

Author's forward:

When I was young, I used to get in trouble during Sunday school for arguing with the teachers. My dispute always had to do with a disagreement over what Jesus said or did, as taught according to the Bible. This was San Francisco in the late 1970's, and the grandmotherly volunteers were so patient with me but clearly, they did not like what I had to say or the passion with which I said it. For what I knew to be true was definitely not in alignment with Presbyterian doctrine.

My mother gave up, eventually, and stopped making me go to church. But the frustration I felt about what I saw so clearly to be a misrepresentation of the man called Jesus and his teachings never went away.

At 41, shortly after the birth of my second child, I felt compelled unearth that innate knowledge to see what it was all about. With pen in hand, in a three week time period dictated by my newborn's erratic sleep schedule, this story poured out of me, a story that I was born with in my heart.

-Jacqueline Lloyd September 2009

The Story Of The Seven

Ancient Judea, Circa 150 B.C

I was about six years old when I first met the woman who would become my mother.

Prior to that I was an orphan, and nobody seemed to remember my biological parents or why I had none- adults just said I had been left in this dry, dusty Pharisee Jewish village- a female child left to die or live according to the will of these villagers. To their credit, they took me in. As far back as I could remember I tended to the village animals, the elders had recognized that I had a natural bond with all beasts furred and feathered. Plus, nobody else wanted the job. I slept with the animals, cared for them, gave them medical assistance and lived as one with them. In exchange, I was allowed daily sustenance- eggs from the chickens, milk from the goats, and the clothing I wore was given to me for the sake of modesty by villagers after their children outgrew them. Needless to say, I was always filthy, dressed in rags, with matted hair that had never met a comb. The animals were my family and my friends.

One day, as I was hauling manure from the goat pens to the vegetable garden that I also

labored in, I heard a commotion. A child ran past me, crying, her head bleeding as if she had been struck or fell. The nearby villagers made no move to follow her- they were engaged in conversation with a few strangers. So I dropped what I was carrying and ran after her. I empathized with this young human as I would an animal in distress, and I was angry that the adults didn't seem to care. Little did I know that this small band of visitors who were in our village witnessed my act of kindness, and that the impulse I had changed my life forever.

I caught the child and held her tight, rocking her and wiping the blood from her face until her sobs turned to hiccups, then I carried her back to the village. I found her harried, irritated mother and gave her up wordlessly, then went back to my manure job. As I walked away, I became aware that the band of travelers, two women and a man, were watching me intently.

One of the women followed. She wore a robe that marked her as one of the Essene community, healers that roamed the countryside and traveled to our village periodically for food and shelter in exchange for healing or psychological counseling. Since this village was Pharisee, the adults in the community accepted the healing but didn't particularly care for the philosophy of universal love that came with the counseling. Still, they treated members of this Order with respect because I believe they feared them- the Essenes had a reputation for being more than they let on, and strangeness breeds suspicion.

The Essene woman came up to me and started helping me dump the manure, very kindly asking me what my name was, who my parents were, and about my role in this community. I understood much more than I could speak- I was accustomed to silently following orders from the villagers- and I was well aware that I knew only the barest courtesy. But I wanted to please this nice lady and did the best I could.

She listened to me in a way no one else had. She actually cared what I had to say! Shy at first, I quickly warmed up, especially when she asked about my favorite topic, the animals. She was interested! The words I did know came fast, bubbled up from deep inside of me- here was an adult who actually cared what I had to say. I proudly showed her the kid goats that had recently been born, and mimed how I had saved one of them by being there for the birth to resuscitate it when the mother didn't take interest, and showed her how I guided the baby to its mother and helped it nurse, and clapped with joy to show just how happy I was that he was strong and had survived. I felt she understood me in a way nobody in my entire life ever had.

In time, she took her leave and I saw her return to her companions. They had a similar

presence, an undercurrent of power and wisdom. I saw the normally pompous village elder treat them with deference. Who were these people, I wondered, and why did I feel like I belonged with them?

Then another one of the strangers, an Essene man, came to me. He was different, more detached, but still kind. He asked me about animal care and the herbs I used and plants I tended. When I stumbled for words, he would nod, like he knew what I meant and asked another question. This went on for quite some time, and I was late for the evening feed- the animals grew restless as the sun went low and red. He noticed my distraction and waved me to my duty as he returned to his companions.

I fed automatically, my mind spinning, my heart singing that they were here for me. It took every ounce of will power not to drop everything and run up to them. But then, I saw them leave, taking the road out of our village. I was crushed. That night, I cried into the fur of my animal family, feeling an unthinkable loss. How could I grieve so deeply for something I didn't know? It made no sense, but I was devastated that they didn't take me with them.

A few weeks later, they unexpectedly returned. At first my heart soared, then I stopped myself. I turned sullen, resentful.

The same woman who initially spoke to me tracked me down where I hid among the animals, pretending to be hard at work. I had difficulty meeting that kind, loving gaze through my wall of anger. Up to that point in my life I had been extremely self-sufficient, I didn't need anybody, and that was what I relied on. Their earlier visit had shown me a hole in my life and heart that I never knew existed, a hunger for family, for community, that I had suppressed in order to survive.

And somehow, she knew all of that. "You're angry and sad," she said, kneeling to be at my eye level. "You're angry that we left you behind."

I was instantly wary. How could this woman know my deepest heart? To my horror hot tears sprang into my eyes.

"We're back now," she added. "And if you're willing, I'd like you to come with us."

I just stared at her, wanting to ask why the delay, why they had left me behind, but I didn't want to jeopardize the moment. So I stayed silent.

She said, "I want you to come with us. We will teach you many things, and care for you as one of our own children. Do you agree?"

I didn't want to be hurt again, abandoned far from this village which was the only home I knew if she changed her mind. Dare I leave the life I had, where I had a job and a role I understood, to venture out with this stranger into the unkind and unknown world? I was content here, as long as I didn't think about the void in my heart. I was safe here.

Silence stretched on. She said, "Think it through. We leave at dawn. Think it through and choose wisely, beloved."

I watched her go back to the village, unsure whether to follow my head that said stay and be safe, or my heart that sang go with her!

I didn't sleep at all that night, and as dawn approached, I knew I would go. I gathered my precious belongings, a pretty stone I had found, a coin a villager had given me for doing a special job for him, and made an attempt to clean my clothing in the goats' water. I lovingly stroked all the animals in turn, crying a bit it came time to say goodbye to what I thought of as "my goat", although I was glad I wouldn't be there when they slaughtered him. The village elder stood there with the woman and her companions to see me off. He seemed surprisingly sorry to see me go.

The women and I left after a rather awkward parting with the village elder. I had become accustomed to walking paces behind everybody, and took my usual place. But the woman who had invited me to go along, her name was pronounced AnDehLeh, had me walk next to her. I felt nervous and shy, but also quite bold. I was following my heart, and I felt daring and empowered.

The journey to the community that she called home took several weeks, not because it was far away necessarily, but because we stopped at villages on the way. I quickly learned that these women were healers, of body mind and soul. I would listen to them talk about healing and the people we encountered, the diseased ones they assisted in payment for food, water and shelter. I was fascinated. I watched them work in awe, itching to be a part of the healing they magically provided before my eyes. I wanted to be like them, to assist people like they did. Once in awhile, Andehleh would ask for my help, fetching linens, water, that sort of thing. And I always felt them watching me, appraising me, and oh, I was so eager to please!

One night, I got up the nerve to communicate with Andehleh about her healing arts. I was bursting with questions I couldn't verbalize about a man who was very ill in the abdomen- how she had used her hands and herbs to assist his healing. She told me a little bit about what she did, drew me close into her lap (sheer heaven- I had never had anyone hold me close before like this) and described in basic terms what his problem was and why, explained that the body

naturally wanted to heal but the mind and emotions got in the way, and how she assisted in moving the energy of the wound, the blocks, to healing. I was entranced. I had never met anybody like her, and I wanted to be just like her. I told her, shyly, how I felt. She laughed and hugged me close. “Then you will learn,” she promised me, “you will learn from me and many others.”

For the first time in my life, I knew true joy. I felt like I belonged, and like I had a purpose- healing- and a person to learn from. I would have died for her by the end of that two week journey.

We arrived with little fanfare at her Essene community which was a much bigger village than I had come from. We were greeted warmly by people who saw us come in. They were openly curious and friendly with me, even the children, which was odd because in my old village, the children harassed me, threw rocks at me and called me “goat girl” or at best, ignored me. I was shown her one room hut, told this was where I would sleep, on a wonderfully thick mattress with her, and she showed me where to put my treasures- then she told me I was safe here in this village, to go explore and learn of my surroundings. She left, saying she had to meet with others.

I peeked nervously out of the doorway for awhile, just watching the people go by. Everyone left me alone, although they knew I was in there. After awhile, I had to pee, I was hungry and thirsty and not sure what to do with those needs. A burning bladder finally drove me out of the hut and into the community.

Unsure of what to do or where to go, I approached a group of children who were gardening together. The younger ones were playing while they were gardening, and there was light-heartedness to their business that I found appealing. Their play was friendly, not like in my old village where children would belittle other younger ones, and the males already exerted dominance over the females. I stood a short distance away and watched silently.

One of them, a boy a little older than me but not by much, looked over at me and grinned. I spoke clumsily, asking where I could eat and pee, trying to use manners I hadn’t been taught, social skills I had observed but never practiced. He responded immediately, taking in my filthy appearance with bright curious eyes. He told me his name was Josiah. He took me by the hand and showed me around the community, chatting away, either unaware or indifferent to the fact that I only understood a fraction of what he was saying. He showed me where the communal

restrooms were, and the communal kitchen. We shared pieces of a sweet fruit, spitting seeds while he talked, our legs swinging as we sat on a low wall. I loved him immediately, but I was still wary and not believing his kindness.

He showed me where to wash, and where new clothing was left for everyone, then a chime sounded and he ran off. I scrubbed my dirt stained body furiously, wanting so badly to fit in, and recognizing how much I didn't. I was in awe of how generously this community shared their water. In my old village, every drop was precious and not wasted on washing children. My hair- I couldn't do much about my hair- it was a solid mat of dirt and twigs and that bothered me. The adults I encountered were friendly and helpful as I changed clothes, helping me find an Essene robe that fit and showing me how to secure it properly. They were gentle and respectful of my silence, no one pushed me or badgered me. It was so strange, how differently I was being treated by everyone, and I wondered if I was in a dream.

Night fell, and the community gathered for dinner. That was too much for me, the milling, laughing people. I crept back to Andehleh's hut eyed the bed, wondering at the layers of pretty woven cloth that covered the mattress. Not knowing its purpose, I stretched out carefully on the very edge and fell deeply asleep. I didn't hear Andehleh, my soon to be beloved mother, come back and tuck me in under a blanket.

The next morning I woke to her heating tea over the flame of an oil lamp. She smiled and greeted me, and offered me a cup of tea while she gathered a few foods to break our nighttime fast. I accepted the cup, still shy, full of questions but afraid to communicate them lest this wonderful dream disappear. As she prepared the meal, I attempted to get the mats out of my hair with my fingers, dropping small bits of sticks and leaves as I worked. When she noticed, she asked if I wanted assistance, which I accepted gratefully because all the other children had such shiny hair and I wanted so badly to fit in. She had me sit on her lap, which I did awkwardly (she was so warm and soft!) She stroked sweet smelling oil into my hair so my scalp would not feel the bite of her comb as she patiently worked out every last knot. To my surprise and delight, when she was done I discovered that I actually had long brown hair.

We settled in to break our fast together. I dove on the food like a famished animal- but she stopped me gently. "First, we bless our food," she said. "We thank God, the Source of All That is, for this nourishment, and ask that it be raised to the vibration that best supports our physical and energetic bodies." She showed me how to circle the food with cupped hands, and

how to visualize golden light streaming from my forehead into the meal until it glowed bright. I did as she asked, squinting hard, trying to see that light with everything I was worth. She praised me heartily, and then we ate, and I did my best to follow her instructions to slow down and chew and enjoy the flavors and textures. I learned so much from her so quickly, and the main thing I remember was that she taught me to be patient with myself, to take a humble pride in whatever I did by being fully present and enjoying all the process that made up the moments of my life. I learned most by example, for everything she did was deliberate and elegant, done with the intent to honor life itself.

That first morning, over breakfast, I blurted out that I wanted a job to do, to assist her and the others in their healing work. She asked me what I could do, so I listed and pantomimed my knowledge and abilities with animals, with plants, with vegetables and herbs, but added that I would do anything that was needed, anything at all. As she studied me in silence, my hands balled into fists, fearful of not being good enough, of not having said the one thing she wanted to hear.

When she finally spoke, she said she would assign me to work under the guidance of ones who worked with young children. I was baffled, and a little annoyed because I didn't particularly care for children, rather I regarded them with resentment for what they had that I didn't, and disdain, for I knew well how to survive and earn a living and they didn't have a clue. But I wasn't about to argue with my kind benefactor.

She sent me off to report to duty, which I did with trepidation. Suppose I failed at this task? I knew nothing of children. If I failed, would I be sent away? Oh, how I wished she had given me any other job, even cleaning the sewage pits, anything but children!

I found the area where the children, the young ones of this community, were. They ranged in ages, up to about 5 years old, when they switched to a schooling role. There were only a few 6 year olds, they were considered late bloomers and not ready to move on yet, and were under no pressure to do so either. There were a group of adults in charge, men and women, which I found quite odd because in my old village the men had very little to do with daily child care. There were no infants, as they were still with the mothers. Children came and went, adults would come and take them for awhile, and then return them, adults like mothers, fathers, relatives, friends- it was a very loosely structured program that honored the children's need for socialization, growth and bonding with members of the community, including each other.

As a result, it was a very happy and lively place to work, once I got over my fear of failure and learned to enjoy the children. Mostly, I helped them with imaginary play, which turned out to be very good for me as I had never had the chance to play as a child. Oh, the wisdom of my Andehleh! Working there was a perfect way to simultaneously heal my own childhood and bond with the community as I got to know the children and the adults who came and got them and dropped them off. They all took a kind interest in me and made me feel very welcome, very much a part of them. I was also asked by Andehleh, after a few months, if I would agree to be formally adopted as her daughter. The ceremony during which I was given her surname and bound to her for life was attended and celebrated by the entire community, and it was one of the happiest days of my life.

I worked with the children for many months, until my mother decided I had integrated into the community and learned what I needed to from the children and their care givers, including how to speak! At that point, my formal schooling began. I was assigned to a class with a half dozen other children who were younger than I because I had gotten a late start. There was no caste or class difference between families or the children, they were all given the same opportunities to study and learn.

We started at the basics of schooling. Divine Law included Principles of Universal law, which had nothing to do with the laws of mankind, rather natural cause and effect. We learned about reincarnation, karma, God's unconditional love, and the history of the Earth which included Lemuria and the rise and fall of Atlantis (and yes, both did exist, and the Essenes had records of it). So I spent about a year in this class, and I loved it, discovered a craving for knowledge I didn't know I had. I wanted to learn absolutely everything I could get my hands on and finished the work in about half the time as the other children because I was older and wanted to learn so badly. This was my first taste of the wisdom and education offered by the Essene Order, and I was positively hooked.

They moved me up, to another class, after my "finals" (an English word that comes close) which consisted of speaking before a board of teachers, those involved in testing and teaching the children as they learned. They asked me questions, and I was nervous at first, but beyond that, excited at the prospect of moving to a higher level of teaching, with more complex and more involved material. I could see that they were pleased by my enthusiasm and how I had, on my own, gone and learned more about certain areas that interested me. I passed and they

promoted me to the next class level.

