

## PREFACE

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### *Finding the Jewel Within*

I saw this phrase in a dream and nearly used it as my title. It speaks to me of our essential obligation in life—to find our core, the jewel we each are, the brilliant, star-like center of our being.

This has been my own journey now for 77 years. I have learned a few things in this time and join you as a fellow traveler who has a few more miles on my clock than most. This is not a scholarly volume; rather, I wish to write as simply as I can about life and faith and about my “real world” travels in Italy, where so many of these ideas gained focus and demanded to be set down in writing.

As is typical of those who approach the Winter of their days, I find myself having extended conversations in my mind with my children, step-children, grandchildren, grand-nieces and nephew, great-grandchild, God-granddaughter in Ukraine and future generations. So, much of what I write here is for them and speaks to how they might go about finding their jewel within.<sup>1</sup>

This journey begins with a breaking away from our origins.

This sounds paradoxical, and I suppose it is. But to move forward, there is much we need to leave behind. Specifically, getting unstuck from the literalism of our youth is critical to finding the jewel within.

Any kind of literalism is problematic. But the particular type of literalism in which I was raised was Christian. My parents were conservative Protestant Christians, so I grew up in that tradition, and from ages 15 through 18, I was swept up in Fundamentalist Christianity (which I explain in Part Two). Like other children, I

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the footnotes that appear throughout this book are included to assist these younger readers. Further, I have chosen to forego a scholarly approach to citations and other matters. Instead, I have included a Selected Bibliography at the end of the book that includes most of the books and other material from which I have quoted or which have contributed to my thinking on various subjects.

grew up believing that Jonah literally was swallowed by a whale, that Adam and Eve lived in a garden, and that angels protected children on a regular basis. While I use the term *Christian* literalism, I mean to include all varieties of literalism because, while the focus of my youthful literalistic beliefs were essentially those of fundamentalist Christianity, I believe that any kind of literalism, while normal in childhood, is an impediment to growth in adulthood. And we will only find the jewel within if we can cut loose and get unstuck from literalistic belief systems and secondhand learning.

In the balance of this book, I return often to this basic premise to expand upon it, discover its further implications, and explain and investigate it. So, Part One draws on my mystical side, reaching beyond the common understanding of “faith” and yet claiming simplicity. Part Two is more scholarly, persuasive and autobiographical. Part Three comes, hopefully, from the grandfather with wisdom about a wide spectrum of life’s experiences.

While my reference point is Christian literalism, which is the tradition I know best, I read about and talk with others from different traditions. The poetry of Rumi, the Sufi (Islam) poet, has inspired me. I read scriptures of different traditions. So, I write from that tradition which I honor but no longer claim in terms of membership. My spirituality transcends any religion just as my citizenship (though technically I am a U.S. citizen) is universal in spirit. I have cut loose but not *cut off*. Indeed, my spirituality is the most important dimension of my life. The ancient Hindu scripture says, “Truth is One, Sages call it by many names.” Believing that, therefore I can embrace many expressions of faith.