

The Messiah Closet

Introduction

I am the Messiah.

Though I might not be the kind of messiah that you have been expecting, nevertheless, I am here.

I am aware that you probably think I belong behind bars or at least in a tight white jacket with my arms fastened safely to my back. I assure you that I have contemplated the risks of coming out of my messianic closet, but risks cannot always stand up against storms of conviction. Just like you, I am what I am and I cannot be anything else. And what I wish, just as you wish, is to be heard and seen for who I really am.

What follows in the coming pages are glimpses into my personal life journey thus far. I have no specific agenda in mind, only to share with you some hints of wisdom that I have received along the way. I will not be teaching you anything new, just gently unearthing that which you already know. You might find in these tales situations that are similar to your own experiences. It is my wish that you do. If you should find inspiration in these words, please do not search for me. Rather close your eyes and look inside. I am already here.

Chapter 1

I remember playing in the backyard. Sitting on the grass with two toy racers in my hands. I was only three years old. Mom had gone inside the house, perhaps to stir up some veggies for Dad's dinner

or maybe to throw in a wash. The two toy cars had just collided, when Whiskers, the family cat, came pouncing toward me with a delightful step. I could see he had something in his mouth, something jerking and bleeding. The guileful kitty stopped in front of me and a frail and frightened bird dropped from its deadly jaws. My little hands pawed at Whiskers, causing him to retreat. The bird lay on the grass, now barely moving.

I stared at the bird and felt the urge. I looked harder at the bird. The pain I first witnessed was slowly becoming a veil and underneath a glimpse of radiance was present. In my mind, I could see the bird begin to move again and sing a twitter of relief. I just knew, NO! I was compelled to reach out and hold the bird in my palms and within moments, my vision became a reality.

As my hands brushed the blood-stained feathers I felt a flowing and warm sensation, as if my hands were immersed beneath a gentle stream on a summer's day. The bird's wings began to flap with increasing strength against my sheltered palms. Chirping rapidly, it called for freedom of release. The bird felt soft to the touch, the moment simple and serene.

“Disgusting, diseased! Put it down. Goodness! What are you doing?” My hands were startled open by the shriek of my mother who had returned to the yard. The bird took immediate flight, over the yard's wooden fence. She ran towards me screaming in hysteria. My shirt was soon clenched within my mother's nervous grasp and I was half pulled, mostly dragged into the bathroom for a thorough scrubbing.

Whenever I reflect on that day I feel the joy and peace of the bird that was healed in my hands and also the fear and anger of being yelled at and misunderstood. This is the first time that I am finding the words to describe my life. Perhaps I was the one who was short-sighted, but I never thought that my parents could comprehend. I did not believe that they could hold that piece of me.

This feeling soon extended to everyone I encountered. I tried talking about my experiences once with my best friend.

“Prove it,” he demanded, “I scraped my knee. Make it go away!”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?” His hands rested on his waste challenging me further.

“I can’t make it happen on my own. It has to happen by itself.” My mind was pleading for him to acknowledge that it was possible.

“Well until I see it, I won’t believe it,” my friend huffed extinguishing my hopes of connecting to him.

After school that day I walked home instead of taking the bus. I felt completely alone and broken. My eyes bounced from face to face of each passing stranger begging for a moment of recognition. No one returned the gaze. A pit of despair was hewed out in the core of my stomach.

Since then I have found the courage to sit with my despair. What I have learned is that loneliness is a source of compassion. It is the depths of sadness and of love; the place where a person’s tears give way to incomprehensible laughter. I am able to glimpse this place in everyone. My only reaction that can follow is one of reaching out and of wanting to fill that void. This is the first lesson I wish to bring to people. We must see one another not as only a face, but also as a space that is filled by our interactions with it. We are responsible for the filling we provide. Fill with love not hate.

Chapter 2

Eventually I learned that the healing did not even need my hands. In the fifth grade, sitting at my desk during math lessons, I heard a sneeze. It echoed in my head and like metal to magnet I zoned in on Susie, a plump, freckle-faced red head, who frequently sported pick tails and red suede shoes. She was squeezing her nose with a tissue and sniffing her round face into a prune. Her eyes were red and watery, fore-head glistening with sweat. I could hear her breathing. It was the only sound in the world. My breath slowly matched pace with hers. I could feel myself expanding and encompassing her body. My toes wiggled in my shoes to affirm that my feet were still firmly planted on the ground, but I certainly was not. I had become the ground, the ceiling, the walls and I was filled with Susie. My mind

poured forth silent words of comfort and prayers for healing.