And so it went for years. I continued to excel simply because of my enthusiasm. Everyone was supportive when I asked for more information, and worked hard to provide me with whatever I sought. I studied late into the nights because I was fascinated with the wisdom the Essenes possessed- they had copies of ancient scrolls which I devoured, and wise and learned teachers who had studied in other communities, and other societies as well. In the annals of history, I found what I came to call “the golden thread”, evidence that throughout time, indeed back to the beginning of time itself, souls dedicated to God would incarnate on the Earth to wake humanity from its illusion, to deliver messages of a truth of Oneness with God and all life that was forgotten. It became my passion to trace that golden thread, uncovering God at work through human hands in a world where the illusion of separation was the rampant belief. And in my heart, I pledged my life to become a strand in that golden thread.

I had chores around the community, my part in the well being and functioning of the whole, but those grew less as it became clear that I really wanted to be a teacher and a scholar. I had made friends in my classes too, and Josiah, the boy who was my very first friend in my entire life, the boy who had shown me around my first day, was my close friend.

There came a point in every young adult’s life, at around thirteen years of age, when they were expected to choose what role they would hold in the social fabric of this community, at least for a time- it was understood that that role could change because people evolve. What was each one’s calling?

There was a lot of community support in this process, mentors would step forward and offer assistance, apprenticeship, whatever was needed. Meetings with teachers were held, roundtable discussions with family and friends. This was a joyful time in a young adult’s life, with much celebration as a child made the transition to a formal stakeholder in the community. Young adults who were not clear on their path were encouraged to make a journey into the desert alone, to search the heart for what they wanted to contribute to the whole. Because, it was understood that souls came to this dimension to be and to share from the heart, and to learn and to participate in a community from the heart.

At the time of my own transition to adulthood, I knew my path. I would be a scholar, and a teacher of children. I was happy and empowered. I knew my purpose. I met with my teachers and mentors, and explained my intent with my usual enthusiasm and boundless energy. I wanted,

I explained, to give back to this community by sharing and teaching the next generation. I saw myself as holder of the knowledge and wisdom that had been passed from one age to the next since time began, which was one of the sacred duties of the Essenes.

At my (graduation) conference, there were teachers I loved and had studied with, my mother whom I loved more than life itself, and she sat a ways apart with a man I knew simply as the Master Yonis. They were both silent throughout the conversation, but my mother watched with love and affectionate pride. Knowing that she was proud of me made me feel, in that moment, that I was honoring her decision years ago to take me in, a dirty, half animal that no one else wanted.

The Master Yonis was wearing a blue robe that identified him as one of the Essenes who taught and guided the whole. They would meet en masse once or twice a year or as circumstances warranted, and to my knowledge at that time, they travelled between Essene communities scattered across the Middle East. Some of the blue robes were what would now be called Ascended Masters, and I was in awe of them, their wisdom, their presence, and the universal power that fairly glowed around them. My mother had told me that Yonis and the others like him were holders of the body of arcane knowledge that had been passed down from Lemuria onward. Secretly, I longed to be like them, to know all that they knew, to do what they could do, but I didn't bother to ask how one might set about accomplishing that because they were **different**. They were Masters. They had attained a level of wisdom on this earth that I didn't think I could ever achieve, although the teachings of the Essenes said very clearly otherwise!

I felt Master Yonis watching me, as if he read my very soul, but when I glanced over I just saw an impassive, mildly interested expression. Anyway, I just figured a blue robe was at every young adult's (graduation) conference and didn't think any more of it.

By the end of that conference, it was settled. My teachers all agreed that I would follow in their footsteps. Everyone was pleased. It was, we all thought, a simple decision because my clarity and determination made no one hesitate or question my choice. I would work closely with each of them, shadowing them, learning what they did, how they did it and why- and I would do this to complete my education. We ended the conference with, what in this modern day might be said, "You're hired. You start Monday".

I thanked them all, promised to honor them with the utmost of effort and dedication- to

which they all said they knew I would, and that they were very pleased. As we were closing the conference, I saw my beloved mother and Master Yonis simply walk out of the room again, without uttering a word. I thought it was odd, but what did I know? It seemed like that didn't really matter. But in retrospect, this was the second time my entire life changed course without my being aware of it.

I ran home to our hut, flushed and triumphant, after sharing my joy with my friends. They were all happy for me to have my calling so clear and cemented. I wanted to celebrate with my mother, and I anxiously waited for her to come back to our hut. I was bursting with joy, wanting to shower love on the one who I owed my life and all my success.

I waited for hours. I periodically went to check the usual places she might be, but didn't see her anywhere. My beloved mother did this periodically, disappeared for a little while - and I never knew where she went or what she did, and I never had the nerve to question her. She eventually returned to our hut with a warm smile and gave me a huge hug. She told me how proud she was of me, waved off my attempts to tell her that I owed everything I was to her, then her mood turned somber and she sat me down.

Very loving, very sincere, she asked me if I had considered doing a vision quest to search my heart for my next step in life. I was shocked, said no, not at all- I felt no confusion or hesitation, this decision was as clear as could be, I was to be a teacher, a scholar, I loved the wisdom and working with children and books and scrolls. That was where I belonged.

She said she wanted me to do a vision quest, to go out into the desert for three days and three nights, by myself, to examine my heart and my decision, whether they were in harmony.

I was silent. Appalled. She had rarely asked me to do anything in all the years she had cared for me as her blood born daughter, so I didn't dare refuse. I was also perplexed. How much clearer did one need to be about their pathway? But- to honor her and her wisdom, I agreed, although in a deliberately hesitant tone to show my reluctance- which she completely ignored. "Wonderful!" she exclaimed. "You leave at dawn."

Truth be told, I was terrified. A friend of mine had gone on a vision quest last season and had never returned. Searchers eventually found his body- he had been bitten in his sleep by a deadly adder snake. Now, I trusted my mother, but I was completely freaked out. I hadn't been alone since she rescued me from the village many years ago. I didn't tell her how I felt was because I didn't want her to think I was rebelling, or worse, questioning her wisdom and

judgment. I didn't sleep well at all that night- I was scared and even more upset that she was doubting my decision to be a scholar and a teacher.

But I rose before dawn, packed a few things into my travelling robe that had a hood to protect against sun and wind blown sand, and deep pockets sewn on the inside. I gathered some dried fruit and nuts, and filled an oilskin with water. I made a lot of noise as I packed, hoping she would wake up to wish me a successful journey. I had a lot of questions for her too, questions that had boiled in my sleepless mind, questions born in a night of doubt and fear. Where should I go? Where would I find water, or food? What are the rules for this vision quest? Did I **have** to wait three days and three nights before I could come back? And what about the snakes?

But she didn't stir. Normally, she was a light sleeper, always in tune to my movements so I do think she faked it, but didn't dare test my theory. With a heavy heart and heavier step, I left our hut, in a moment of self-pitying drama I stopped to look back, wondering if I would ever see my home again.

I walked slowly through the community, heading toward the road that led out into the desert, hoping to see someone who might stop me and ask me what manner of insane quest I was embarking on, someone who knew how clear I was on my purpose and pathway as a teacher and scholar. I would have settled for anybody that I could ask for advice or guidance. The village was strangely empty. I considered dallying in hope that someone would emerge from their hut- but then I thought of how crummy I would feel if my mother found me standing around after dawn.

So I took the road out of town that led into the desert, as I had been instructed. I walked all morning. The first few hours, I was sad, and self-pitying, and very lost for an explanation of why my beloved mother had asked this of me. As the burning desert sun climbed high into the sky to bake me and the land, I became irritated. This was all wrong. I had done my part- I followed their rules, studied my ass off, excelled in all their stupid tests- and here I was, cooking in the desert, banished for three days, risking death by snakes! I had done everything my mother and teachers had asked of me, and so much more. Why was I being punished?

By the time it was a few hours past the sun's peak, I was exhausted, thirsty beyond belief, hungry, and **pissed**. I decided to stop and take a break, eat what I had brought and drink my water, then head back to the village. I would just tell her thanks but no thanks, I needed to start

work with my teachers- my life is set, my path is clear.

I found a tiny bit of shade cast by a sandstone outcropping. After checking carefully for snakes or scorpions, I flung myself down and savagely opened my robe to find my food, realizing I hadn't taken much, hadn't considered my preparation for this journey well at all. But it didn't matter, I was on my way back home. Still, I savored each bite and made it last.

As I sat in the growing bit of shade, I calmed myself with the pattern of deep, even breathing that I had been taught- what every child was taught to diffuse stress and block negativity. I settled into my breathing and reached out to my spirit guides for comfort and safety and security, something else all children were taught. Slowly, I began to shift. First deep inside of me, where a peace built in my heart and slowly spread. Relaxed now, I opened my eyes and saw the desert from this new state of peace and awareness.

As I watched through half closed eyes, the desert breathed around me. I saw a lone vulture wheeling overhead, and a lizard pause in my precious shade. There was, I realized, immense power and presence inherent in the land around me, devoid of even a trace of humanity. This was the power and presence of God, the source of life and All That Is, which felt awesome and humbling and comforting all at once. I decided, as father sun completed his journey across the sky, to spend the night where I was. I started to realize my mother's wisdom in suggesting I come out here- while I sure didn't expect my decision to change, I was now appreciating this opportunity to let go and be at one and at peace in a way that was difficult in my daily life.

Night overtook the desert. The stars were phenomenal. I sat in my spot still, only marginally on alert for snakes. I saw a scorpion but not much else. I began to lose touch with my body, as though I had shifted out of my sense of "I" and merged with something much greater. I must have dozed off in that state of meditation because I awoke with a start and noticed the false dawn heralding father sun's journey about to begin again.

I drank some of my precious water and ate some nuts, chewing slowly, like it was the first time that I had ever eaten. I gave thanks to God, the source of life and All That Is, grateful for the nourishment so that I may simply **be**. I existed because life expressed life, life expressed itself in infinite forms and energies that also included me. It was a powerful sunrise. I felt the desert inhale around me, soaking in sun's first rays. I understood on a deep, atomic level how the sun was also life expressing life, how the sun was part of the cycle of God, how the sun was of me and I was of him and neither was separate from the other.

Still in that profound sense of oneness and reverence for my simple beingness, I rose from my spot. I gave thanks to the sandstone outcropping for the giving of itself and the shade I had rested in, for providing a haven and supporting my transition to this state of peace. Then I gathered my things and walked on, not home, but deeper into the desert, seeking more of what I had found, this incredible sense of divine belonging to all of life that filled every fiber and cell of my self.

Through heat I barely felt, I walked on. I was in a trance, simultaneously aware of everything and nothing. I had no purpose, no destination, no goal and no thought. I just walked in the desert. For how long, I don't really know- but night fell and still I walked until I found myself stopping.

By the light of the moon, I could see a small structure by an ancient hand dug well. The structure was a tiny cave of sorts, built around a natural indentation in sandstone that had been fortified and enlarged by rocks which people had lovingly carried over eons of time to create a sanctuary. But I could sense that no one had been there for a long time, and the well was dry.

I ducked through the entry way of the sanctuary with a feeling of awe, silently honoring those who had passed on ages ago after creating this haven in the desert for travelers just like myself, leaving this tender mark on the great Earth where they had been. I lay down and drank the last of my water and fell into a deep sleep.

I dreamed that I walked amongst the stars. The stars stretched to infinity everywhere around me, even below me, past my feet. I was them, and they were me. I was as infinite as the intent that had created life, and I simply was.

As I floated in a field of infinity, I came across a being. He pulled me to him, or I pulled him to me, like gravity. It was the Master Yonis, the one who had attended my conference. I recognized him from his blue eyes, which shone with light and power and wisdom.

You have a choice to make, he told me. Two paths. One path leads this direction.

I looked where he showed me, and I felt an orderly, organized existence as the teacher and scholar. It felt limited, controlled, like a pasture fence holds animals in place. I could peruse this lifetime with ease. I got married and had two children. And I could feel that I was happy- but only to a point. I felt like I wasn't complete, like I had missed something. My mind attempted to understand it- I wanted to travel, and didn't do much of that. I wanted to see the world, but didn't. Sensing that wasn't quite right, not the whole story, I puzzled over this sense

of longing for something I did not know, a restlessness that came from deep inside of me. There was some way I wasn't fulfilled, almost like living only half way.

Then I went to look at the other path Master Yonis showed me. It was blocked by a gate, about chest high, shining gold, but simple and not ornate. I tried to open it- because I was intrigued by the expansiveness and infinite power I felt beyond- but the gate didn't budge. I looked to the Master for an explanation, and he said, "That choice requires commitment. Then the gate will open for you."

Disappointed, I turned back from the intriguing gate, then looked back at the orderly scholar's life, which now seemed almost bleak in comparison.

At this point, I wasn't at all sure about my chosen life as a teacher and scholar. I was also unclear what to do about it since I had already committed to my teachers and felt locked into that life. My thoughts surged toward the Master Yonis with doubt and questions, where was this gate in life and how do I find it, wouldn't my teachers be disappointed, what was I to do now, what next?

He returned my gaze steadily and with compassion. "If you choose to seek the other pathway, you will find it. If you choose to continue with the life you have already set in motion, you will find that, and the gate with what lies beyond will remain hidden from you. The choice is entirely yours. But- choose wisely, my friend. Choose wisely."

And with that, the dream dissolved. I popped awake in my little sanctuary in the middle of the desert.

Judging from the sun's position in the sky, it was mid morning. I allowed myself a few minutes to breathe deeply and reflect. Even in a waking state, I could still feel the clarity of the two paths, the limitation of the first one, and the power and expansiveness of the path guarded by that golden gate. And as I sat and looked out at the morning, my mind filled again with questions.

What was this second path that required commitment? Was this the golden thread? In my life, I had not been presented with any options that resembled a life with that power and freedom. And if I did seek it, would I severely disappoint my teachers who I had committed to, and who had committed to me? What would my beloved mother say about all of this? Would she be disappointed too? Although I was starting to believe she knew of this second path, both because she sat with Master Yonis at my conference and after all, it was she who set my feet on this

journey of inner discovery.

I decided, in that moment, to return home even though I had only spent two nights and not three, as she had instructed. I did feel that I had received the wisdom which was the point of the journey, and now I was to return home and make my choice.

In truth, my mind and heart were already made up. I **would** seek that second path, and find that gate, if it were at all possible, even though I hadn't the faintest idea of where to start my search. I just had to.

I squeezed the last drop of water out of the oilskin, which did little to quench my desperate thirst, ducked out of the door to the little sanctuary, turned, and offered my deep, heartfelt thanks to the spot and those who had created it ages ago. As I prepared to leave, I realized I had no food and no water. It was already burning hot- and I had a long journey home. But I felt no fear- I now knew with great certainty that this journey was divinely guided. After all, I had found this sanctuary which was miles from absolutely nothing!

As I stepped down from the plateau where the sanctuary was, I halted in surprise. The ancient well, which I would have sworn was bone dry, held crystal clear water that sparkled in the sunlight. A few steps away, I saw a beautiful bush laden with bright red fruits. Even though I was absolutely positive it had not been there last night either, I knew immediately that the fruit was for me and good to eat, and that the water was also for me.

I laughed out loud with great joy, and sang praise to the Great Spirit of God that provided all with love and support and nourishment. I knelt by the well and filled my oilskin to bursting with the cool, gloriously clear water and drank from a cupped hand until my belly felt full. Then I picked as much of the fruit as I could carry, for there seemed to be still more and more on that little bush, and I tucked away some fruit in pocket of my robe for my mother. Giving thanks again, I bit into one of the fruits and grinned up at the sun as the sweet juice ran down my hand. It was the best fruit I had ever tasted.

Fully satisfied and energized, I again thanked this place and all it had provided me, I thanked God, and promised in my heart that I would not rest until I found that expansive pathway, even if it took the rest of my life and I died trying. Surely it symbolized the golden thread that I had pledged my life to as a child! Happy and excited, I set on the path away from the sun, following my footsteps that would lead me back home.

