

Being a Teenager

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Much of our compulsion is set in place before we enter our teen years. Yet it is during these years that we consciously reflect on the persons we are becoming. This is when we more deliberately lay claim to the strategies that we have already developed before our teen years. In the youngster, after all, these strategies are simple reactions without much awareness of alternatives, while in the teenager, these strategies are compared with great scrutiny and introspection to the strategies used by other teenagers. The compulsion is at work winning over the teenager's value judgments on how best to be. The compulsion's goal is to get the teenager to take pride in the compulsion.

How can we help teenagers catch themselves in the act of taking pride in what is ultimately a self-defeating routine? The general answer is to appeal to their authenticity. They have the same yen as adults for beauty, for what makes sense, for living in the real world, and for doing the right thing. But to translate these vaguely-felt inclinations into clear guidelines, we need first to look at how the teenager perceives the problems of growing up. An incorrect perception, after all, will invariably result in a personal style that adapts poorly to the problems of living. Teens who reflect on how they may be misperceiving the world will be able to take a second look at their compulsions, so that as they move into adult years, they do not consider that the answer to the identity crisis has been resolved.

The following essay aims to help begin this reflection. Although it is addressed to teenagers, I include it here to help adults recall some of the development of their compulsion during those agonizing years.

How Should I Be?

Growing up is so difficult.

There is much to learn. You have to learn about history, math, science, grammar -- all the stuff they teach in school. A lot of that is a waste of time anyway. Or, if it isn't, nobody has explained why not.

You also have to learn just how to be. Should you be witty? Be serious? Be careful? Be clever? Why doesn't anyone teach you something about how to be? You think about it often, and so do teenagers everywhere. All over the world, they are experimenting with the self they will end up being.

And the experiments are costly. You pay with emotional pain, anxiety, frustration, and humiliation. If you put on a weird self, others will laugh at you. But then if you put on a self that everyone wants you to be, something inside starts objecting. You don't feel sincere. You feel like a phony. Some teenagers genuinely like doing things that others don't understand -- like raising pigs or tap dancing. Then they have to hide that part of themselves just to look ordinary.

But there are many teenagers who can't hide how different they are. Some are very short, or very fat, or very near-sighted. These are the ones that others avoid. Sometimes others beat them up. Just for being different.

Why are teenagers so hard on each other?

One reason is that they are doing a bad job at figuring out for themselves how to be. Bullies push others around because, deep down, Bullies have done a bad job of finding out how to be. So, when they meet someone who is doing a better job with being different, they try to force them to conform to the Bully's rules or else they kick them out of the in-crowd.

Popular kids are no exception. They seem to have all the friends they want. But inside, they doubt that they are really worth something. In their heart of hearts, they know they work hard to be popular, and other kids buy the act. And a lot of it *is* just an act. The real test of how successful they are as teenagers is how they treat others. Some of those who always take center stage are downright mean to the stagehands -- the less popular kids. They have figured out that one way to stay popular is to make sure that certain other kids stay *unpopular*.

In fifteen years, you will have a much better sense of how to be. Ask any adult who has really grown up (not the adults who still act like teenagers!) It will not be nearly as painful as it is now.

What happens between now and then? Is there something to learn that you don't know about? Are teachers and other adults keeping some secret from you?

The answer is yes. And I will tell you what it is.

You need to understand two things.

The first thing you need to understand is just why it is so difficult to know how to be. You already know *that* it's difficult, but you probably are not sure *why*. If you don't understand *why*, you will start thinking that there's something wrong with you. Secretly you might think you're going crazy. Or that you are naturally bad or ugly. But you are not. Believe it or not, you are good and beautiful. You don't feel convinced about that because you are facing problems you have never faced before and you don't recognize the resources you have for dealing with them.

The second thing you need to learn is what *authenticity* is. You need to learn how to recognize it in yourself. To be your real, best self means being authentic. And being authentic will guarantee you more happiness and fulfillment than anything else -- including popularity or money.

These, then, are the two main reasons why just *being* a teenager is difficult -- you don't yet understand why it is difficult and you don't yet understand how to be authentic.

So first, let me explain why it has become so difficult to know how to be.

Why is it so difficult to know how to be?

Growing up means learning. Everything you know today you had to learn. When you were a child, you learned how to speak a language fluently. You learned how to dress yourself, use the phone, and ride a bike. Maybe you learned how to swim, how to sew, how to whistle.

This learning process goes on in two very different ways. In the first way, you learn things little by little. You gradually add to your vocabulary. You collect various practical skills such as cooking or carpentry. During this learning process, you think mainly in pictures or sounds.