May Susie's sickness be removed and health and strength fill its place. Like a rubber band reaching its elastic extreme, my consciousness snapped back to its limited center. I relaxed back into my chair, peaceful, breath at ease, amazed. Shifting my gaze back towards Susie, there was a look of bewilderment on her face and with a deep exhale all the tension visibly faded from her, followed by a smile of relief.

The whole class was at odds when Susie was the first one out to the yard for recess time. She explained that she just felt better and that the remedy must have been the candy that Sally gave her when she first arrived at school. I could not deny my experience though, even at such a young age. I had healed her, or at least in part. Her healing came through me.

Chapter 3

I can not make the healing happen. It really happens on its own. It has a will of its own, or a will beyond my own. Throughout my youth I tried to heal people who were ill but nothing ever happened. I would see a person who was blind or looked seriously sick. I allowed my gaze to rest gently upon them, breathing slowly with determined attention. My mind would fill with healing thoughts. What never followed was the presence of healing, not once. <How frustrating to be sitting on a mountain of precious gems and be completely incapable of choosing the recipients.> More than that, my desire to give became so strong and yet, remained unfulfilled. I would often wind up steeped in emotional darkness.

The last being that I tried to heal out of a personal desire was not a person at all, but a tree. It was a beautiful white tree that took root in the front lawn of my house. Its branches stretched up two stories to my window where they would wave greetings to me in the morning and dance shadow puppets on my walls at night. It provided easy footholds to be climbed in the summer and was able to turn invisible against the background of snowy winters. A tree that bore fruit of the most peaceful

memories. And as it turned out, a tree which was sick and needed to be cut down.

As I turned the corner of my block there were people in front of the house with chainsaws and a truck with sharp wood-eating teeth. They had formed a semi-circle of convergence, cornering my tree. Running inside my house I yelled,

“Mom! What is going on out there?”

“Relax dear.” She patted my shoulder with a soft hand. “That old tree is dying and it has to be chopped down.”

“Chopped, what...Down!” My mind hollowed out in shock imagining the empty space my tree would leave. “No. They can’t do this.”

“Oh. Come on. It’s just a tree.” Her feeble attempt at comfort was dismissed by the sound of my feet scurrying up the stairs to my room. I lay on my bed and pictured the tree in my mind. My focus remained intact like a cement barricade. My will was solid.

This tree will be saved! My skin felt thin and hard as bark. I sensed my feet plunging through the house, breaking ground and digging through layers of soothing and nourishing dirt. Each individual strand of my hair seemed to reach out to catch the softly blowing wind, breathing in unseen particles. A current of energy - of renewed life – entered my roots, drawn in from the earth. The feeling was of cleansing strength. My tree was being healed.

As this flow was reaching my stomach, a sensation of heat arose which quickly flared into an unbearable burning. My body jerked wildly on the bed as my hands clasped at my stomach in hope of relieving the pain. It was as if I had swallowed flames and out of these flames snapped a strange voice like lightning splintering a tree to its stump, “Stop! Leave me be!” I was flung from my bed onto the floor with a thud drowned out by the sounds of vicious machinery. My eyes closed, body released and I drowsed beyond dreams to a pit of unconscious sleep.

I awoke a few hours later drenched in sweat. My mother found me on the floor and assumed that I had cried myself to sleep over the loss of the tree. After a few coaxing remarks she left the room.

I rolled onto my back and stared at the ceiling pondering the experience. The conclusion that I reached was that the pain I felt was the pain of the tree, and the voice I heard was the tree choosing its destiny.

With all my heart I still wish to save that tree, but it is not possible. The tree's deepest desire came before mine. This is so for all of us. Each one of us is responsible to want the healing of the planet. The ultimate contribution that each person can make towards the actualization of this dream is to personally contribute to the collective feeling of desire for a more perfect world.

Chapter 4

Aviva was the youngest daughter of a family in whose home I once rented a room. She was the kind of child who liked to dress up in her holiday best even on the weekdays. I believe her unspoken rule was: the more lace, the better. Patten leather shoes often graced her feet and bows galore were adorned head to toe. Always color coordinated, she was often serious, and very curious. She was a young lady well beyond her years in maturity and etiquette.

One Saturday late-afternoon, I was sitting on the wooden steps of the front porch waiting to witness the first hint of the evening's arrival. The crescent moon was already visible in the sky as the sun was leaving its final mark upon the sky's horizon. The air was crisp and warm.