I went East, drinking in the beauty of the desert and the connectedness of everything out

there, wondering why I had been so afraid of the desert- it was pure magic. I wasn't even startled when a deadly cobra slithered across the path in front of me. We were, after all, one and the same, not separate from each other. As I walked, finding the expansion that lay beyond that gate, and the golden thread, became a solid goal that merged completely my heart and soul- soon, I couldn't even conceive of taking the life of a teacher and scholar.

I must have been in a trance because the next thing I knew, our community was coming up fast in my path. I reached it as night was falling, and made a beeline for our hut, hoping my mother would be there. On my way through our village, I saw a teacher I had committed to. He smiled and said essentially I'll see you Monday, when you start work with me.

I stopped in my tracks, suddenly afraid of the reality that I was going to disappoint him. It was a moment of truth, do I demonstrate my commitment to the gate path or surrender to the life that I had already set in motion?

Without a word I ran, leaving him to stare after me. I didn't know what to say or how to handle it, and I was ashamed at my cowardice but this had never happened before. I always honored my word, and did what I agreed to do. Later, I understood this to be an important part of the rite of passage from child to adult, making decisions from the heart and following through no matter what- but at the time it seemed like the end of my world. The idea of disappointing those who had taken me in and loved me, fed me and clothed me, raised me and educated me as one of their own- I was flattened by dread and grief.

I ran straight to the hut I shared with my mother. She was sitting at our little table, with tea for two and a snack, like she knew I was about to arrive. I looked at her, panting and out of breath, feeling a wave of emotions crashing down on me. Fear, the excitement of discovery and insight, the dread of disappointing those I loved and respected- I blurted out that I was sorry I dishonored her by coming back a day early, which I now regretted. The insight and clarity I had in the desert diminished greatly with the encounter of my teacher!

"Beloved daughter of my heart", she said gently, "you have been gone three days and three nights."

How could that be? I clearly remembered only spending two nights in the desert. Not knowing what to say, I chose the obvious. "I have a big problem."

She looked at me carefully, with her usual kind smile. "Sit down, beloved. Have your tea, and tell me what happened."

So I did. I told her the whole story, even the parts where I doubted her wisdom in sending me out there. I told her everything, because I always had- she listened without comment or judgment, just poured me a second cup of tea when I finished the first, her expression empty except for simple love.

I got to the end of my tale, and told about the dry well with crystal clear water and the nearby bush that offered me fruit when there should have been none. I dug into my robe for the three pieces of fruit I brought for her, and added the four I had not eaten on my journey. I laid them in front of her like it was an offering for a goddess, which is exactly how I thought of her. Her eyes widened slightly as she saw the fruit. She reached out and touched one of the seven polished red plums, then studied them wordlessly.

The moments dragged on. I tried to sense her reaction from her energy, but couldn't- a wall had come down and she was unreadable. I loved this woman with every bit of my being, loved her and would die for her if she but asked me to. The idea that I would disappoint her was unfathomable.

Breaking the silence, tears burning in my eyes, I said, "I don't know what to do. I saw Mikalas (my teacher) on the way in and I suddenly felt awful. I feel like I'm disappointing them. But I have to follow my vision. Mother, what should I do?"

She finally looked up at me, and I was taken aback- her eyes shone with unabashed pride. "Honor your heart, is what I suggest," she replied, taking the fruit and tucking it into her robe. "Find the gate. Tell your teachers what occurred on your quest, and be without fear. Fear is the beginning of true death, beloved, death of the heart. Honor your calling. That is what I suggest."

"But I don't know where to find this gate! Does it really exist? Or what does it mean? Where can I find one who will show me?"

"Ask Yonis," she said simply. "Was he not the one in your vision?"

I paused, hesitant. After all, Master Yonis was one of the most powerful and wise people who walked this land. My mother and I would attend his teachings every chance we got, and I would see my own teachers there as well. He was rumored to be a member of the mysterious Order of Melchizedek- a group of ageless Masters who roamed time and space, holding the consciousness of unconditional love, the love of the true God and All That Is. Once or twice I had even heard he was a member of the Order With No Name, which was even more obscure,

their purpose unknown to all except members. I was supposed to march up to him and demand that he show me a golden gate? He would think I was mad!

But I swallowed hard, and nodded. Of course, I would talk to my teachers first, free myself of obligation to them, then find Master Yonis wherever he was on God's vast earth, and talk to him. I simply had to.

My beloved mother smiled. She said, "I love you more than you will ever know. You fill me with such joy and pride, and I give thanks every day that you came into my life. Fear not, beloved. Your pathway must be honored." Then she stood and bowed to me. "Welcome to adulthood." (That translation isn't accurate, what she said was more like, Namaste to your new self.)

I sat alone with my thoughts for awhile, but I knew what I had to do. There was no point in delaying.

One by one, I sought out the teachers that I had committed my life to. I told them my story of my quest and spoke simply, from the heart. They all let me tell my tale without interrupting, for that was the Essene way, regardless of how much better I would have felt if they had cut my story short, said they understood, and let me off the hook! But, one by one they said they supported me in my choice. Only the last one questioned me, and rather intensely at that. How did I know this was a vision and not a product of some desert delirium? What was my plan? How did I know that this was the right choice? He was not rude or angry, but very persistent, asking questions until he was satisfied. And he did me a favor too, because after our talk I knew with absolute certainty that I was on the right track.

Then I walked to where the Master Yonis stayed when he was in our community, an area set up in our village for visitors, near the library. I did not expect him to be there, but I hoped to find someone who would know when he would return or where I might find him. As I neared the guest quarters, a little nicer than ours but essentially the same, I passed my mother. I stopped to ask her what she was doing here, but she simply smiled and kept on walking. I found a woman who also wore a blue robe, and asked when the Master Yonis would be back, expecting to be questioned or turned away. To my surprise, she pointed and said he was inside the quarters that he usually stayed in when he visited.

I gathered my courage and asked to enter, heard something like a distracted grunt of permission from inside. The Master Yonis was standing by a shelf with books and artifacts. He

turned at me with raised eyebrows, an expectant look. He wasn't unkind, but clearly not in the mood for chitchat. I faltered a bit, having taken courage in the idea that my mother had been here a moment ago, sure she had told him I would be coming, and why. If she had, he gave no sign. When I fumbled in an uncomfortable silence, he said something to the point of, Well? What do you want?

That was almost my undoing- this man truly was a living god in my eyes- but I took a deep breath and told my story. When I got to the part of my vision, I said shyly, "and you were there. You told me I had a choice to make, one path the scholar, the other path marked by a golden gate that felt infinite and all expansive. You told me to choose wisely, that the gate required commitment, and so I have excused myself from the obligation to my teachers and now seek the golden gate." With that I fell silent and waited, hoping he would respond favorably, and show approval of the courage and insight it took to get this far!

Instead, he looked at me with a flash of impatience. "And what of it?"

I was startled, then truly afraid. What if I had created this whole scenario, this delusion of gates and stars and pathways? What if it had indeed been a product of desert heat and dehydration? The Master did not seem at all impressed by my vision, or even willing to acknowledge that it had merit. In fact, he seemed downright irritated that I had interrupted him.

Wracked with uncertainty, I felt the heat of embarrassment burn my cheeks. I began to turn away, intending to flee from this house, track down my teachers and apologize, say what-oops?- begging them to take me back into their fold.

But then I remembered the discontent I had felt in that orderly scholar's life, how going back now would condemn me to an unfulfilling existence. The life as a scholar I thought I had wanted with such certainty, was a life worse than death. That much I knew for sure.

So I turned back to him, where he had already busied himself with whatever he had been doing before my arrival, and I spoke clearly. "Master Yonis, I am seeking the path marked by a golden gate, a path that leads to a merging with God. If you can point me the way to that life, I would be very grateful."

He stopped what he was doing. Mildly, he said, "And if I do not?"

"Then I will keep seeking until I find it." I answered without thought- for this response truly came from my soul.

He studied me in silence for what felt like an eternity. Finally, he said, "Come back

tomorrow. Your work will begin. Good day, sister.”

Grinning from ear to ear, I bowed deeply, repeatedly, thanking him and bowing over and over until he waved me out of his room with a small smile.

The next day I arose before dawn, did my morning meditation and broke my fast, then dressed thoughtfully, taking extra care in my grooming, preparing for my first day of work with the Master Yonis, marveling at how easy uncovering this pathway had been, and how fantastically lucky I was to be the apprentice of the great Master teacher Yonis himself! I trotted through the village and presented myself inside his quarters. To my surprise, a blue robe woman stood there. Master Yonis was nowhere to be seen.

“I seek the Master Yonis,” I said to her, “He instructed me to start work this morning. With him,” I added, just so there would be absolutely no confusion.

“He told me,” she replied. “Come with me.” She took me to a room where other young adults around my age waited. She introduced me to the group, whom I already knew for they had been classmates of mine previously, and said we would be in class together, starting today. I was glad to see that one of the students was my best friend Josiah, who beamed at me in greeting. Josiah was an outspoken and confident teen, tall and lanky, eager to partake of life and all it had to offer. He also, I thought, tended to have a high opinion of himself- (a trait he eventually outgrew) but I loved him nonetheless- he was my very first friend in this life, from the moment he showed me around my new home.

But--- I was more than a little confused, and very disappointed. I expected Master Yonis and an introduction to the golden gate, the mysterious golden thread, to the permanent merging of my essence with God. I didn’t want a class, didn’t want this woman as a teacher, although she seemed pleasant enough. Since I didn’t know what else to do, I simply sat down with the others.

Class went on for months with no sign of the Master Yonis. I learned more in depth how universal law worked, essentially how the love and wisdom and intelligence of God gave shape and form to the expression of life. Josiah and I stood out in the class as adept students- we both had an innate understanding of this topic, drawing on the wisdom that lived within our hearts- and we were challenged to hone that ability. We spent almost a year in this class, being tested on our abilities to draw on inner knowing, for therein truly was the deeper understanding of God’s law, and unlike man’s law, it was not a set of rules that could be memorized and regurgitated. Josiah and I demonstrated skill in this subject, as I said, although we went about it differently.

He used his big energy and charisma to tell a masterful story that illustrated a principle, then he would challenge the **teacher** to disprove or decipher the message, which was always profound. He was bold, and he was brilliant! I was softer and more factual, and would draw on history for examples, using passion and natural enthusiasm to deliver my point in a way that listeners understood a concept on a new level. This was a raw talent and ability of mine that was refined, tested by fire, and ultimately encouraged during class.

Josiah and I became fast friends as we studied together. He called me little sister, and would play pranks on me. He tried to get me to lighten up, and I tried to ground him in the history and wisdom of the scrolls in the library. We had a good rapport based on something essentially indescribable- we knew the same wisdom, and it came from the same source, the God force that lived in each and every one, and it was just a matter of two personalities expressing knowingness in very different ways.

One day, we agreed a big test was coming. We could feel it. Although we were never told when we would be tested, we had learned to sense it, so we set about helping each other prepare, debating back and forth, changing sides of an argument to make sure we had no beliefs that stood in our way of truth. We arrived for class, and the room was empty. The others were gone. Our teacher said, you're moving on. Report to Master Nechemya for further instruction.

So, there was no test, because we had tested ourselves- apparently all our late night studying and debating had not gone unnoticed. Josiah and I congratulated each other, celebrated for just a moment with a promise to properly kick up our heels after class, and we tracked down our next class.

Here, we were taught rudimentary healing, use of herbs, karma based dis-ease, human energy systems and how to identify the source of a person's dis-ease in a very basic way. Healing, we were taught, was, in simple terms, a matter of changing the negative energy and trauma of an event into a positive one. Parts of this class, Josiah struggled with- mostly because his attitude with people who were sick (ones at dis-ease with themselves) was- "get over it!" He couldn't fathom why a person would suffer for lifetimes instead of simply releasing whatever block or belief caused the illness in the first place. I was more compassionate by nature, so I fared better. He relied on me to help him understand why people were who they were, and in teaching him it showed me to be a natural healer. This pleased my beloved mother, and I was so glad! We studied until we mastered the body's energy grids (the ones we were taught), and the

interlinked systems of the body that were the focus of this type of healing we were learning. I discovered that my compassion gave me an extra edge because I found it easy to pinpoint what belief, or negative or repressed emotion was the source of disharmony in the body.

Again, came the day when we arrived for class to find the other students gone. Again, the teacher said we had learned all that he had to teach us, and we were to report to another teacher in another area. Again, Josiah and I congratulated each other on our way to the next class and celebrated quietly (although his relief at passing this class was enormous!) This new teacher's room was loaded with dried herbs, plants and flowers of every shape and size and scent, many which did not grow wild in this part of the world and were completely foreign to me. We spent a fair amount of time in the community's gardens, learning how to identify and use the various healing plants and all about how to honor and support a plant's entire life process from seed to life giving medicine. This included assisting the plant's energy, what would now be termed composting and soil amendment, how and when to plant according to the cycles of the moon and natural rhythms of the Earth, using color, sound, energy and intent properly (without forcing the plant to accept a general method of care, but recognizing each as an individual being). And again, this was so much more than memorizing facts, we learned to sense what a particular plant needed and required to flourish into a powerful life giving entity. I enjoyed this class tremendously, as did Josiah. It required intuition and knowingness of the heart- which made us both thrive as we exercised and honed these abilities.

A year later, we moved on yet again. This next class was what in modern terms would be considered Anthropology, for it was the study of human cultural systems and human societies, what succeeded and what failed, which systems since time began supported the individual and which existed for the purposes of control for the benefit of an elite. Josiah, in this class, was astounding. **This**, we discovered, was his forte, seeing clearly what didn't work and why. And in this particular class, my compassion was a hindrance because I could easily understand why individuals would give up control and it made sense to me because it was comforting. In retrospect, part of me still wanted to give up control of my own destiny, turn my life over to someone or something I perceived had power greater than mine. I also lacked clarity because I had spent the first years of my life in a society that practiced fear of God, and Josiah had grown up in this remarkable community where even infants were taught that they were a sovereign part of the great oneness of all life. So he helped me through this class, and by doing so also honed

his great gift of teaching with stories. He understood on a very deep and powerful level what living under belief systems of separation and limitation did to a person, how it resulted in all manner of dis-ease between the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical bodies as they vied for control instead of harmonized in the Light of God. This was his magnificence, and he was really somebody to watch and listen to when he was tested (and tested he was!) because he would cut to the core of an issue so fast and so cleanly. My mother used to laugh and say Josiah could convince her that water was wine.

We were best friends at this point in our schooling, years of studying together had cemented our already deep bond. And we were late teens by this point, hormones were raging. But we never became anything but best friends, I considered him a soul brother and he called me “little sister” and we never crossed that line. For me, the lifetime as a scholar and teacher of children in my desert vision involved a mate and children, and I was determined to avoid what I considered a trap at all costs.

One day, a beautiful and charming female friend of ours came to me in tears. She wanted to be Josiah’s mate, but he apparently did not return the feelings, other than to fool around, and what we would call dating today. She loved him with all of her being, and he was breaking her heart. She asked me to talk to him, so I agreed. I cornered him one day after he had played some physical game with other boys, and asked him about her. He looked a bit sad and ashamed, I remember that well. He said the problem was not with her, it was the fact that he had pledged his life to a particular path, and a mate was not part of that picture. He added, in an offhand way, that he would not walk this earth for very long in any event, so he chose to remain alone. He was here to do a specific job, not have a mate and children.