The second way comes later. Sometime around 8-10 years old, you notice that people don't always explain why. You become aware that things have reasons. You ask your teachers about why the school rules forbid blue jeans. You ask why you can't wear an earring. The question keeps coming up: Why? Why? Why?

You also realize that people lie. You have told a few lies yourself. But you have wondered why you lied. It makes you mad when other people lie to you, yet you sometimes find it very difficult in some situations not to lie your

way out. This bothers you: You know the truth but you tell a lie. Or you don't know the truth and so you make up a story. Naturally, you hope that you won't get caught in a lie, but deeper down, you wonder if this is the best way to get along with people. You think, "Wouldn't it be better if everyone just told the truth?" We'd all know what is really going on then. Out loud to others, and silently to yourself, you are constantly asking, Really? Really? Really?

You also notice that people don't always do what they should. You have to include yourself here, since your heart often tells you to do something and you don't do it. You think of phoning the new kid at school but chicken out. You see an injured bird on the grass and you feel you should rescue it before the neighborhood cat sees it. But you don't do anything. Or your heart tells you *not* to do something and there you go, doing it. "I shouldn't eat this seventh slice of pizza," you say. Then, like Garfield the cat, you're eating it. Should I? Should I? Should I?

Or maybe you notice that you keep thinking about certain people. Maybe this boy or that girl. Maybe your parents. Maybe a teacher. Between every two different thoughts, this same thought appears. You are getting obsessed with something or someone. Or maybe you're in love! Deep down, you are wondering who is really on your side, who really respects you, who accepts you as you are, who likes you. Although you don't put it into words, you are constantly wondering, Who? Who? Who?

All these questions can be upsetting. You don't know the answers and so you get disappointed in yourself. You are not always as smart or good as you pretend to be. You are not really in control.

Actually, the news is mostly good because this second kind of learning is a brand-new way of using your head. You have opened a door to a new skill. In the first kind of learning, you added bits of knowledge one at a time, gradually learning more about the world around you. But now you have developed the ability to learn about the world within you. You can watch your mind and heart at work. OK, what you see isn't all that great. But you can see! You can think about how you are using your mind and heart. You can wonder whether you really understand something or are just bluffing. Only a few years ago, you were unable to do this.

This is very different from watching a waiter at work, or an egg-beater at work. This kind of thinking does not focus on pictures or sounds. It does not focus on the data delivered *to* your consciousness by your eyes, ears, taste, touch, and smell. Rather it focuses on the data *of* your own consciousness. It focuses on activities in the mind. These activities cannot be seen or heard. (Did you ever see an *insight*? Ever hear yourself *realizing* something?) They are noticed, first of all, in your *inner* experience. Then you understand what you experienced. Sometimes you *misunderstand*, but after a while,

misunderstandings stand out. They don't make sense with everything else you understand. So you have to reconsider what you first understood.

So here is the basic difficulty. For the first ten years of your life, you used your *imagination* to decide how to be. Some teenagers *imagine* terrible things happening to them. They don't talk about it much; they keep their fears secret. Others *imagine* having wonderful things happening to them, especially things that make other people admire them. They are very image-conscious, which just means that they are deeply concerned about what image of them appears in the imaginations of other people.

But the imagination specializes in what is visible. And the visible is only the surface of your world. The fox in Saint-Exupery's *The Little Prince* said, "What is essential is invisible to the eye. One sees best with the heart." This means that what really counts is something going on *inside* people. By *inside*, I don't mean something visible there, either -- like your stomach digesting food or your heart pumping blood. I mean how you think and feel.

We call these events "spiritual," to distinguish them from physical events. But "spiritual" here does not mean "religious." It just means "in the invisible order." It refers to everything that goes on in your consciousness *after* input from your five external senses.

These spiritual events are what really make a person authentic. The more authentic people are, the more they are concerned with what happens *inside* their hearts and minds. Authentic people do not fake their behavior. They are not paying attention to what impresses you. The behavior you see is what results from them paying attention to these invisible, conscious events.

Now that you are a teenager, you have developed the ability to notice your thinking processes. You know the difference, for example, between really understanding a joke and just pretending. You have learned to name your feelings and to recognize when one feeling starts to overwhelm you. You have entered the world where being authentic is important to you.

But you are still like a child in this invisible world of thinking and feeling. You are just learning how to walk. You are going to fall down. But better to try and fall than to never to walk at all. Better to start learning authenticity now than to limp through life with a crippled spirit.