I heard the screen door creak open and slap shut as its springs stretched and recoiled. Aviva had come out of the house and I listened as her soft steps found their way beside me. She plopped down next to me with a deep and full sigh, wearing a child-sized wedding gown. The layers of white lace shrouded her torso making her head appear as a pearl resting on a cloud. She had been evidently crying. Her eyes were puffy and ringed with redness, and there were smears of fresh tears on her pink cheeks. My heart ached with compassion and sadness at this delicate sight.

“What's wrong Aviva?”

“Umm...,” she sniffed, turning towards me to reply, “Mommy said that there are no such things as angels and I want to be an angel when I grow up.”

“No such things as angels!?! But your mommy is an angel herself.”

“*She is?*” She said slowly. Her eyes and mouth opened wide in astonishment.

“Well, don’t *you* think so?”

Aviva pondered for a moment causing her eyebrows to scrunch lower in full concentration.

“Well, Mommy *is* really nice and she *does* like to help people. One time she even bought a sandwich for a man that she didn’t even know. Maybe Mommy *is* an angel.” A broad smile peaked upon her face as her mind caught up to her own words. And as her next thought arose, she looked straight at me ready to challenge.

“But Mommy doesn’t have any wings or a halo, and she doesn’t live in heaven, she lives here, in our house.”

“Good point. But not *all* angels have wings and a halo,” I said. “In fact, I’m not sure that *any* angels have them. I don’t know any angels that do.”

“Then maybe lots more people are really angels and they just don’t know.” Our eyes met in agreement and with playful delight she added, “Just like Mommy.”

“So if people can be angels and angels live in heaven,” I offered, “then maybe that means...”

“...that...*WE LIVE IN HEAVEN?*” Her hand clapped against her open mouth.

“Well yes, but only if people are *being* angels. Then this world just might be heaven.”

“Oh,” she collapsed into deep thought. “Well...then I don’t want to be an angel when I grow up.”

“You don’t?”

“No...I want to be an angel right now.”

Chapter 5

We all have limitations; every single one of us. This lesson came to me in a rather harsh way, though looking back I can only laugh at my extreme naiveté. For a very short time I believed that I could do anything. My fantasies about heralding a perfect world included miracles greater than a

splitting sea. I imagined waking up in the middle of the night glowing with shining silver light, outlined with sapphire blue. No longer needing to walk, I would float out of my bed and coast along the floor. Wherever my thoughts went I would appear. I would think of school, mid-day and I would be in my class. The moment I appeared in the classroom my peers would gasp and then they too would begin to glow with the same radiance. Then following their thoughts, through space and time, there would be a chain reaction towards complete cosmic enlightenment, one being after the other. End of story.

The breaking of my fantastic self-perception occurred with the breaking of my arms. One evening my parents decided that we should watch the first Superman movie. Like most people, I was completely entranced from beginning to end. My heart raced whenever Superman would effortlessly soar through the air.

What freedom.

By the time Lois and Superman were having their infamous flight of love, I was convinced that I too could fly. How else was I to save the world if I did not have the ability to fly? I thought about flying all night long, imagining swooping down to intercept an atomic missile and sending it off into space. The two warring nations would be so amazed by my actions that they would forget their anger and declare immediate peace.

What power.

At 4:30 in the morning the first crack of dawn shot a ray of light through my window. It shined right on my eyes and I believed that it was a sign. I had to try right then. I did not even change out of my pajamas. I figured I would take a quick zip around the block and return to my snuggly nest before my parents' alarm would sound.

Switching off the alarm switch to disarm my window, I removed the screen, opened the window and stepped onto the second floor ledge of my house. Early morning chills crept up my body forming goose bumps on my exposed arms. I took a deep breath and stepped closer to the edge, allowing my toes to extend over the ledge. Another breath brought my arms perpendicular to my body at chest

height. My knees bent slightly and with a final strong and focused breath I sprang forward...

I am sure I heard a wump, followed by a crack or a snap and probably a few screams.

Thankfully, ego defense mechanisms do not allow me to remember more. My next memory is of me in a hospital bed feeling heavily drugged. My arms were set in plaster casts and my neck was supported by a brace. My parents, I later learned, had convinced themselves that I had been dreaming of the movie and had taken a sleep leap off the roof. Luckily, damage was limited to two broken arms and a few twisted and sprained limbs and nobody, at least overtly questioned my sanity.