He spoke with a faraway look in his eyes, a look I had learned to recognize as Josiah tapping into his higher self, his soul essence. I protested vigorously, not on behalf of the mutual friend’s feelings for him, but because his statement that he would not be here on the Earth for long unnerved me. It had the ring of truth, and the idea of losing my best friend and soul brother upset me very much. I felt real fear for the first time in years. He noticed and flung his arm around my shoulder with a tight hug, an act of affection he reserved only for me. When I still bugged him about the girl, he stopped me with typical Josiah bluntness. “Enough! Is my reason also not why you refuse to bond with another?” Well, he definitely had me there. So I just nodded, and he said he would speak to her and help her understand.

And really, that was the last time he became romantically involved with a woman (that I knew of) I think he realized that he didn't want to break any more hearts. This conversation also cemented my resolve not to get involved with anyone, ever. I wasn't terribly worried about breaking hearts, I worried about my falling in love and abandoning my path.

There came a time of a festival among the blue robes. Leaders from Essene communities were to arrive for a three day conference to discuss and determine in which way the Order should proceed as a community in the face of the Roman threat. Anyone was allowed to attend, because the Essenes were most definitely not elitists. Josiah and I had decided we would perhaps attend part of the conference, but remember, we were teens and actually preferred to have three days off. Besides, the Roman threat of occupation seemed distant and removed from our daily lives, and we were quite content to let the blue robes deal with it.

Our community was thrown into a frenzy of joyful preparation as we readied accommodations for the travelers and food and casks of wine for the feasts. I looked forward to seeing the Master Yonis, for I had caught just glimpses of him in the years that had passed since our meeting. He travelled a lot, and was very elusive- he never, to my knowledge, came or went by use of the roads. It was more like he just appeared out of thin air, did whatever he needed to do, and then disappeared again. This just added to his mystique, and I was quite in awe of him.

We did see the Master Yonis shortly after he arrived with two others who wore robes of a different kind, signifying them as members of some Order I did not know, and they crackled with the same power and God force. He walked past Josiah and I, who were busy cleaning an outside wall with stiff bristled brushes. He passed by me without a word, but he did make eye contact with a faint smile and twinkle in his blue eyes. In retrospect, he was probably saying "nice clean wall" but at the time, I took it to mean he approved of all of my efforts and regarded me as a diligent student of the Light! My heart swelled with pride and I walked on air, reveling in my perception of his approval.

On the first day of the conference, the blue robes arrived, about fifty men and women of great wisdom and universal power. During daylight hours they convened and deliberated in our community's conference hall, which was large by the standards of that age, and partied equally hard at night at the great feasts. Blue robes knew how to celebrate- they were as wise and powerful, but they also well knew how to enjoy the earthly magic of food and drink and the company of beloved companions.

Deep into the third night, Josiah and I withdrew from the rowdy feast to sit quietly together, lounging by a fire pit in our community's residential area and enjoying the distant sounds of celebration. As the noise died down, we assumed the blue robes were going off to bed. Talk turned to our futures, and we traded ideas on which teacher we would be sent to next.

Suddenly, we heard hurried footsteps- a young man who was what would be considered an assistant to the blue robes came up to our cozy spot by the fire. "They want both of you in the conference room," he said. When Josiah and I simply stared, he added, "Now, please."

We jumped up and trotted after him without another word, and I remember smoothing my robe and running my fingers through my long hair, wishing I had time to clean up or put on clean clothes- it didn't seem honoring to show up disheveled!

We followed the page inside the stone building, where the blue robes sat silently in a great circle around the perimeter of the room. All eyes turned toward us. I felt a peculiar weakness in my knees; the combined energy and power of those present filled me with a deep respect and humility. The space felt sacred, like I had walked into the heart of God.

The page instructed us to make our way to the center of the room. I took a deep breath and followed Josiah, then my exhale came as a gasp- I saw my beloved mother, sitting with a soft, regal presence and wearing a blue robe like it was the most natural thing in the world! When she saw my astonishment, she responded with a gentle smile, and I could almost hear her say "You didn't know, my daughter, because you never asked."

A blue robe greeted us and said that we had been called to demonstrate the teachings of our community. Without further discussion, one of them addressed Josiah, (and I was so grateful he was asked the first question because I was still wrapping my head around the idea that my mother was one of them), "What is the true meaning of time and space?"

I watched Josiah shift into what I recognized as his "student teaching the teacher" mode, where he planted his feet and drew himself to his full impressive height to speak in a bold voice, bringing information straight from his soul.

Truly, time and space are limitations accepted by those bound to the third dimensional consciousness. An individual's perception of reality and the limitations thereof can be measured by one's consciousness. For ones who have mastered the third dimension, or ones have not lowered their vibration and consciousness, time and space are meaningless. He went on to describe the universal laws of gravity and how they factored into the creation of time and space

as boundaries that define the third dimension, and when he was done, the blue robe nodded that he was satisfied.

The woman sitting next to him asked me to describe disease. Without a thought, I did what I had been trained to do. I spoke clearly from the heart, drawing information from the pictures that came from my soul to my consciousness, weaving my answer from those multi-layered images into words. The ancient ones knew no disease, I said, for the great One had not yet separated from the whole. As ones divided their consciousness from the 'I AM', under the illusion of facilitating learning, disease began to manifest as symptoms of that separation. Truly, the origin of all disease can be traced back to that original separation, which is but an illusion as old as the illusion of time itself.

I then spoke about the duty of a healer, which was to honor the individual's path by assisting and supporting the consciousness back to that state of oneness. I answered with the passion and enthusiasm because I knew this to be true, and moreover, I knew that I knew. She followed with rapid questions. What if the one requesting healing did not accept the assistance? To which I replied that the healer might, for example, identify the particular belief system blocking the healing and present the support and information in a different way to assist the consciousness in recognizing the belief system for what it was, an illusion. She persisted, asking, and if they still resist? Resistance, I said, is temporary. It may last twenty minutes, a lifetime, or a hundred lifetimes. A true test lay in the healer's ability to sense how best to honor the individual's pathway.

One by one, the blue robes peppered us with questions. Master Yonis asked Josiah about laws and humanity, and Josiah's answer was brilliant. We both knew our stuff, I realized at that meeting, more than we had recognized before that night. We had truly mastered the teachings of this community, and more importantly, we had developed our own ways of conveying that wisdom. His method, by going straight to the heart of the issue, and mine, by exciting a consciousness to a different level, which meant I had an ability to help others see and hear in ways they had not before.

My mother addressed me by my full name, which included her last, and asked me why so many students failed to reach their full potential.

I knew why she had asked me this particular question, for the answer had very nearly been my own downfall, and I spoke with compassion about how many students allowed their

growth and learning to be limited by an unconscious desire not to reach past the consciousness of those they love and respect, often teachers and parents. The desire not to dishonor those who shared their wisdom was often interpreted in the subconscious mind as a barrier. Additionally, the student may unconsciously pattern their life after a respected mentor's life or unspoken expectation. But in truth, to honor the teacher is to honor self, which is to achieve one's full potential by following the heart. Only then can mentors truly be honored, by the full honoring of self and one's path.

When all the blue robes had asked their questions, we were asked to leave. I was a little disappointed- this was fun! Being challenged by ones of great wisdom to reach deeply inside of myself and answer questions on subjects that I lived and breathed and loved- this was the first time I really saw myself, what I had achieved through hard work and determination, and how I had an ability to convey that love and enthusiasm to move others. It was, as we would say today, an eye opener. I had always known of Josiah's brilliance but hadn't considered my own abilities.

After we left the conference, I just assumed that our other classmates were called by pairs. When I said to Josiah, who was uncharacteristically quiet, that I wondered which of us went next- he gave me a funny look and did not respond.

The next day, after the blue robes had left our community, I expected life to get back to normal. I went to class, but there was nobody there.

Puzzled, I walked back to the hut I shared with my mother. Maybe she knew what I was to do- perhaps the community had taken the day off to rest. I found Josiah sitting with her. His eyes were dancing with excitement. My mother looked like she had bitten into a fruit that was simultaneously sweet and tart. When I asked what was going on, my mother said the two of us had been chosen as candidates to become blue robes, and we were to leave for Engaddi.

I was stunned. I didn't want to go anywhere! At the same time, I knew Engaddi to be a nexus of teaching and wisdom in the Essene world. Chosen for candidacy? I repeated. When did we apply?

Josiah looked at me, aghast, then laughed outright. "What did you think you were doing all these years?"

When I shrugged and said I had been studying for the love of the wisdom, not to achieve anything in particular, my mother turned serious. She said, "That is one reason you were chosen. Many fall into the trap of studying with a goal in mind, to become a blue robe. They are rarely

chosen.”

The night before we left, I sat with my beloved mother in our hut that I called home, not knowing this was, in fact, the last time I would ever be there. We held hands as I leaned against her warmth, as I had done since I was a child. I cried a little, told her how deeply I loved her, and that I did not want to leave her, but that I wanted to go so I could honor her wisdom and her decision to take me in over a decade ago. She stroked my head while saying she loved me more than I would ever know, and that we would never really be apart because our hearts were as one. The only thing she would say about my candidacy or future was that this was an unusual time in the world, with unusual circumstances for which many had been preparing for a long time. She said I had the opportunity to be part of something very wonderful, but she wouldn't tell me more- other than I would know some day.

The next morning, Josiah and I set out on foot due North for Engaddi. We had limited supplies, only what we could comfortably carry- as Essenes we travelled by God, not man or beast, which meant that we were to follow the guidance of our hearts in choosing which road to take, which village or town to stop at and exchange healing and assistance for food, water and shelter. Because of my compassion, I could sense which communities held a need we could fulfill or a divinely destined encounter. This was how my beautiful mother had found me- by following the love of God and love for the oneness of life that lived in her heart. And following her footsteps, I strove to do the same.

It took us over a week to reach Engaddi. Josiah and I soon proved to be good travelling companions. He willingly accepted my lead if I thought we should go to this village or that community and didn't bother to question.

But one afternoon, I remember, we reached a fork in the dirt road. I said left, he said we should go right. Each path led to a different destination, a village and a town. There was tension and strife in the town on our right, and a healing need in the village to our left. We debated which way to go- he was drawn to the strife, and I to the healing opportunity. In retrospect, that choice also defined why we were each on this Earth at this time in history- but at that point, all I knew was that we had a problem. Neither of us wanted to split up and go our separate ways, so we earnestly argued our positions to each other until I finally gave in after he pointed out that he had let me call the shots up to that point in our journey. We set out for the town that had a bristling cloud over it, a crackling aura of deep, angry red to my intuitive perception. Years

later, I would look back at that event and realize much about Josiah and his path in this lifetime. It was a foreshadowing of what was to come.

The town he chose was rife with tension and anger. The Jewish priests had levied a new tax on the residents, and this caused much fear and anxiety because the people were poor and this tax a great burden. I stayed in Josiah's shadow intending to watch his back as he jumped into the fray and quite publicly, quite loudly, denounced the priests for putting themselves between the residents and God. "God has no need for money," Josiah taught as he took up a position in the town's center, "God does not want your crops or your animals! You do not need to buy eternal life- that is simply given to you by the love of God!" On and on he spoke, delivering his message, speaking out against the priests and the temples to anyone who cared to hear. A crowd soon gathered in wonderment of this traveler in a dusty robe who spoke with such might and clarity, and heaven knows Josiah had charisma.

As I stood nearby, a young girl came up to me, her ragged dress showing her to be one of the poorest residents of this town. She looked worried. She tugged at my robe and asked if I was a healer, which was more of a statement than a question because we wore the robes that identified us members of our community, and Essenes were renowned healers. Come with me, she begged, my mother is very ill. After hesitating, torn between following her and watching out for Josiah, I did as she asked.

Her mother lay on the ground in a pile of dirty damp straw. She had recently given birth to a daughter, a tiny infant that was using the last of her strength to suckle on a breast that was empty. I quickly determined that the mother had lost a lot of blood in childbirth, and that her own life force was ebbing away fast. I went to work, unpacking the dried herbs I carried just for this purpose, choosing the blood strengthening ones which I had brought plenty of, for we encountered a lot of women suffering after childbirth. As I spoke quietly to the mother, she answered with the barest of whispers, and I learned that the issue was also that this mother doubted her husband's willingness to feed yet another daughter, and that the tax the priests had just levied caused her to lose all hope.

As I cradled her in my lap and fed her a strengthening tincture which included an herb to encourage her milk to flow, I held the infant in my other arm and spoke to them both about unconditional love and how God never intended us to suffer. I spoke empowering words to her, honoring her sacred path of motherhood, telling her the temple had nothing to do with the sacred

gift of her children, that she should set her eyes on God and not the priests. I delivered the same message Josiah was delivering outside, only in my own way, supporting their healing by empowering mother and infant (for the infants always listen too, and often with more presence than the parents!)

I barely took note of a group of women that had gathered around to watch and hear what I had to say until one of them stepped forward with an offer to nurse the infant until the mother's milk came in. When the mother agreed, I was pleased by that positive sign and gently handed over the infant. As I felt mother grow stronger in my care, I praised the one nursing the child and spoke to the other women as well, reminding them that God loved them equally to men, and that they were the life force of this community, that they need not cower in front of the priests- for indeed if they did not give birth and care for the children, the priests would have empty temples!

Josiah and I wound up being driven out of that town by angry priests and town rulers, who denounced us and declared us condemned in the name of the almighty Jehovah- but we were pleased. We made a good team, we decided, we were able to reach many by working together. With happy, empowered hearts we arrived at Engaddi.

Engaddi was a huge community compared to our village, with districts of clustered huts and common areas. After asking for direction, we presented ourselves at the center of the blue robe district. I was assigned to what would today be thought of as the female dormitory for candidates, and Josiah was sent to the male.

Without a whole lot of introduction, we were integrated into this community, given new robes that identified us as candidates, and assigned classes and teachers. We were split up and I was forced to make new friends, but that proved to be relatively easy because the other students were similar in intent. We were all there to learn! And oh, the library- I adored the library, full of scrolls and lovingly handwritten books copied by Essene scribes and tablets that held more wisdom and knowledge than I had ever encountered. Those in charge of the library soon knew me and they would laugh and say I had no need for a bed because I lived quite happily in the maze of books and scrolls. I threw myself with great enthusiasm into this new phase of my life, learning everything I could, asking teachers for more. And I did so, not because I wanted to become a blue robe, for that truly never was my goal- I wanted to learn everything I could with the notion of eventually embodying the teachings of the Essene world, to be, by example, a

physical representative of the wisdom of inclusiveness, and the oneness of all life, that had been passed to these people from a time long ago. I wanted to become a strand in the golden thread that I had uncovered in my childhood.

I was educated, tested by a panel of blue robes in a conference setting, then moved on to new classes and new teachers. This went on for years, time passed in a blur of study and debate, testing and demonstrating abilities I hadn't realized I had. As part of our learning, students were regularly sent out to surrounding communities to offer assistance and healing support, and we travelled far and wide, going where we were needed regardless of religious or political or racial beliefs. Sometimes I would travel with classmates, sometimes with a teacher or mentor who was there to assist me in expanding my abilities or simply to watch me work. Rarely was I given a goal for my journey before I set out, it was usually up to me to figure out where to go and what I was to do based on listening to my heart and intuition.

After awhile, I realized the journeys were essentially variations on a theme, because the strife Josiah and I had witnessed on the way to Engaddi was rampant across the lands. The Jewish priests were exerting more and more control over their people. The Romans put increasing pressure on the priests and temples to pay taxes to the Empire- and of course, this all trickled down to become a huge burden on the ordinary people. Time after time, I encountered ones who were literally wasting away with worry and fear and being "bled out", as they toiled in every way they possibly could to pay, often slowly starving as a result, and sometimes, they even tried to use their children as currency.