Let us take a closer look at how the mind and heart really work. The more we understand about these inner events, the better we understand what authenticity is. And the more we understand what authenticity is, the easier it will be to actually become a fully authentic person.

What Authenticity Is

By "authenticity" I mean whatever it is that makes for genuine, real living. I mean that attitude that gives us the best chance of being free of our compulsions. I mean those mental and emotional actions that can free us from the false solutions that people usually cling to.

There are basically only five kinds of inner events that make a person authentic -- five levels of our consciousness that really make a difference in the kind of person you are. Since we are talking about the difficulties teenagers have with knowing how to *be*, we can express these five events as five fundamental ways to *be*.

1. Be attentive

That is, pay attention to what people say. Watch what goes on around you. There are thousands of clues surrounding you all the time, but if you don't notice clues, you won't bother wondering what is going on.

2. Be intelligent

That is, let yourself ask *why* and *how*. By asking these questions, you gradually build up an understanding of the way things work. You catch on to hidden meanings in what people say. You grasp why people act the way they do. You get insight into how to solve problems. If you don't let your intelligence ask questions, you live in a world of chaos. And to the extent that you do not understand the world and the people around you, you only add to the chaos. This is the level of your consciousness that asks, *Why? Why? Why?*

3. Be reasonable.

That is, don't settle for good stories or fanciful dreams. Go for the truth. Face the facts. Not everything people claim is true is really true, and unless you often ask yourself the question whether this or that view is true, you will live in an unreal world. This is the level of your consciousness that asks, *Really? Really? Really?*

4. Be responsible

That is, do what you believe is right. Avoid what you believe is wrong. This means a lot more than obeying rules in school. This means more than not breaking the law. This means listening to your conscience and to the advice of responsible people. This can even mean breaking a law, if that's the right thing to do at the time. At this level you ask, *Should I? Should I? Should I?*

5. Be in love.

That is, stay connected to the people who love you and to the people whom you love. I don't mean romantic love, although that has its

place. Being in love means realizing that you are the child of your parents, that they gave you not only a body but also most of their thoughts and feelings about life. Believe it or not, they hope you put those thoughts and feelings into action better than they have! Being in love also means realizing that love between people is the basis of trust, and unless people trust each other, everyone ends up isolated, suspicious, and afraid. Here, at this top level of your consciousness, you wonder who is connected to you: Who? Who? Who?

These are the fundamental "be-attitudes"; they are more fundamental and far more effective than such making resolutions to "Be careful" or "Be aggressive" or "Be sensitive," and so on.

Yet these are just brief descriptions of the five rules for authenticity. There is a lot more to be said here, so let us look a little closer at how being authentic works out in practice.

Being intelligent, being knowledgeable, being stupid, being ignorant

Being intelligent is mainly about being smart. Really smart. Not smart-assed. I mean being a person who really tries to understand.

Do you know the difference between being knowledgeable and being intelligent? Being knowledgeable means knowing a lot. The knowledgeable boy has a good memory. He has built up a storehouse of information, maybe about batting averages or stamps. The knowledgeable girl has remembered a lot about her areas of interest -- film stars, math formulas, whatever.

Being intelligent does not necessarily mean knowing a lot. It means wondering a lot. It means asking why things work the way they do. It means asking for explanations when you don't understand. The intelligent girl doesn't just obey her parents blindly; she wants to understand the logic behind what they ask her to do. The intelligent boy doesn't just memorize math formulas; he wants to get the insight into why the formula works.

The opposite of being knowledgeable is being ignorant. The opposite of being intelligent is being stupid. Do you see the difference?

Beware of kids who are knowledgeable but stupid. They are the ones who are always throwing out some fact to impress you with what they know. Ask them for an explanation, and they change the subject. Why? Because they *don't understand* what they know. They use the right words, but they don't know anything about causes, reasons or explanations.

But give respect to the kids who are intelligent, even if they are ignorant. Intelligent people let their minds wonder about why things are the way they are. They're not afraid to admit they don't understand something, and the

reason is that they value understanding immensely. Because they really wonder about things, and because they look for answers, in the long run, they will know what is really worth knowing. A good example of this is exchange students. They may act and talk funny, but this is because they are ignorant about our way of life. But are they stupid? On the contrary, the reason they decided to leave their country is usually that they wanted to learn more about another culture. This is raw, tough intelligence at work.

This is the voice in you that says, *Be intelligent*. It's the part of your spirit that always wonders why and how. It's your mind seeking to understand what doesn't yet make any sense to you.