My time in recovery and physical therapy emphasized for me the importance of creating the miracles that are within my grip. I cannot deny that an instantaneous world shift might be on its way, but I also must fully accept who I am and what I can accomplish with the tools at hand. Part of me wishes to apologize for not being able to fulfill the fantasy of an inexplicable universal transformation; my deepest desire is to do so. But I cannot. I can only hope to inspire the world to begin building our dream existence, one brick at a time. With our super power of being human, let's pave roads of empathy, build bridges of sensitivity, and erect skyscrapers of compassion.

Chapter 6

The mind is so quick to criticize what it perceives and its perception of the self receives no grace. To be aware of this is not menial. Consider what occurs when you are emotionally hurt by someone. The action remains in the past, while the *thoughts* harbored continue to cause pain. Or, at times we act because we do not want others to think we are weak, when in reality no one said that we are weak. This was our own judgment.

The moments when I became aware of how my thoughts were painting my reality are certainly precious. At times they were as simple as taking a breath and realizing, "hey my mind is really stuck on this." On other occasions they had to burst through my consciousness like lightening on a stormy night.

One episode of my life that I consider a true blessing was when I went to see the Dalai Lama

give a lecture. It was held in a huge auditorium and my seat was way in the back, yet the feeling was intimate and friendly. I sat full of childish glee with a white thin-cloth scarf adorning my neck, pen and pad in hand. Of all the beautiful things said that day, only one phrase made it onto my pad. “Emotions are like the ocean, the surface is always changing while the depths stay the same.”

My interpretation of this was that if you’re freaking out there is always a center of calm to be found. And I remained in this center of calm after the lecture as I road the bus to the inter-city bus station and even until I was about to board the next bus. I reached for my wallet and felt nothing in my pocket. An uneasy feeling surfaced that my sanctuary of peace was about to be invaded by a platoon of barbaric warlords. My hands began to work more frantically dipping into pant’s and backpack pockets, searching for the wallet. The situation quickly became a runaway train toward worried hysteria.

I ran up and down the station to information booths, manager offices, and bus driver lounges. After about five dead-end encounters, on the verge of tears, I suddenly stopped and thought. “I can’t believe I did this. I *always* do this.” The words “*always*” rang deep within me and seemed to have summoned another voice, a voice of deep serenity. “Emotions are like the ocean,” it said, “the surface is always changing while the depths stay the same.”

Waves of clarity broke against the shores of my minor case of insanity. “*Always* do this!” I retorted to my mind. “*Always?* I don’t *always* leave my wallet on a bus. Is it my fault that my wallet dropped out my pocket? Am I responsible for the incompatible designs of wallets and pockets?” With my mind finally put in its place I was able to think more clearly. I borrowed money from a bus driver and gave my contact information to a manager in case the wallet turned up.

As I rode the bus home that night, I laid my head against the window allowing the coolness to soothe my remaining frustrations. I reflected on how my thoughts were fueling my panicked state. It was unclear to me where the inspiration to stop and examine came from. What was important though, was that it was possible to examine my thought process and that this practice transformed my outlook from panic to problem solving.

When I started turning my mind on itself regularly I began to realize how much unfounded criticism was present. I noticed that I am often stuck in my self-perception as an awkward teenager unable to face people fully and with confidence. And just as skewed, there are times when I catch myself judging others based on such superficial qualities as the clothing they wear, or the color of their skin.

As of yet, I have found no eternal freedom from thoughts which distort my reality. My answer is gentle diligence in practices of self-awareness. Periodic mental check-ins are a key to liberation of outdated or mistaken thought patterns.

Just as a point of interest and to inspire faith in the kindness of strangers, my wallet was returned to me. A woman found my wallet on the bus and called a number on a paper that was stuffed in it. My friend who received the call connected us and we met the next day for a wallet-for-hug exchange. Blessings to kind people everywhere.

Chapter 7

Heroes come in the most unexpected guises. Generally the people that have touched me deeply, who have provided me with space for profound insight, have not been the muscle men and women of Marvel comics (though admittedly Wolverine has always been a source of inspiration for me). They have been small children like Aviva. Regular people, like toll collectors for example, who always wished me well. Educators who taught me much more than their plan books could hold in writing. One teacher in particular stands out for me as he taught me lessons in his life and in his death.