So I discovered within myself a great pleasure during these journeys, where I was able to assist very directly in shifting the hopelessness and fear that was all around us. Engaddi was, by comparison, a haven and pillar of Light, where everyone in the community was equal and part of a vibrant whole. The difference could not have been more stark. As my training rolled on, I became restless with the time I spent in classes because I wanted to be out doing my healing work and empowering women, urging them not to give up their lives out of terror of the egotistical priests and the angry, vengeful God they preached. I loved this work, it filled me with a tremendous sense of rightness, like I was truly living my purpose on this earth.

My increasing impatience with classes reached a head one day. I was tested and passed, then assigned a new group of teachers. I reported to class, which held about a dozen students, and the blue robe teacher was a male who said he would be instructing us on how to calculate the

heavens, the paths of the stars and planets, (astronomy) and how that related to the world, past present and future in an energetic sense. I felt this was all very abstract, with a lot of math and angles and planetary alignments, some of which would occur two thousand years in the future and I- for the first time in my entire life- rebelled.

The teacher was an old man, very kind and well meaning, and very committed to his esoteric world, so I tried my hardest to speak with honor and respect as I explained that I would not be taking his class after all, there was much work to be done in the surrounding communities and people that needed us, our wisdom and the healing we offered. I thanked him for his intent to educate me but I would be leaving his class immediately and would not return.

The other students were dumbfounded. A candidate refusing the blue robes apparently didn't happen often, but I was clear. I was meant to be out in the villages and towns where I was needed. The teacher was also surprised. But he simply sent me to what would be considered "the office" in today's scholarly world, so I left the class and went straight there. A blue robe working in the room had apparently been warned I was coming and what to do with me- she directed me into a small room with an adjacent courtyard, and told me to wait in there.

So I did. For hours. From my seat inside the room I watched the sun traverse the courtyard. I ran through the spectrum of emotions during that time, my blazing determination dwindled and gave rise to fear, fear of disappointing my beloved mother, my teachers back home who were so proud of me to have made it this far. I debated leaving this room and the school and starting my new life straight away, but felt that would be disrespectful to the blue robes who had done nothing to wrong me- I felt honor bound to stay put until whoever I was to speak with returned. Shadows in the courtyard grew as I wrestled with my inner demons until I was exhausted and hungry. Yet in that empty state, I also found a deep peace with my choice to leave the candidacy.

As the sun set, I heard the door open. The Master Yonis swept inside, to my great astonishment- I didn't even know he was in Engaddi. I scrambled to my feet and bowed deeply, a sign of respect and honoring that came from my heart, for this Master had more wisdom in his little finger than I had could ever hope to embody!

He simply looked at me- Master Yonis was not one for formal greetings- and said he was told I had refused to continue with my candidacy. And then he asked me why. Taking a deep breath, I explained in a very calm and clear fashion what I saw in the villages and towns made it

clear that my soul purpose lay not in becoming a blue robe. I described with an angry passion how the priests had everyone terrified, and how, given the state of the world, that there was no way I was going to sit in some class and learn about how the stars would be positioned two thousand years hence.

After a lengthy pause, during which he seemed to stare right through me to study my soul, he smiled. I felt his boundless love like a warm golden ray of sunshine. “You want to assist?” he said. “Then assist, you shall. Prepare for a journey. You will be gone a long time.” With that, he turned and walked out.

It all happened so fast- I didn’t even have time to find Josiah to say goodbye, but I sent him a message through a mutual friend. There was a group of three women in travelling clothes who were apparently expecting me. They looked decidedly foreign, with odd yellow hair and pale blue eyes- so unlike the people in this region- and they spoke with heavy accents. They intrigued me because they were so different- but any attempts I made to engage them fell on deaf ears. They essentially ignored me. I was fine with that treatment, actually- I was just glad to be on my way. I didn’t even care where we were going.

I was by far the youngest member of this party, and as we first set out, I was in a supportive role to these women who- I quickly learned, were extraordinary healers. I fetched and carried and watched and learned as we went from town to town, healing and assisting those who asked. I craved the knowledge they had, for their styles of healing were very different from what I had been taught. Gradually, as the weeks wore on, they let me take on more responsibility and they taught me by example, showing me how to use the earth’s wisdom and what She had provided in each region, which was actually specific to the viruses that were ripping through the impoverished people. They would watch me work and offer suggestions, listening as I assisted the sick by addressing body and mind and emotions, talking about the danger of separating from the God of love and giving one’s power away. These magnificent healers also tolerated my incessant questions with bemused patience, for I always wanted to know more about their art, never content with a single answer!

For over a month, we traveled in what I considered a destination-less trip around the countryside, healing and supporting the people to take their power back from authority, be it priests, Romans, soldiers, parents, friends, or local government. One day, we arrived at a port town. The water’s vastness and innate power rendered me speechless.

Led by the healer who I had come to realize was in charge of our little troop, we made our way to a great ship. The captain, a dark skinned merchant, wore more gold and jewels on his body than I had seen in my entire life. He spoke with the leader of our group in her native tongue. The reverent way he addressed her, which was so obvious despite the fact that I didn't understand what was said, puzzled me because I had had no inkling this woman was anything but a simple, yet very accomplished, healer. After a short time, she returned to where we waited and said essentially, we're all set. Let's board the ship.

I was incredulous, and more than a bit frightened. I had no idea how to swim, and in my life had encountered bloated, decomposing bodies of ones who had failed to do so properly- all of which gave me a healthy respect and aversion for water any deeper than my waist. When I asked where we were going, and she smiled with a radiant inner joy. "To a distant land. My home. Where the ground is green with grass underfoot, and the mighty trees live. Where thick fog caresses your body with the life of Mother Earth, and if you're thirsty, you just open your mouth to the sky!" I mentioned that I didn't know we were going far away, and I got the response I should have anticipated by now. "You didn't know, because you never asked!"

The women laughed at my expense, but not unkindly. Fighting a strong desire to flee, I shored up my courage and followed the healers aboard.

By the end of the first day of our sea voyage, I went from crouching, totally rigid with fear, down in the cargo hold gripping the wooden crates of the merchant's goods for dear life, to practically hanging over the side of the great ship drinking in the view, the wind and the waves, loving the smells and the sounds of the great sea. Again, the women laughed at me and poked good natured fun- by this time, I sensed they all felt some degree of affection for me, the "little healer" as they called me. I had been taught by my beloved mother to hold a quiet pride in my self and my abilities, so even if they had been rude or mean, it would not have been an issue, for my beloved mother also taught me that I never needed to prove myself to anyone, ever.

As we sailed, the climate gradually changed from the warmth I had always known to a chilly wet air that blew right through my robe. One of the crew dug out a spare sailor's outfit for me, and I gratefully put that on that even though it was way too big and far bulkier than anything I had worn before. When the voyage approached its end, I was sad to leave the ship, for it had shown me great wonders- but I was also very much looking forward to standing on land and eating food that wasn't dried or salted to death!

The coastline had me entranced, it was unlike any land I had ever seen. Towering cliffs with waves that pounded at the base, giant rocks that stood firm in the onslaught of the tide, cloudy grey skies and odd birds that wheeled overhead until they determined we were not a fishing vessel and had no fish to steal. This land seemed more deserted to me, as opposed to the populated area which I called home- we saw small villages sparsely scattered along the coastline, mostly by beaches that were conducive to ports for fishing boats.

As we prepared to dock, the women spoke rapidly with each other in their native tongue, and I sat in the background after getting all our supplies ready to disembark, wondering what adventure we would find here. We docked in a busy city, and I carried as much of our belongings and supplies as I could handle, grateful for a job to do, these women to learn from, and the chance to see new sights.

And what new sights I saw! I stared at huge beasts (cows, horses) while waiting in the background with our belongings as the women made arrangements with a caravan heading inland. Again, I witnessed the same deferential treatment, and again, I wondered who these women really were.

We travelled with the caravan for days, and the landscape changed. I saw my first forest on this trip, and I was amazed at the life force the trees held, and the entire world of animals and plants that lived amongst them. I do believe my jaw hung open for two solid weeks- which, again, generated teasing and good natured fun from my companions.

Now that I reflect back, looking through the filters of my modern American world, I suppose it is odd that I never asked for details about our journey. But at the time, that made perfect sense. The Master Yonis had instructed me to travel with these women, and so I did- that was good enough for me. I never asked when (or if!) we would ever be returning to my homeland. I trusted my heart, which felt great peace with this mysterious path I was on. Wherever these amazing women went, I would follow, learning and practicing healing, fine-tuning my abilities and growing as a human being and a woman and a healer.

Then one day, the caravan stopped. My women told me we would be making the rest of the journey on foot. I gathered our things and scrambled down from the horse drawn cart. After a day or so of walking, single-file, with very little talking, we reached a grand forest, far older and mightier than any forest we had seen so far. These trees, I could feel, were ancient- untold years had come and gone under their watch. One of the women took the lead on a path, narrow

and winding and tangled with growth, often indiscernible from the rest of the forest, but she moved with confidence. Through this forest we walked, stopping periodically to eat and rest in silence. Eventually we came out and into a huge open expanse. We crossed the grassy land for several days and encountered few people, a small village here and there. Again, I did what I was told and stayed in the background, watching how everyone we met treated us with respect riddled with fear. I puzzled over that as well- I hadn't seen a mean or vicious intent from these women in all the time we had been together. We passed without incident and wove our way deep into the other side of the wild, ancient forest.

As the hazy afternoon sun cast shafts of muted light through the few spaces between branches that opened to the sky, the woman in the lead turned to me and said, "Now, you will see the wonders of my people. It is a great honor for you to be here, and know that you have earned the right to walk freely among us, here, in our holy of holies."

I bowed deeply and thanked her, wondering what I had done to deserve such an honor. With that, we emerged from the protective wall of trees into a wide clearing which I immediately sensed was a deeply spiritual place, one of those areas on Earth where the boundary between spirit and matter was thickly blurred. Raw power emanated from everything I saw. The round houses built of rock seemed to sprout naturally out of the Earth, as if the great Mother had grown them as shelter for her human children. My awestruck gaze took in ancient rock aqueducts that funneled fresh, sparkling water from hidden springs, and cooking fires cleverly protected from the pervasive mist by rock ovens.

My companions' people came over to greet us. They all had pale, almost translucent skin, the same peculiar white gold hair, and eyes that varied only from light blue to green. They wore different cloaks, mostly earth tones but a few, pearly white. Their faces shone with love and happiness at our arrival. I hung in the background during the outpouring of joy and laughter, overwhelmed by the majesty of these people and their home. My women companions turned to introduce me- I heard my name pronounced slowly so ones could remember it, then our leader added something I could not understand but the effect was immediate- I was viewed with respect and received warm greetings.

As I gathered my wits about me I noticed one peculiar feature about this community- I had seen no children at all. Were they away somewhere for the day, or did the community have none? In either case it was very strange because the Essenes always had children running

around, either biological or adopted ones that no one else wanted, like me.

I was shown a rock mound, worn smooth with time and covered in grasses that had a doorway facing east. I was told this would be my hut, my shelter. One of the women I had travelled with showed me around the community, where to wash, where to eliminate, where the meals took place, the stone wheels and circles where spiritual events were held, where the animals were fed and tended (they were not penned in but knew to return for meals and sleep and safety). Unable to contain my curiosity, I asked where the children were. She told me this community was a college of sorts, for scholars only. I also learned that while there was no obvious class division in this culture between male and female, the spiritual leaders of the community were all women.

A feast in honor of our arrival lasted well into the night. Apparently, this community rarely received visitors from afar. I was offered dish after savory dish until I was stuffed to bursting, and given a sweet drink that made me feel warm all over. After the solitary travel, this celebration was hard for me to take- people were fascinated with me, touching me, feeling the cloth of Essene robe, stroking my bronze skin, my dark hair, talking to me in gentle words I did not understand. When I could take no more, and my eyelids kept closing against my will, I bowed my thanks for the meal and crept away to my hut.

Inside felt still and ancient. A soft pallet of woven reeds was my bed, and there was a short wooden table to stow my things. It was a lovely hut, and I felt like I was snuggling in the arms of Mother Earth- but I was used to sleeping with others, and usually out under the stars. My heart was gripped by deep loneliness. I was terribly homesick. I cried into my Essene robe, realizing that even if I wanted to go home, I wouldn't know how to get there- I was an outsider in a very strange land, far from everything I had known, where no one spoke my language. I wondered when I would see my mother again. I missed her more than words could say. That night, I dreamt of her.

I rose before dawn and crept out of my hut, meditated with the sunrise, then washed and was beckoned to the communal dining area for a breakfast. I felt better now that it was daylight, and I drew comfort from my dream, knowing that my mother's love stretched easily across the great distance that separated us. As I ate warm bread and honey, I felt stronger, more able and prepared to do and learn whatever my path had in store for me.

The leader of our traveling group, who, I had learned at the feast last night was actually a

high priestess of great regard (which explained the deferential treatment I had witnessed in our travels!) sat down next to me. Dressed differently now, my mentor looked like a regal goddess in her white cloak. She explained to me that I had been brought here to learn the ways of her people. I was to be in class, much like at home, except the instructor and I would be one on one. I would learn the power of this place, and how the people worked with it, their understanding of the life force and healing arts. As she spoke, my old enthusiasm kicked in, and I nodded eagerly to everything she said. She introduced me to my first teacher, a woman about the same age as I, who I was told held great wisdom and skill in working with the animal kingdom.

Shernese was my first teacher's name, and with time, we became fast friends. She clearly loved what she did, much in the same way as I, and we took great delight in the months we spent together. At first, it was difficult and slow going- the language barrier was an issue- but we rapidly developed a method of communication that included hand gestures and thoughts sent between hearts that beat similarly. She also began to teach me their language, names for the objects around us, and then verbs for actions as well as healing. I enjoyed her company so much, I was quite disappointed when the day came that she announced to my mentor that she had taught me all she would teach, and that she had found me an eager and gifted student.

It always surprised me when others referred to me that way- I was simply myself. Nonetheless, I accepted her praise and seal of approval with deep gratitude. I had prepared, in anticipation for the day our class would end, a parting gift- a frog I had whittled night after night out of a burl of fallen oak. I had drilled a small hole, intending it for a necklace. She was overjoyed when I presented it to her- frog was her (totem animal- closest term) and she wore it every day from that point on.

My next teacher, a male who had mastered the inner wisdom of herbs, could not have been more opposite. I felt like he barely tolerated my presence. The first day of my apprenticeship he sent me out into the land, by myself, to fetch a plant that had no healing properties. He wouldn't tell me what it looked like, or where in this great wild world to find it- only to go get it and bring it back to him. I wandered the countryside for days, connecting with all the plants in this foreign land, asking each to speak to me on a heart level about its purpose for life. Finally, I returned to the community, empty handed and defeated, confessing to him that I had not found the plant he asked me to seek, for all the ones I had found had medicinal properties of some sort, some way in which they lent support to humanity and the animals we

cared for that gave us life.

Without looking up from a foul smelling concoction he labored over by the cook fire, he muttered, “Took you long enough. That was the point. Every plant has a purpose. Now, fetch me an armful of yarrow, and don’t dawdle.”

Fortunately, I had seen plenty of yarrow; unfortunately, it grew in a field that was over a day’s hike away. I was famished, tired, and now seething, but not about to reveal any weakness. I marched off, pausing only to grab a loaf of bread and cheese for my journey before I set out again.

A series of teachers followed, each more talented than the last. Some I adored, some I respected, some I couldn’t finish with fast enough, but each one left their mark on my soul. I learned how to call forth and work with nature spirits and wind and rain, the power of water and how to imbue it with healing properties, how to read Earth’s energetic currents that coursed through the Mother like a pattern of blood vessels, how to communicate with rocks and plants and animals, mastery over the elements of Earth, water, fire and air, how to interact with the powerful mystical guardians of the land that dwelled in several dimensions simultaneously. One after another, my teachers brought me back to the high priestess, and announced that I had learned what they had to teach me.