Being Intelligent: Seeing Beyond Your Desires and Fears.

So it's important to let yourself wonder why and how. But be careful. We all have in us certain fears and desires that put blinders on our intelligence. We may be bright but we have tunnel vision because our desires and fears prevent us from being intelligent about things outside certain boundaries set up by our emotions.

Obviously, desires and fears are spiritual events too. But by themselves they do us neither good nor harm. By themselves they make us neither authentic nor inauthentic. Fears and desires are like sights, sounds, smells, textures and tastes. They just occur in us. They pop up without warning. But when they do, our intelligence has a job to do. Just as we use our heads to decide how to use our eyes and ears, we also should assess whether our desires are worth pursuing and whether we should take our spontaneous fears seriously.

For example, imagine a girl who always fears saying the wrong thing. Maybe her parents were too strict on her and punished her for things she said. If a teacher asks her if she thinks King Lear was crazy, she panics. She's not sure. Her mind searches for the answer that will prevent the teacher from criticizing her instead of for what she really thinks. She might have said, "I'm not sure, but King Lear sounded like a desperate person to me." Instead, she says, "No, he wasn't crazy?" -- with a question mark. She's not answering the question; she's testing the teacher for the correct answer. She is using her intelligence to figure out how to avoid embarrassment, not to form an opinion about King Lear's mental state. Her fear is controlling her intelligence, when it should be the other way around.

For another example, imagine a boy who has to write an essay on Hemingway's "Old Man and the Sea." He hopes to get an "A" on the essay -- hopes so intensely that his desires overrule his intelligence. He looks up big words that might impress the teacher. He writes, "The intent of the narrative is to explicate the manners in which the elemental forces of the physical world conspire to overpower the solitary individual." Do you see how his

mind was on his teacher and his grade rather than on Hemingway's story? His strong desire is applying his intelligence to the wrong thing. But suppose he had written, "This story is about how nature can destroy a person." Reading this, we get a very clear idea of what he thinks about the story.

The intelligent teacher will see right through the smoke screen of big words. If the boy is unlucky, he will have an unintelligent (the technical term here is *stupid*) teacher who is impressed more by words than by understanding. That dolt will give him an "A" and only reinforce the impression that words are everything and thoughts are nothing.

For a final example, imagine a girl named Abby who drives to school and picks up three other kids. One of the kids is Jack, a boy she likes. One day, Abby's parents tell her that another boy has moved into the neighborhood and would like to get a ride to school with her too. The trouble is, there isn't enough room in the car. What's worse, her friend Jack could easily get a ride from another girl that likes him. What should Abby do? Her intelligence says that letting Jack go with the other girl is the best for everyone concerned. But her desires and fears tell her to think up reasons why Jack should stay with her. If Abby fights to keep Jack in her car, she is using her intelligence to serve herself alone, not to serve what really makes sense. If she were to continue reserving her intelligence for her own benefit, people will gradually learn that she's the type that will seldom have a good idea for others.

Worse for Abby, if Jack happens to be intelligent and sees what she is up to, he might eventually look for a girl whose intelligence is not so bent by desires and fears, someone whose intelligence is more in charge of her emotions rather than vice versa. Then Abby is out of luck because she followed her fears instead of her intelligence.

The Secret Work of Your Desires and Fears

While it is very important to not let your desires and fears tie down your intelligence, it is also important to be honest about what your desires and fears really are.

Many people never take a hard look at these two emotions -- desires and fears. As a result, they act in weird ways, ways that neither they nor their friends understand. These are the people we call "compulsive." This means is that their actions were mainly the result of the automatic activity of their desires and fears rather than the more consciously governing activity of their minds and hearts.

Desires and fears are like unruly children. When they are not guided by intelligence, the head of the house, they take over that house and run it by their own crazy rules. It is important to see some of the crazy rules that

compulsive people live by. Instead of trying to Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible, and Be in love, they try being something else. I will give nine typical examples. One of them probably fits you to some extent.