Specifically, he was a foreign language professor in the university I attended. I took his class for two semesters. He was an older gentleman, in his mid-seventies. Always showing up to class with a smile, he had a particular teaching philosophy. He had no interest in grade numbers, but rather in grade improvement. An initial score of 65 that became a final 75 was as much an A as a consistent 100 percent. You competitive types are probably fuming that this is not fair. Perhaps you are correct, but

this man taught with love and he wanted to give everyone an equal chance to do well in his class. He taught to teach, not for students to memorize for exams. It was though my own grandfather was teaching the class. He would share stories from his past and teach us songs. One day he even brought his own son with family to class, complete with wife and children who rode their scooters around the room for forty-five minutes.

Just as our second semester began his health took a noticeable turn for the worse and he shared with the class that he had been diagnosed with cancer. He continued to allow us into his world, displaying the different containers and contraptions connected to him to supply medication. He would tell us how he was honestly feeling and admitted how important coming to class had become for him. He attended class when he lost his appetite and when he lost his hair. Rain or shine, he would show up until it became physically impossible.

When he could no longer come to class, we would visit him and his wife in their fifth-floor apartment. There would be fifteen students sitting in his living room, a group huddled around him, a group huddled around his wife. Chatting, inquiring, and receiving. He was always reminding each of us how special we were and how proud he was of us. And so it continued until he finally passed on a very still evening in early spring.

Following his family tradition, his body was prepared for burial which would take place on the next day. Throughout the entire night two people had to be present to “watch” his body. His students divided the night into one hour shifts, with at least two of us present at all times. My turn, along with three other students, was from one until two in the morning. We arrived promptly at one to relieve our friends who were watching the hour before.

We sat in a carpeted room with pale blue wall paper striped with equally pale pink. There was a little nook for sitting, with two comfortable sofas separated by a low coffee table. Upon the coffee tables lay a few copies of the Book of Psalms. A fireplace and mantle faced us along with two wall lamps hanging symmetrically at opposite ends of the mantle. To the right a door was about two-thirds

open. The room just beyond the door was a completely different world than the one we were sitting in. It was a room you expect to see in a hospital emergency room, and now I know, in a funeral home as well. The opening allowed for a clear view of his body from head until shoulders, laying on a gurney. Though covered by a *talit*, I was sure it was him by how his nose protruded against the cloth.

My friends and I decided to read some of the passages from the Book of Psalms. We alternated reading paragraphs, carefully reciting the words of praise. When it was my turn to read a strong sense within me bloomed as I was made aware of the presence of his soul filling the room. As I inhaled to gather breath to read, I was taking in his soul. And as I converted this soulful breath into words of prayer, I was shaping his essence into these words.

Glancing up at the wall facing me, it was as if my professor had expanded to become the room. His eyes were the two lamps hanging on the wall, his moustache in place of the mantle, and the fireplace had become his mouth. The spirit of my professor was still alive beyond the limits of his body. It was so clear in that moment. The man that I learned so much from was not just flesh. He was life itself and life lives on, eternally.

The following day, the funeral service commenced on the second-floor sanctuary of a nearby temple. Because of the difficulty to get the coffin upstairs, it remained on the first floor in the lobby. Again, there was a need for two people to watch over the coffin, which I volunteered to be one of them, though this time the reason for guarding exceeded religious obligation.

My professor's funeral happened to be on the same day as the synagogue's charity sale. The downstairs' lobby was packed with tables overflowing with used goods to be sold. The coffin was put off to the side and was separated from the sale by a simple partition. The staff present encouraged people to come through the front door so they would not pass the coffin that lay close to the side entrance. Of course many people did come through the side door, passing a coffin and two men sitting reading prayers. I kept imagining someone coming over to the coffin, and being drawn to its simplistic, yet powerful presence, exclaim, "I must own this rare piece of artwork!"

Surprisingly, and quite shockingly, not one person even hinted a flinch at the coffin's sight. No boggled faces of inquiry or even a smirk of uncomfortable surprise. No reaction. It was as if the coffin, containing my professor's body, was a worthless piece of junk not even worth raising an eyebrow about.

The truth hit me again. My professor was not in this wooden crate. He shed his clothing of flesh and blood and was now occupying a larger container, perhaps the entire universe itself. Realizing this did not dim the sadness I felt after his passing. I needed time to pause and mourn. What it did allow for, and still does, is a continued connection with my professor. Our lessons go on in all my rememberings of how our life paths harmonized during those two semesters. Each time I speak or hear the language he taught I am reminded of him. Still deeper, I feel his presence in each breath as it is shaped into words and are set free into the world.