Nine years passed this way, which I marked by solstice celebrations, nine years I spent with these magnificent solitary people, learning their ancient wisdom. I lost track of the menstrual periods I spent alone in contemplation, as all the women did, which I had originally counted by way of keeping time. I made fast friends, had a few lovers, mourned the loss of a child in miscarriage, and grew to maturity in the haven of this community. And yet, my commitment to my path made committed love a danger- I could easily settle down, develop a deep bond with a mate, and stay with these people for the rest of my life. But there was always a part of my soul that urged me on, to some other calling that I did not consciously understand yet still honored.

After nine years, I again prepared with the community for the summer solstice. The longest day of the year was celebrated as a day of fulfillment, of completion of work and growth. On the opposite end, the winter solstice was considered the night of the cave, which ones celebrated as a time to connect with the unseen forces of the universe. The summer solstice always began the week before with ones trickling in from the woods around the community,

hermits who had chosen a solitary lifestyle to retreat into their souls for awhile.

The day of the solstice, I was told by the high priestess to prepare for an initiation. While I had no idea what that meant, instead of asking questions, I turned inward for guidance (how much I had matured!) I walked through the trees, soaking in the power of the land, reviewing all I been taught, honoring my teachers, and myself for my effort and learning, sensing that my time here was coming to an end.

When I returned, I was met by Shernese and a few other close women friends, who took me into the woods to an ancient spring. As they undressed me and washed my body, Shernese sang a prayer that I be guided and supported by the love I had found amongst her people, and she asked that my soul find me worthy of proceeding. In silence, I was dressed in a black cloak which signified the darkness of ignorance, and securely blindfolded.

Wordlessly, I was led deeper into the woods, blind and stumbling, but trusting those strong, gentle hands that supported me. The acoustics changed along with the ground under my bare feet, which turned from leaves to soft cool dirt, and I surmised that I had been brought into a cave. We walked deep into the earth, then the hands on my arms stopped me. I smelled wood smoke tainted with cleansing herbs, felt the heat from a fire, and over the heavy silence marked by the crackle of timber, heard breathing and the rustle of cloaks. How many people were there with us, I could only guess.

Warm hands lay on my shoulders. Shernese's voice rang against stone walls. "For nine moons, I have taught this one the art of animalspeak. I have tested this one, and found her worthy." Her hands came off, and I heard her leave my side.

Another pair of hands gripped my shoulders, strong and male. My second teacher, I felt from his energetic signature, but instead of the animosity with which he taught, his energy was love and pride. "I have taught this one for thirteen moons in the arts of herbal medicine. I have tested this one, and found her worthy." One by one, my teachers held my shoulders and announced what I had learned, and that they found me worthy. Tears seeped from my eyes into the blindfold as I was overcome by humility and gratitude.

The high priestess spoke. Addressing me by my full name, she said, "We have taught you and tested you, and found you worthy as a Priestess of the Druids. You may remove your blindfold. Behold, the sacred womb of the mother."

With trembling hands, I slid the blindfold off. My vision was assaulted by a bright

bonfire, lit in the center of a huge cavern next to where I stood. The curved white walls stretched above my head so high the roof was swallowed in darkness. Scores of Druids- there must have been over a hundred- surrounded me, smiling at me, praising me in chanted song. I cried openly, too emotional to do much else. I had not realized I was being prepared for all these years to take up the mantle of a priestess, and what an honor this was! Someone began to strike a huge drum made from animal skin. The sound reverberated like an earthquake beneath my feet. Then suddenly, the singing and drum stopped. Silence fell in the cavern once again.

The high priestess turned to a man standing next to her, wearing the robe of a Master Druid, the highest achievement of the Order. I blinked, hard- it was the Master Yonis! With a faint smile, he acknowledged my shock of recognition. I hadn't seen anyone from my homeland in so long, he seemed like an apparition. He spoke to me, saying, "The Druids have welcomed you into their sacred home, the holy of the holies. They have taught you well, tested you and found you worthy. Priestess of the Druids, where lies your fate?"

I spoke, stopped to clear my throat of tears, and my voice grew bolder as I reached inside myself for words to respond. "Beloved people of the great mother, tribe of my heart, I want nothing more than to stay with you, understanding more of your knowledge and arts for so much lies unknown to me and I am humbled by your wisdom. But events in my homeland call me back- my people are enslaved and live in poverty and fear. I must return, and assist in whatever way I can, for there is great need for empowerment of women."

The Master Yonis turned to look at the High Priestess, awaiting her response. This was clearly her call- and I wondered what would happen if she refused my intent to depart. I eyed the shiny curved dagger that hung from her golden belt and for a moment, wondered if I would leave that cavern alive. Then she raised her arms and said, "This one speaks from the soul, so shall it be. But let no one pry our secrets from your lips, for our wisdom is to remain hidden from mortals until the return of the Light."

Like a wave, the people rushed forward to embrace me, to congratulate me. Shernese reached me first, with tears in her eyes, and hugged me tight. After the flurry of congratulations, she led me to the back of the cavern, where a deep pool of still water lay. While the others began the solstice ceremony, she motioned for me to take off my black cloak and told me to immerse myself in the frigid water. After I dunked completely under and emerged, gasping from the cold that seared my bones, she handed me a cloak of the Priestess and whispered, "I am so happy our

mother agreed with your intent to return to your homeland to assist.” Shernese didn’t finish, but the look in her eyes told me I was right in my assessment that the Druids guarded their wisdom with the death penalty. I never betrayed them.

After the formal solstice ceremony, we returned to the camp for celebration. I gradually made my way around the party, thanking those who had taught me for their patience and wisdom, celebrating with the friends I had made. Full with food and head buzzing from the drink reserved for feasts, I made my way over to where Master Yonis sat with the High Priestess, laughing over something she had said.

I knelt by his feet with my head bowed until he decided to notice me- his cheeks were ruddy from the drink and he was clearly enjoying himself. He regarded me with blue eyes that danced with merriment. “Priestess of the Druids, what say ye?”

“Beloved Master Yonis,” I said, “I am very surprised and happy to see you again! I didn’t know you were a Master Druid! Did you study here too, in this school?”

He simply smiled. The High Priestess leaned forward and said to me, “Priestess, the Druids have no need to teach or initiate one who already carries the wisdom we hold, and quite a bit more.”

“Oh,” I said, wondering how many other spiritual Orders considered Yonis ‘one of them’- perhaps he had a closet full of cloaks, robes and headdresses somewhere! Then I added “Master Yonis, I have followed the wise women here, and I have learned from them to the best of my ability.” I paused and searched his gaze, wanting acknowledgement or confirmation that this was what he wanted from me. He gave me no sign, simply studied me with his usual impassive expression, so I forged ahead. “And yet my soul calls me onward. I want to assist my people in finding their way back to God. Do you have any guidance where I might go next?”

He grinned at me- I had never seen Master Yonis in such a good mood! “Well, beloved, student of the ancient wisdom, where would you like to go?”

His answer gave me pause, but truly I was no longer surprised when dealing with him. “I want to serve my people,” I said, “unless the climate has changed to where the political and religious authorities no longer terrorize their followers.”

I spoke without jest, but he chuckled anyway, saying, “Then you leave in the morrow.”

Again, I wasn’t surprised. This was simply how he was, always two steps ahead of me. And I did not ask my destination- I had come to realize that the Master Yonis was in the

background of my life, directing me from that day I asked his assistance in finding the golden gate in my desert vision. He would open doors for me, but it was always up to me whether to walk through, **and** what I did once I got there. “Master Yonis, have you news of my beloved mother?”

“Indeed. She is quite well. She sends you honoring for your success, Priestess, and the message that through her love she is with you, always.”

I thanked him, then said, “And Josiah, my brother of the heart? Have you news of him?”

After a pause, he simply said, “No,” and turned to ask the High Priestess about the recipe for the special mead he drank, a clear sign of my dismissal.

I stood and left his side, wondering what had befallen Josiah, but aware that the Master would tell me no more. My thoughts reeled from the knowledge that I would be leaving my surrogate family the next day.

The next morning I emerged from my hut for the last time, having no clue where I was going or who I would be traveling with. There was no sign of the Master Yonis- he had already disappeared as abruptly as he had arrived. I carried only a small bag of belongings that included the Priestess cloak I regretfully packed away in favor of the Essene travelling robe- for I was, first and foremost, an Essene. I bade a final farewell to Shernese- with tears in her eyes, she hung the frog I had carved for her around my neck, which was worn smooth from her skin, and said we would be sisters for eternity.

Sure enough, there were two men who had attended the solstice, strangers with skin far darker than my own, similarly dressed for travel. After a brief greeting and acknowledgement, we set out on our journey. I followed the men who clearly knew their path through the forest. As the community disappeared behind a wall of ancient trees, I took one last look at the magnificent Druids, a people lost in the mists of time by their own choice.

My new companions were aloof. We conversed in the language of the Druids when necessary. When not dealing with me, they spoke to each other in a guttural tongue punctuated with much laughter. They were a jolly pair, although I could sense their immense power and abilities that lurked veiled from my eyes. We reached the ocean without incident, and again boarded a merchant vessel, similar to the one I had arrived on but a different ship and crew. I was assigned “quarters”, as the only female on the ship- a little square of room down in the cargo hold barred with crates for privacy. That was to become my home for the many months we spent

at sea, for the voyage was motivated by the locations of trade and not a single destination.

And yet, I soon understand what the Master Yonis had intended for me. Along with goods, we picked up passengers for various lengths of time, all powerful Masters in their own disciplines, for truly, this was a ship of Light that worked in a time of great darkness. There were Persian Masters, and Adepts from the land of India and Egypt- I was taught by them in the long days at sea. I re-learned how to breathe, how to use breath to achieve different levels of consciousness, how to manipulate matter by affecting the energy that lay inherent within solid form, how to transmute one form for another, and so on.

I was also taught by example. One teacher travelled with a nasty viper- before my horrified eyes he let it bite him repeatedly on the arm, then instructed me to watch closely as he directed his life energy to shift the poison to a harmless substance. I learned how to fast properly, achieving states of altered consciousness while I journeyed far from my body. I witnessed many wondrous “miracles” which, over the course of the voyage, I learned were simple feats when one understood that all matter is energy and nothing is separate from the whole. A teacher took a still, windless day when the sea looked like glass as an opportunity to impress upon me that the laws of matter as I accepted them did not apply to ones who had transcended the physical world. He vaulted over the side of the ship and proceeded to land on his feet, where he trotted around **on top of** the water like it was solid ground! I leaned over the rope railing to cheer and clap with great astonishment- at which he rose back up onto the vessel as if lifted by an unseen platform, and sternly told me to rid myself of my self-imposed limitations, for everything he did I could also do.

Because my teachers came from so many different places, with different languages and dialects, I became accomplished in the art of telepathy, essentially understanding how to read packed multi-layered thoughts, a combination of images and ideas shaped by intent. Interestingly, every teacher I had seemed to know I would be on this ship and what they were to teach me- there was always a specific lesson plan for however long I was in their company.

By counting moons I travelled in this way for over a year, learning from many different men ancient arts. I missed female companionship, but never felt sexually threatened even though most of the men on board were very strongly masculine in energy (I wondered often how women fit in their cultures). I spent much of my time alone and in meditation and practicing what I had been taught. I was forbidden by the Captain to leave the ship during our many port calls, and I

knew this was for my own safety for the places we visited were chaotic and unlawful. The Captain looked out for me in a fatherly way, I remember, and I appreciated that. I also noticed that along with the exchange of goods, vital information was exchanged with ones who lived in the towns and cities we visited, although I didn't understand what was being said in their hushed, urgent tones. From the ship's deck, I saw many wonders and strange sights as the climate grew hot once again.

We pulled into port one morning, docking at a great city with beautiful architecture and bustling people laboring under a fog of smoke from cooking fires. The Captain told me this was the city of Alexandria. Gather your things, he added, you have arrived at your destination. Seek the library and home of the scholars. They are expecting you.

By this point, I was used to these abrupt changes in my life. I packed my belongings, and thanked him profusely for his hospitality and care. He seemed sorry to see me go- he had come to view me as a daughter, perhaps replacing one he had at a home he rarely saw.

I was excited, for Alexandria was famous for wise scholars and extensive libraries, yet at the same time puzzled because more study meant that I would not be assisting my people, as I had intended. Still, I trusted the Master Yonis, so I bade farewell to the sailors and left the ship with the first mate, who the Captain had instructed to see me safely to the Alexandrian scholars.

Deep in the ancient culture and library center of Alexandria, where I saw occasional blue robes mixed with scholars of many different races and cultures, the ship's first mate turned me over to a woman who was a scholar and a library worker. She was familiar with the scrolls and books and where they could be found in the vast mazes of the library. A quiet, reserved, older woman, she informed me she would be my main teacher and guide for the duration of my stay. I was to have a few classes, but I would be mostly working with her. I thanked her for her intent to educate me, took a long, deep breath, and began my new life.

Classes here were different from what I was accustomed to, in that there were many students to a teacher, but it wasn't a formalized program. Each student was allowed to choose their focus and area of study within the framework of the class, so it was like an independent study in a group setting. I lost a sense of time and self in the wonders of the ancient knowledge contained in the libraries, the likes of which I had never seen before in one place! When I wasn't learning various methodologies of healing, I was working on absorbing and understanding the bygone cultures that were chronicled in the library, and seeking, as always, evidence of the

golden thread. I became well-versed in what befell Atlantis, and the wisdom held by the ancient Greeks, the works of ancient philosophers and alchemists.

I had been there for months when the winds of change began to blow, jolting me out of my scholarly trance. Alexandria was the center of a political battle between the Egyptian and Roman empires. Unease and fear for the future of this magnificent cultural center and the wisdom stored within its libraries started as murmurs in the hallways and soon grew to rampant paranoia. The Romans truly conquered Alexandria by fear alone. I also heard what the Romans had done in my homeland as they tightened their grip on our lands; the Jewish priests also clamped down harder as they vied and bargained with the Roman Empire for money and control of the people.

Once again, I felt restless and dissatisfied with my life, eager to return home to be of assistance to those who wanted support in this struggle against oppression. My teacher took notice of my mood and asked if I feared the Romans. I said no! and told her that my whole life I had wanted to serve my people and by this point, surely I had studied enough for the right to do so! Instead of agreeing or arguing, she said she would consult with my teachers.

If I expected a speedy response, I was sorely mistaken. I was expected to show up for classes and study while my teachers deliberated my fate. I became quite surly and agitated and began looking for my own way home. Scholars that spoke out against the Roman Empire started disappearing, first one, then another, ambushed on trips into the city and never heard from again.

One night I was awakened from sleep by my teacher. She hurriedly dressed me in poor traveler's robes made of rough, scratchy plain cloth, whispered for me to gather my things, and then hustled me out of my room without another word. She led me down the servants' entrance into the hands of a man who only communicated with hand signals. I followed him, bewildered, yet certain this was being done for my safety. Much later, I found out that the library was stormed and raided by Roman soldiers, and many scholars arrested and taken away. Some of the librarians had given Roman guards the names of those who were in opposition to the occupation in exchange for the promise of safety for themselves and the scrolls.

In any event, I knew none of this as I followed my silent, hooded guide in the dead of night through the back alleys of Alexandria. We came upon a merchant caravan, canvas covered wagons drawn by donkeys. My guide shoved me into the back of one of the wagons. With a jolt, the caravan started, and I clambered into the front of the wagon and hid behind crates. I

dozed uneasily, lulled by the steady, slow movement of the caravan. Later, daylight shone through cracks in the woven covers draped over the wagon that protected the goods. I had no idea who was leading this caravan, whether the merchant knew he had a stowaway, or even where we were going, but I trusted God and trusted my soul, I trusted the unseen hands that had always guided my life.

