration.

And the path teaches more than an ending. It teaches that every moment is kept, whole, within That Which Is, and that nothing that has happened can ever be made not to have happened. The kindness you did is not erased by the end of the world. It will always have been. That is a stronger claim to meaning than a reward that comes later, because it does not depend on anything later. What you do matters because it is real now, and real forever.

VII. "IT HONORS EVERY RELIGION BUT SAYS NO ONE MAY BELONG TO TWO."

This looks like a contradiction, but it is not. To honor a window is not to look through every window at once.

A person may deeply respect every language without being fluent in all of them. They may love many places and still live in one home. The path honors every tradition as a window onto That Which Is, welcomes people of every faith into its gatherings as companions of the path, and never asks anyone to convert. But to be *of* the path, and to take its Vow, is to walk this particular path with your whole life. That is not a judgment on other paths. It is simply what it means to walk one.

The alternative, being of every path at once, would ask a person to make promises to several communities whose teachings and rules differ. The path asks for less, and more honestly: choose your road, and respect everyone else's.

VIII. "ITS ETHICS CONTRADICT THEMSELVES."

Several of the path's hard answers will be pressed together by critics. Each deserves a direct reply.

It forbids lying even to save a life, yet allows suffering to prevent a greater harm. Yes. The path holds truthfulness as the one line that necessary suffering does not cross, and it says so openly. One reason to hold this line is that a community that believes some lies are righteous will soon find more of them, and those with the least power are usually the first to be lied to. So the path keeps truth whole, and leaves every other protection open: to refuse to answer, to close the door, to stand in the way, to hide the one in danger, to call for help. This is a hard teaching, and some great moral thinkers have held it before.

It allows deadly force in self-defense but forbids fighting in war. The difference is judgment. A person defending a life at their own door sees the danger, judges it, and stops the moment it ends. A soldier gives that judgment to a command and fights whom they are told, for reasons that are not their own. The path forbids handing one's conscience to anyone. So its members may serve in war as healers and bearers of the wounded, but not as combatants.

It teaches that life outweighs any choice for death, yet leaves abortion to conscience. The life teaching holds wherever a thread is present. But the path does not know when a thread first enters a new life, and it refuses to pretend to know. Where the presence of a thread is unknown, it will not bind another person's body to a claim it cannot make. A critic may wish the path had chosen differently. But it cannot fairly call this a contradiction. It is the same teaching, applied with honesty about the limits of what anyone knows.

IX. "THE FOUNDER HOLDS TOO MUCH POWER."

During the founder's life, the founder's revisions to this book are final. That is the only special authority the path grants its founder, and it is an authority over a text, not over people. Even that authority is bounded: no revision, the founder's included, may weaken or remove any commitment that protects people. The founder may add protections, but can never take one away. Every circle is independent, with no body above it, the founder included. No one is required to accept anyone's spiritual authority without question. And the founder is named in the Commitments as fallible and accountable like anyone else. After the founder, the text is fixed, and no one may claim the founder's authority again. Understanding then grows only through commentary, which every circle is free to use or not.

A founder who wanted power would not write these limits. They are written so that no one, the founder included, can use this path to rule anyone.

X. WHAT THIS DEFENSE DOES NOT CLAIM

It does not claim that the path is proven. It does not claim that other traditions are without truth, or that their followers are any less held in That Which Is. It does not claim that the circles of this path will never fail. It does not claim to have answered every question, and it expects that some of its answers will be found wanting and improved in the commentaries to come.

It claims only this: that the path is honest about what it is, careful about what it asks, open about how it is governed, and willing to be questioned by anyone. Let it be judged on that.

Awakening is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning of understanding.

Walk on.