- 1. The Perfectionist** is the person who is always correcting things, always pointing out what is wrong, always dissatisfied with the way things are. She acts like a scolding parent, a nasty teacher. The reason she acts this way is that she has not admitted to herself that her *desires* to be happy are completely focused on her surroundings. She thinks that her well-being mainly depends on everything *outside of her* running smoothly. She believes that the best way to be is to "Be *perfect*." She fears that she will be overwhelmed by crud, dirt, and disorder around her. She also fears that her parents or other authorities may not approve her desires. So, instead of saying, "I want," she says, "you should," or "we should," or "they should." The truth is that she doesn't want to look inside and see that her happiness depends on what goes on in her heart.
- 2. The Helper** is the person always being generous to others. He knows everyone's name and is good at getting everyone to like him. His friends often admire him for what seems like selflessness. But in reality he is manipulating people to win their affection. He is not really interested in giving; he gives in order to get. He believes that his well-being depends on how warmly other people take to him. Happiness, to him, is a warm fuzzy. He is convinced that the best way to be is to "Be *friendly*," even when it means pretending to like someone he doesn't like. His desires are all aimed toward having clout in the lives of others, and his fears are about being disliked. However, happiness never comes from having others like you. It's nice, of course, but if you are unhappy because someone out there doesn't seem to love you, then you're looking in the wrong place for how to be.
- 3. The Star** is the born winner. Everything she tries is a smashing success. Everything she wears, everything she says -- they all seem to advertise, "Here is a wonderful, sparkling, accomplished person!" They are the natural salespersons -- selling themselves, mainly. What may come as a surprise to shy people, these achievers are really very anxious and worried. For them, the only way to be is to "Be *successful*." They worry about failure. They won't play any game where they might lose. Even when they mess up, they somehow gloss over their mistakes and point to the good parts. Deep down, they really believe that happiness and success are exactly the same thing. They are profoundly afraid (believe it or not) that their negative features might show. Usually without their noticing, their desires focus on success and their fears focus on failure.

4. **The Romantic** is the delicate, sensitive and neglected soul. He sees life in very dramatic terms. To him, there is no such thing as a small hurt. He longs to share in the fullness of life, but feels that it's usually other people who get the best chance, not him. He is more aware than most people about his desires and fears, but he blows them all out of proportion. He hates living just an ordinary life because he somehow thinks that his life should be an opera. He desires to live more dramatically, to be the magnificent player on some stage. He fears -- and tends to believe -- that he will never be recognized for his true worth until people gather at his funeral and then realize what a great person has been lost. But he too does not know how to be. He thinks he must "*Be special*" or he is nothing at all. His desire to be special and his fear of missing out on life are running the show of his psychology.
5. **The Hoarder** sits in the back, watching. Sometimes she can seem like the smartest kid in the class. You don't get to know her very well because she is holding herself in. She doesn't have many friends, but then she doesn't seem to want many friends. She is collecting knowledge and getting the A's. You would think that doing well in school would make her happy, but she doesn't look especially happy. Actually, in her heart of hearts, she is afraid that something is missing inside her. Like the artist, she is very aware of her desires and fears. But her way of dealing with them is to hold them in, analyze them, gather more knowledge, put off taking action until she's sure. Her fears are stronger than her desires. She fears not having enough, not being enough of a person. She fears that she is empty inside. She desires to fill up, and she pours in a constant stream of information and book learning to make her feel like she has something to contribute. She somehow believes that to be an authentic person, you have to have something to offer. To be is to "*Be prepared.*" But she never feels ready.
6. **The Guardian** is the self-righteous person. They come in three varieties. The *friendly* Guardian sidles up to you so that you won't hurt him. The *cautious* Guardian stands around like a deer ready to bolt at the first sign of danger. The *accusing* Guardian is always telling people what the law is, as if the law is the only protection people have against being hurt. All three forms of Guardian are afraid. Their fears float all over their minds, seeing threats where there is none. They strongly desire security in one form or another, and the three kinds of Guardian seek it in friendship, flight, and law, respectively. They all believe that the best way to be is to "*Be careful.*"
7. **The Planner** is the happy-go-lucky person running around collecting positive experiences. She is light on her feet, quick, and always

cheerful. You love to have her around because she brightens things up. You might wish you could be as carefree, but you will be surprised to learn how afraid she is underneath the smiley face. What she fears is pain, boredom, and ordinary experience -- anything on the down side of life. All her desires are biased in the direction of new and exciting experiences -- travel to foreign lands, the newest movie, the latest book and some exciting subject. She thinks that the best way to be is to "*Be optimistic.*"