We stopped at a Roman checkpoint, and I could hear the merchant talking to the soldiers about the goods he carried, what delicacies, fine cloth and perfumed oils the wagons contained. I peeked through my crack in the canvas and saw soldiers inspecting the wagon next to mine; they dragged crates out and dumped the goods in the dirt, searching for what, I did not know. The merchant complained loudly and good naturedly, saying things like, “Easy, there! Your mistress is going to be livid if her perfume arrives to the market damaged!”

As the soldiers found nothing suspicious, they turned to the wagon I was in and pulled out the first crate. I froze in terror- then heard the merchant call out, “Here, take samples of my finest perfume, compliments of A ‘dab the merchant, to your lady loves!” That worked- they moved away from my wagon and busied themselves, sniffing each slender bottle in turn, choosing their favorites. When the soldiers told the merchant to repack his caravan and go on his way, I sent a silent prayer of thanks and gratitude to the merchant who had probably saved my life.

We trundled on for another day and a half. I was desperately thirsty, and my body was so cramped from being stuffed in the back of the wagon that I had ceased feeling my legs. I spent the time deep in meditation, leaving my body as I had been taught, merging my consciousness with the oneness of all life while the caravan travelled slowly and steadily onward. Suddenly, the flap closing the back of my wagon was thrown open. Blinded by dazzling sunlight, I saw the outline of a man wearing a merchant’s clothing- my merchant, as I had come to think of him. Behind him soared the biggest manmade structure I had ever glimpsed in my life- what we would call the Great Pyramid of Gizeh. I stared, in a daze, dumbfounded by the sudden sight of him and the Pyramid beyond, like they were both a vision. In a heavy accent, he said, “Come out now. This is where ones expect you.”

My lower body was next to useless after the days spent folded behind the crates so I half crawled, half dragged myself out of the wagon. He helped me out, and I promptly sat heavily on the ground, wincing as the blood rushed to my lifeless limbs. As I croaked my heartfelt thanks

through a throat parched and dusty, he retrieved my bag of belongings and dropped it on the ground next to me, then gathered the donkeys' lead ropes and hastily moved on, leaving me in the sandy ground where I sat.

I massaged life into my legs and stared in awe at the Great Pyramid. Truly inspired by God, it loomed next to me, a reminder of a time and a people long past. From my studies, I knew much about the Great Pyramid before ever laying eyes on it- that it was a library built of stone, full of dimensional doorways, constructed after the fall of Atlantis by those who had escaped the destruction, a statement and a warning for future generations that was difficult to ignore or explain away. It was a beacon of Light, a sanctuary and place of initiation for thousands of years and as I stood slowly, testing my unsteady legs, it felt like a dream to be in the shadow of this magnificent creation.

Gradually, I noticed the people nearby looked hunched and tense. I saw no robes signifying a spiritual Order- everyone was dressed as a commoner. So I stopped a woman who hustled past, asking for those spiritual workers who lived near the Pyramid. They left, she said, Romans came. They all scattered. Soldiers took some of them, some of them got away. I don't know where they went. You'd better leave too, if you belong to that place. The soldiers will be back.

She eyed my clothing nervously, as if I hid a cloak signifying a spiritual Order, and I was thankful my teacher dressed me in common robes. She walked quickly away, clearly not wanting to be seen speaking with me.

So...now what? Should I find another merchant or caravan to take me back to my village, the one I had left over a decade ago? I wasn't even sure it would still be there, given the political upheaval- the Essenes would be targeted by both traditional Jewish sects and the Romans, for the philosophies of a God of pure love, the inclusion within all life, and the truth of reincarnation threatened ones who sought control. Should I wait by the Pyramid to see if someone returned? Should I seek those who fled, try to track down where they went and follow? Going back to Alexandria wasn't an option- I knew my teacher had hustled me out of there in the dead of night for good reason.

At a loss, I went to sit in the shade cast by the Pyramid and consider my fate. I reached deep into my heart for guidance from my soul, and felt no urging to leave. My heart was quite content here, I discovered. Surprised, I started walking around, determined to find out why God

and my soul had led me here.

I found a peasant marketplace nearby, but it looked shut down, dirty and apparently unused for awhile. As I stood there, studying the deserted marketplace, trying to figure out what had happened to the people who once bartered and traded here, I noticed a girl, dressed in filthy clothes with matted hair, staring at me. She reminded me of myself eons ago, with one notable exception- this one had known a mother's love at one point, I could read it in her energy field- she was depressed, grieving, and terrified because something or someone had destroyed the life she once knew.

I squatted and made eye contact with a warm smile that I hoped would scatter her fear of me. It seemed to work- she edged closer and considered me carefully. Pointing furtively toward the Pyramid, she asked if I was one of them. I didn't know how to respond- if I said yes, would she fear me as the other woman did- or did she seek an affirmative answer? Instead of responding, I asked her what she needed, for I could sense an urgency. She told me her family was very ill and that people were dying, she was looking for a healer because she thought her mother was about to die. She spoke matter-of-factly, clearly in a state of deep shock.

I offered her my hand and said yes, I did have some knowledge of healing, and if she took me to where her mother was, I would do my best to assist. She refused to hold my hand but did lead me out of the marketplace, and away from the Pyramid.

After about a half hour of walking, we reached a squalid settlement. People were dying, she had not exaggerated. Bodies lay amongst the barely living, gravely ill adults and some children were lined up in a haphazard way in the center of this camp, and it fell mostly to children to tend to the sick, laboring over fires heating weak broth while taking care of wailing infants and toddlers. The stench of human waste and sickness mixed in the air with the weak coughs of the dying with breath and will left to fight.

I sought out an elderly woman who was hunched over a fire and vat of water, boiling cloth in an apparent effort to sterilize it. Her eyes were empty, devoid of life, beyond suffering from the horrors she had witnessed. She spoke in a monotone, telling me that they had been a settlement of peasant workers employed in a nearby city and farms, but that the Romans had come and declared them all slaves to the Empire. They could earn no coin for food, and were expected to work as slaves for the Romans and the agriculture that supported the Empire. When they could not work, their strongest male children were taken away as payment instead. Several

times a week, Roman soldiers would drop off what they considered sustenance for the slaves to live on, but the food was garbage cast off from cities, and had mostly spoiled and molded by the time it arrived. From what I gathered between what she told me and what I observed in my rapid assessment of the sick, these conditions had bred a virus that was ripping through the community and killing the adults, a plague fueled by spoiled food, unclean water, and a desperation so abysmal people simply lacked the will to live.

I was moved to tears of rage and for a minute, felt utterly overwhelmed and helpless- what could I possibly do, just me alone, with very little in the way of healing herbs and supplies? Taking a deep breath, I sent a heartfelt plea out into the fabric of spirit, asking for support and assistance from God and the Light. Certain help would come, I unpacked my bag, spreading out the precious herbs I had with me, small bundles of dried medicines I always travelled with as a healer. As I looked at what I had, then looked at all the sick people, my heart sank, knowing I had not nearly enough.

My gaze was drawn to a young man who had paused in his treatment of an adult to study me. He looked to be around the age of fourteen, and still alert and well, and like he still had his wits about him in spite of the horror of his reality. I could sense an emotional solidness, integrity, and, most importantly for the task I had in mind, cleverness and trustworthy quality. I beckoned to him. Divesting myself everything I had of value, a few pieces of jewelry and trinkets my mother and teachers had given me as mementos, I told him I had a job for him, he was to go to the city marketplace and shop for me. I showed him the herbs I carried, told them their names in several different languages, showed him what they smelled like, and felt like. I had him turn his back to me and repeat the list of the herbs, and as I expected, he did so perfectly the first time. Then, into his outstretched hands, I gave him all the jewelry and what little coin I had, and I saw his eyes widen- although it wasn't much, it was more than he had seen in his entire life. But I knew, beyond a doubt, that he would return with the herbs we needed.

I watched him trot off in the direction of the city, and got to work. I labored without pause for two days and a night. I stretched my herbs as far as they could go by making tea rather than a more potent tincture, and administering the herbal remedy until I ran out. I worked on their bodies with my hands and the healing energy I had been taught, bringing the light and strength and love of God into their human energy systems, those of meridians and energy centers (now called chakras) murmuring while I worked that they had to get well for the sake of the

children, not to let the Romans take their precious lives from them. Some grew stronger under my care, some died in my arms.

The young man did come back from the marketplace at the eve of the second day, his skinny arms full and ragged clothes stuffed with the potent herbs I needed. Weeping tears of joy I praised him to God and told him what a wonderful mission he accomplished, and he met my enthusiasm with a shy pride. But I could tell, without exchanging words, that he had stolen what he needed when the coin and valuables had run out- and that he felt guilty for it, but also defiant and angry, for he knew his people needed help. I held him firmly by the shoulders, gazed deep into his eyes, and told him he had done exactly what I had asked of him, and he had done well, for without these medicines, his community would not survive.

Drafting several of the older children as apprentices, I put them to work, teaching them how to brew the tinctures, which symptom needed which herb, be it a raging, dehydrating fever or loose bowels or lungs that were filled with fluid. I taught them how to bring the healing energy of God through their bodies and out their hands, and where to place their hands to support the energy of the sick to heal, and how to encourage the mind to let go of limiting beliefs by talking to the sick.

I worked in this way for many days, existing on catnaps and the fasting that I had been taught- I fasted for the sake of the children, for the little edible food that arrived in the Roman garbage wagons needed to go to them, and the sick that were getting well.

At one point, I remember I was working on a woman, a mother of three whose children hovered anxiously nearby. I assisted her for long hours without pause, for she hung in the balance between life and death and I thought if I kept working on her, doing everything I could, strengthening her energy field, talking to her about her beautiful children, she would make the choice to live. As I worked, I become aware of a tight wheeze in my lungs. It became difficult to swallow. I was getting sick- and I knew immediately why: I had violated the cardinal rule of healing. I had compromised myself by becoming attached to the outcome of those I worked with, I wanted so badly for them to heal, and I detested the Roman Empire, and in particular, I hated the coarse soldiers who dumped garbage every week and called it food, indifferent to the dead and dying that lay right under their noses.

Secretly, I also felt abandoned by God- for hadn't I been calling for assistance from other healers who were surely nearby? Hadn't I asked for days for these children to receive the proper

nourishment they needed to survive, for their parents to survive? Why hadn't God answered my cries with any support or help or encouragement whatsoever? Had all these people become disposable?

Because I had developed an investment in the outcome of my work, the natural law of cause and effect dictated that I take on the fabric of their reality. Instead of staying firmly rooted in my own reality as a healer who walked with God to assist others in waking up from their illusionary world, I stopped viewing the sick as equal souls with their own free will choice and tried to decide their fate **for** them. Because I desperately wanted them to get well, I bought into their collective dream and I too was coming down with the deadly virus.

And still, knowing all of this, I continued to labor over the mother until I could no more- dizzy and weak, knowing I was essentially done without assistance from a healer skilled like myself, I simply told my apprentices in a lighthearted way that I was going to nap and that they should continue their work as I taught them. I found an area that was away from the others, and lay down thinking I was probably going to die. I was beyond the reach of the herbs alone, the virus had attached itself to my mental, emotional body, and spiritual bodies as well because of my grief and rage, and because of my belief that I was abandoned by God.

Wracked by fever, I drifted in and out of consciousness, not entirely sure whether I was alive or dead, not particularly caring one way or the other either. A fierce sandstorm buffeted me where I lay, and I had the momentary presence of mind to draw my cloak up over my head to protect my breath. At one point during the storm, I felt called to stand. So I did, turning to gaze at my inert body where it lay covered in a dirty cloak and sand, wondering in a detached way if I had died.

Through the storm I walked, feeling drawn to a place that I didn't know. A wide hole in the sand suddenly opened in front of me, marked by steps leading down. I descended out of the storm, going down, down, so deep into the earth the rock walls turned moist with life giving water.

When the stairs ended, I found myself in a tunnel carved of stone. A thin golden line ran down the middle of the tunnel floor, glowing softly with enough light to see. I followed the line until it split into three; the tunnels split similarly, a path opened to the left and the right, and continued on straight ahead as well. I used my heart to guide me, and felt pulled to the left, so left I went.

I heard men screaming over the clash of weapons in a great battle. The next thing I knew, I stood amongst warriors in a great green field, unseen and unaffected by the flashing swords. Roman soldiers fought viciously against unarmored tall, fair skinned men whose fierce battle cries rang undaunted by the Roman superiority in arms and armor. I reeled away in horror as a Roman blade plunged deep into a bare-chested warrior right in front of me- he died with raw hatred and defiance in his eyes. My own hatred for the Romans surged into my chest and then- I became one of them. I was slashing and hacking with my sword, blocking useless enemy flails with my shield, slaying every man in sight with a deep sense of self-righteousness because it was **for their own good**. These people, the Gauls were what I knew them as, were barbarians doomed by their own warlike excess and pride- and they dared challenge the Romans, **us**, for dominion when **we** were clearly far superior with our laws and refined culture and evolved government.

With that understanding, I lowered my blade in wonderment. From this point of view, what the Romans did made perfect sense- they were intent on civilizing an untamed world, with the idea of improving and making orderly and lawful the lives of everyone in the Empire. From my own experiences, I readily understood the Gaul's point of view, they saw no need to bow to the oppressive Romans for their civilization was a sovereign entity in its own right.

The battle scene vanished. I stood, alone again, in the stone tunnel marked by a golden line. I considered my revelation, let it sink in until I felt a shift deep inside- I no longer carried a hatred for the Romans, I now understood why they did what they did. That understanding set me free, and I felt a profound lightening in my being.

I walked on, following the golden line through tunnels within time, going from scene to scene, becoming victim and persecutor, leader and follower, the hunter and the hunted. I became a military captain and king, a whore and a thief, a President and a pauper, lifetime after lifetime committed to the sides of darkness or light, and quite often both, until I had lost all sense of "I" or "myself"- understanding that all was one and there was no separation in all that existed, that each soul that had ever come into being was simply an aspect of God, life expressing life.

When I owned that understanding, I **became** it- my human identity as a woman, a healer, a scholar, an Essene- that all fell away as easily as a discarded cloak. The golden line vanished, the maze of tunnels disappeared, and I stood in a giant room that I simply knew lay, in one dimensional sense, beneath the heart of the Great Pyramid. Although the room was pitch black, I

sensed something with me, something decidedly **not** human, something that had mastered time and space and the dimensions within all the universes that have ever been and will ever be.

With that thought, a huge golden dragon crouched before me, the keeper of the magic that created this place. I was as big as one of its golden eyeballs, and it lowered its great head to stare straight into my soul. It looked fierce and terrible, but I wasn't afraid. I had learned the truth about life- I had nothing to fear, ever again.

“Little human!” It spoke in a voice I felt in every fiber of my being. “Answer this riddle, if you can. Where were you when I made the sun and the moon, the Earth and the stars, the finest blade of grass and the mighty oak tree?”

I laughed aloud- this wasn't a riddle, this was truth! I called out, “I was with you, beloved. For indeed, we are one and the same!”

The dragon opened enormous jaws and blew a searing fire that engulfed me, and the next thing I knew, I was back in my tortured body in the slave settlement, being cradled by healer's hands, the bitter bite of a healing tonic on my lips and tongue. I felt my mother's presence, her love, and her voice in my head. “Daughter of my heart, you do not need to die for these ones you have assisted. Remember, their souls have chosen this path, this experience is to be their learning. You may choose to recover and continue on **your** path.”

My response was the thought if I left these people I would be abandoning them. She answered, “If you decide to come home, a way will be presented to you. And if you do come home, you will have an opportunity to assist many. Choose wisely.”