8. **The Bully** acts like a lion. He can be lazy for days and suddenly attack a project or other people with ferocious energy. This is why others are afraid of him. He detests boredom (but his intensity can be very boring to others). He gets his energy from fear, although he is barely aware of this. He thinks he is driven by a love of life. What he fears is being hurt, being vulnerable, and so he gets very uneasy when tender feelings come his way -- whether from his own heart or from someone else. To cover over this fear, he looks for intensity in life -- whatever is risky, daring, challenging. For him, the best way to be is to "*Be devouring.*"
9. **The Slug** is practically asleep at the wheel. She has very little awareness of both her desires and her fears. It's as though there's nobody home inside. She fusses with superficial activities, trivia, and projects that go nowhere. She usually fits into a group very well because, having no personality of her own, she will take on the personality that fits in best. She is living off the lives of others. Deep, deep within her heart, deeper than she can see without help, lie a desire to be fully alive and a fear that she is already dead, that it's too late to resurrect this corpse. So she settles for a strategy of to "*Be easy.*" "*No trouble from me!*" Don't let anything ruffle you. Like the possum, play dead and you won't die. This strategy works very well because others people like these peaceful, gentle souls; other people even admire how they never seem to get rattled. Unfortunately, this only makes it that much more difficult for the Slug to look for life in the right place.

If you find that one of these nine descriptions fits you, then you have found two valuable insights. One, perhaps you now have some idea of how you have been looking for life in the wrong place. Maybe you see that you have not been directing your energies in the right direction. Perhaps you are not so convinced that you know how you should act. This is a valuable insight because, without it, you would never wonder what the best way to be really is.

Two, you can now realize that *everyone* is like this. The people you admire for being generous or cheerful or successful are very often driven by

neurotic desires and fears that are driving them nuts. You don't have to admire them after all. And the people you dislike for being pushy, accusing, or secretive -- they too are probably driven by neurotic desires and fears, so you don't really have to be afraid of them. They are not out to hurt you; they are really looking for a way to be happy and they are just plain lost.

Do you see how we are all in this together? All of us, you, your friends, your brothers and sisters, even your parents, your teachers -- everybody -- has difficulty knowing how best to be. We have each worked out a style that we hope will keep us happy, but none of us feels very confident about achieving that happiness.

How to Be

So, how should you be? If you understand why being fully human is so difficult, and if you understand the five basic ways to be authentic, then you can avoid some of the artificial ways of being that many people trap themselves in.

This takes a long time. You will not change overnight. But set yourself goals now. Inner goals. Decide now that as far as you can you will be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and in love. Be determined to avoid the many weird ways of being human that unauthentic people follow. In the meantime, as you struggle with being truly human, you can count on being in love to carry you through. You will make mistakes, but being in love means relying on the forgiveness of others. Being in love even means forgiving yourself.

Most of all, being in love means paying attention to the fact that your consciousness never settles down permanently. Your spirit always wants things to make sense. It always wants to eliminate illusions. It always wants to see the difference between what is just comfortable and what is really the best, even when the best involves discomfort. It always wants to spread its love beyond anyone and everyone it loves today.

When your spirit is successful, then you inject some of that spirit into the world around you. It is a better place because of things you said, things you did, and friends you made. These are all spiritual realities; they are about meaning, about ideas, about love. People will hear your words, but it's your meaning that counts. People might admire the "A" you got in English, but it's your ideas that got you the grade. People might recognize who your friends are, but it's the love in your hearts that makes you friends.

The whole world is like this: physical matter under the control of spiritual events. Or, to put it even better, whatever is significant in the entire world is basically spiritual realities shining through physical manifestations. I'm

speaking of the spiritual realities of family life, loyalty to your country, the achievements we are proud of as well as the failures we regret.

I want to finish with a statement that will probably shock you.

Once you see that reality is more basically spiritual, you can realize what the word "God" really means. It is not some old man in the sky. We talk that way to children because they only have powers of imagination; they have not yet developed the powers of intelligence and reason -- the powers by which we see the invisible.

That "more," the "beyond" which we seek in every human endeavor is what many people call God. But not everyone—especially people who have been shocked at how religions have ruined people. Still, this doesn't mean they aren't in love with that "beyond" that seems to invite them close. Scientists can explain what makes rainbows, but we always feel that there's more to understand when we see them. So we ask artists and poets to point to the "plus" that is in everything – the spiritual dimensions of all reality.

You already love whatever it is that's behind all beauty, order, truth, goodness, and love. You at least feel the question whether this "whatever" is a reality most real, most intelligent, most honest, most good, most loving. Count on that. Count on the fact that your spirit is not your own creation but is some sort of gift to you. This wonder, this relentless asking Why and Whether and Should and Who -- this is the activity of love in you. This is a divine drawstring, gently pulling you to whatever is best. Without this spiritual gift, you would never be able to recognize which religious teachings to follow, which people in history are genuinely holy, and how you might live in a truly sacred manner.

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