I felt healing hands on my abdomen, moving the stagnant energy, strengthening my life force. I thought I was being cared for by my mother- but when I opened my eyes, I saw two strangers, women healers of some Order I didn't recognize, caring for me.

Behind them stood my children, my apprentices, watching over me, faces tight with concern. I knew they had found the healers and brought them to me. I smiled in gratitude, and my children beamed back. Then they all started talking at once, telling me what had happened during my illness, how they had helped many of their community recover, and how still many had died, but that it seemed the virus had run its course. The survivors had decided, together, to pack up and move to another location in hopes of finding jobs and a new life. And with that, I realized why God's infinite wisdom had not sent the help I called so desperately for- these people needed to choose to help themselves.

And so, my work there was complete.

As soon as I regained enough of my strength to move on, I hugged my apprentice children and their adults goodbye, then walked slowly toward the city marketplace. I hadn't gone far when a merchant caravan driver spotted me on the road and called to me- he said he could tell from my robe that I was Essene, he was leaving for lands near Engaddi, would I care to have a ride? Startled, I said, I would indeed! Then I remembered the dangerous caravan ride from Alexandria and shared my concern for his well being if he smuggled me. He grinned and brandished a rolled parchment that he carried in his pocket, one that bore the official seal of the Roman Government. "I carry fine flour destined for Roman tables. I move through checkpoints unhindered! Climb aboard, make yourself comfortable, and I will have you safely in Engaddi!"

I praised his kindness, climbed into one of his wagons and stretched out on bags of flour. Trusting him completely, I fell deep asleep as the caravan rocked and swayed me like a cradle taking me back to the arms of my people. It was so lovely...so easy.

Back in my homeland after a decade of absence, I noticed many changes- many more Roman soldiers patrolling the area, more checkpoints on the roads, and many more slaves toiling in the fields. The merchant did drop me off at Engaddi, which seemed quite busy with activity, and I set about looking for someone I knew who might be traveling to my village. I ran into a student I shared several classes with, and we embraced with great joy. She was still studying as a candidate for the blue robes, and urged me to stay for a few more days because they were preparing for a gathering of the Order and the customary celebratory feasts that went with the business side of things. I agreed and asked about Josiah- she said was still here at Engaddi as a student candidate, and yes, he was still the same brilliant bold young man I had left behind- only older and a fair amount wiser. I followed her to the scholar's area, eager to find him.

As it turned out, this was all perfect. My timing and arrival for the gathering was perfect, for everyone I loved was there, and I went from person to person, reconnecting after an absence that felt like lifetimes! Josiah galloped over and hugged me so hard I couldn't breathe- he lifted me off my feet and spun me around. I gasped for air and laughed, noticed how he had grown from a lanky youth into an impressive, handsome man with a striking presence. Behind him stood my beloved mother, smiling broadly, looking just as she had when I left. I flung myself into her arms and wept like a child, never ever wanting to let go. It really was one of the happiest days of my life.

Night fell, and we met for the gathering. I sat with my mother, and we held hands for most of the meeting. This gathering was for a specific, very powerful purpose, I discovered, not because of what anyone said, but because I could feel it. I was amazed at how much I had grown, how my abilities had developed and how much I had matured- when I was among my old friends in my old environment, it was abundantly clear. My experiences had changed me in a profound and fundamental way which set me apart from my scholarly friends.

One by one, various people in the gathering spoke, telling what they had witnessed in the surrounding and faraway lands. This was a time of great darkness, and great upheaval. I was asked to speak, so I did, I spoke simply and from the heart, telling my story of the slave camp and adding my insight about the Roman intent to civilize the world that they conquered. I ended with a plea for all who could to assist, for there was great need for healing, empowerment and Light.

During the feast, blue robes came up to me to congratulate me on my journey. It was a strange, they knew details I hadn't shared, events I hadn't had a chance to tell anyone, not even my mother- it dawned on me that someone, somehow, had been keeping a watchful eye on me.

A few days later, while I was resting and recovering from my illness and contemplating my next step, my mother found me and said people wanted to speak with me. I followed her to the place where the Order had their (government type) buildings, and into a room where the Master Yonis sat with, to my astonishment, the man who had been my main teacher on my sea voyage to Alexandria, and others I didn't know, but could feel strongly their power and presence. They all possessed great wisdom- that much I knew for sure.

As we joined them, the Master Yonis asked me what I was planning to do next, and the others turned to me and awaited my response. The way they looked at me- rather, the way they looked **through** me, made me feel totally naked, like they were assessing my shortcomings, my gifts, my humanity, my heart and my soul. This also felt like a test, but I didn't care. I wasn't trying to achieve anything spectacular or noteworthy, I just wanted, as always, to assist those who wanted help and healing. Through my experiences, I had apparently matured to the point where I had nothing to hide, and nothing to prove- I was quite at ease in this situation. So I told the truth, said I wasn't sure where exactly I would go next, but it would involve healing and helping empower slaves and the poor, in particular, women and children.

Then one of them asked me what I thought of the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and the

Jewish priests and temples. I said I didn't have a real issue with any of them, except for how they pandered to the Romans and drained their people of life sustaining livestock and crops while positioning themselves between their people and God.

A few more questions followed. My responses seemed to satisfy them, and I felt an energetic nod of approval passed from each one to the Master Yonis. Then Yonis asked me if I would like to travel to Egypt, to Moeris, to learn. I was honored- the Light had created a great center on Lake Moeris, a huge temple of learning with an extraordinary library and scores of Master teachers. I said that, under ordinary circumstances, I would leap at the chance- but unfortunately the state of the rest of the world was such that I couldn't hide away in books and teachers any longer. I had to be out in the world, doing my part.

To that, the Master Yonis spoke slowly and distinctly so that I knew to pay close attention. "Perhaps this is an opportunity to assist on a much greater scale. Do ponder this invitation."

This must really, truly be much more than it seemed. But I was also reluctant to leave my mother so soon after many years of absence. She must have felt my thought because she reached over and cradled my hand in hers. I glanced over for guidance, but she was just loving me- clearly this decision was mine alone. So, trusting the Master Yonis once again, while it didn't make much sense at the time, I agreed to travel to Lake Moeris for further study.

As a happy discovery, I later found out that Josiah had been invited to go as well. Even though he and I had been apart for a decade, quite a span of time for evolving young adults to grow apart, we soon realized we had actually grown closer and on parallel paths. His main focus in life was akin to mine, although his focus was the Jewish priests, the money lords and those who controlled the masses by preaching a doctrine of separation between individuals and God. His mission in life was similar, we were both determined to make a difference by being out in the world where we were needed, and we shared a laugh over the discovery that we had both initially rejected the offer to study at Moeris, and the Master Yonis had convinced him in a similar way.

After a tearful parting with my beloved mother, who promised to visit soon, we set off with a group of Essene students for Lake Moeris, an extraordinary center of Light and learning. Here, one could find Master teachers of every spiritual discipline on the planet.

We arrived at the temple on Lake Moeris and immediately began our studies. This place

was phenomenal in so many ways- physically, it was an architectural wonder, mazes of temples and rooms and libraries and an elaborate underground labyrinth- even after a year I kept finding places new to me. The study itself was so much more intense than anything I had experienced! The Masters would wake us unexpectedly at all hours for class, one on one or in groups, and we never knew what we would be studying, or with whom, from one moment to the next. We were tested on so many levels- I do think they tried to break us too, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, probing for weakness and finding strengths we didn't realize we possessed. The intent was to make us better people, impervious to triggers and anger and wise in all ways.

Some of us broke under the pressure. Some students left Moeris in tears or in an angry rage- a few even died during testing. We were pushed to the limits of our endurance, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically. We were fasted and sleep deprived, then we had to swim in the lake for days and nights until we drowned or achieved the point of the lesson- which I had already learned in my travels- to detach from the body, the suffering of the flesh, and still maintain enough of a connection to the physical to continue swimming.

We were tested on the knowledge we learned to see if we understood it or simply memorized, and we were sent out to the surrounding communities to provide assistance to the sick and the dying and the suffering. Then we returned to Moeris having to answer to what we did, and said, and why. I don't know how the teachers always knew in such detail what happened on those journeys, because they did not travel with us, but they always knew!

It was on one of those testing journeys that I met a man who I will always hold in my heart as a true embodiment of God's unconditional love for humanity. I was told to prepare to journey to a leper colony to offer healing and assistance, and I gathered the herbs and supplies I needed and waited by a well in a courtyard for the other student who would be traveling with me that day, for we always went in pairs. Across the stone courtyard, a man roughly my age, with reddish brown hair that shone like gold in the sunlight, walked toward me with a smile that said he was to be my partner for the trip. I felt immediately drawn to him, as if my soul cried out in the joy of recognition- his dark blue eyes shone with such light and love and compassion and awareness, he literally took my breath away. He asked me my name, affirmed that we were to journey together, and introduced himself simply as Jeshua Joseph bar Joseph.

Now, this may sound strange, but I immediately adored this man. Not in a sexual way, or a human way, but I instinctively recognized that he was a living, breathing, walking, talking

example of the magnificent Christed consciousness that lives inside all of us. As we walked out of the Temple, chatting, I learned that his father was an Essene, a blue robe and a Master, and that Jeshua had known my beloved mother when he was a child. I felt a profound, blissful peace just being in his presence. And I swear, within ten minutes, I would have died for him.

As we made our way to the leper colony, he was so loving and kind- and oh, what a sense of humor! Jeshua was truly funny, in a gentle, observant way. He would point out something with a smile on his face and in his eyes, saying things that **always** made me think because I quickly learned that he spoke with meaning that had many layers, and the more I thought about a statement, the more I uncovered, and the more I learned. He was simply amazing and I drank in every moment I spent with him.

We were met at the gates of the leper colony by a crowd of suffering people, crying and pleading and begging for healing. I immediately began unpacking my herbs and healing supplies, then noticed Jeshua carried nothing. I was taken aback- for one who so clearly and dearly loved humanity, he didn't bring anything to help?

I offered him some of my supplies, but he politely declined with that knowing smile of his, so gentle and powerful and loving all at the same time. "I need them not," he told me, "for these ones, I assist with my heart and my hands."

So I simply got to work, boiling water and herbs for cloth compresses, making a healing tincture that had antibiotic properties. I labored without pause for hours, working on open sores which were festering and oozing with decay, talking while I worked, supporting and loving these people who had been shunned from society, condemned to live and die in suffering as outcasts. At one point, I was working on a woman who had drifted off to sleep under my care- which was a good sign, she was comfortable and healing on a deep level- so I took the opportunity to watch Jeshua work nearby, thinking I would probably learn something.

He was kneeling in front of a badly disfigured man, washing what was left of his legs with water. The compassion on Jeshua's face moved me deeply- he was fully present and loving as the man wept and babbled about sin and punishment, quoting Jewish Law, and I will never forget what Jeshua said. "God is not concerned by man's perception of sin. God loves you without judgment. Let no man come between you and your creator, indeed the source of all life, and you shall truly be healed." This exchange went on for awhile, back and forth, the man slowly stopped crying and his largely incoherent speech solidified into a story about how a priest had

told him he was bad as a boy and that Jehovah would punish him and indeed, Jehovah had taken his legs, And if Jeshua wasn't careful, Jehovah would take **his** legs as well for helping a sinner!

But Jeshua kept loving this man, washing the dirt from his face, the dried, crusted pus, gently telling him that the reason he felt punished was because he had accepted that judgment from the priest. "Brother, what if you did nothing wrong?" he asked the man. "What if the priest had stolen coin from the taxes he collected before giving them over to the temple? And what if a hungry boy at that same time was caught stealing bread, so the priest turned the guilt and anger he felt for himself on the boy?"

Jeshua spoke with such clarity and insight- the man's eyes grew wide, then he began to cry again. But now, they were deep sobs of releasing grief, a letting go of all the pain he had carried because Jeshua spoke the truth and this man recognized the truth. When his weeping subsided, he appeared to my intuitive perception, energetically, like a new man. A **whole** man.

Looking straight into his eyes, Jeshua said, "Let no one put themselves between you and the love of your Creator." The man declared that he would not, ever again- and he said it with such passion and conviction! Jeshua kissed his cheek, then stood up and said, "Lo- (look) ye have healed yourself!"

And I stared. The man **was** healed- beautiful, shiny new skin covered a body that was free of sores and scars.

After witnessing Jeshua do this same work over and over again, (with varying degrees of success, of course, depending on the individual's willingness to heal) I said, on the road back to Moeris, something to the effect of, how in the world do you do that?

"I do nothing," he told me. "I only lend a supporting hand and loving heart. They and God do the rest. The real healing always comes from within the one at dis-ease. But," he added, giving me a significant look, "you knew that, for that is how **you** assist."

Between his look and that statement, I immediately knew that he had seen deep into the recesses of my mind. I realized that after watching Jeshua work, I had felt like people were much better off going to him for assistance instead of me.

As soon as I had that understanding, he nodded. "Beloved sister, please do not use me to dishonor yourself, for to hold your work next to another in comparison is dishonoring yourself, and dishonoring God."

Now, this is hard to explain, but he spoke with such love and respect for me, the fear that

I was no good dissipated with the light of truth. He was reminding me that I was, like him and every other person, one of God's equally beloved children. Although I needed no further proof, this simple exchange demonstrated to me that Jeshua truly was the embodiment of the Christ, the consciousness of God's unconditional love for humanity.

Before I knew it, I had stopped on the dirt road and dropped to my knees to kneel in front of him. I bowed my head and pledged my life to him, that I would do anything he ever asked of me for the rest of the days that I drew breath, and indeed, beyond. And I meant it! This vow felt entirely natural and not like worship, for I had already pledged my life to serve God, and I knew Jeshua would never ask anything of me that was out of alignment with my own heart and soul.

He laughed, reached for my hands to pull me to my feet, bowed his respect and gratitude, then we grinned at each other and simply continued on our way. Nothing was ever mentioned again about this event, but it was, as we would say today, "a done deal", and we both knew it.

After this, I didn't see Jeshua much, we only went on two more journeys together, but I learned so much from every moment I spent with him. Back at Moeris, I also saw his human side- we were standing in a courtyard after one of our trips, discussing what we had done, and he suddenly turned to stare across the lake to another part of the temple. His normally eloquent tongue turned to lead, and I saw him blush furiously.

Startled, I followed his gaze and saw, in the distance, a woman with long blonde hair sitting on another balcony, staring at him. I looked at her, then back at Jeshua, and realized he was love-struck. I began to smile. I knew this woman, his love, not very well, but I did know she was the daughter of an Arch Druid and Druid High Priestess. She was beautiful and kind, very smart, and a bit of a prankster in a fun, silly way. I immediately realized they were perfect together, and this may sound odd to our modern viewpoint, but I had not an inkling of jealousy even though I adored Jeshua- his happiness was my happiness, and I fervently hoped they would find a way to be together.

With time, the Essene students I trained and studied with (and Jeshua was not one of them) were whittled down to about a dozen. Together we tested and worked and lived in a fast-paced bubble, apart from other members of the community. We were being prepared for something, but knew not what. My pal Josiah and I would sometimes discuss this as it became clear students were being weeded out. The thing was, I didn't really care, and neither did he, for we both knew we would end up helping people, so whatever was being planned was essentially

irrelevant. We knew our paths and we trusted our hearts to lead us.

One night, after a week of particularly grueling testing, I collapsed in my bed, truly I was asleep before I even reached my room- but within a few hours I was shaken rather rudely awake by a young man who worked for the Master Yonis. He said Yonis wished to speak with me.

Rubbing sleep out of my eyes and cursing silently, I followed him into the room where Master Yonis waited. When we were alone, Yonis told me to sit.

Then, he said that I had done well in my studies, that he and my teachers were quite pleased with my efforts. He said I had passed many tests, indeed, tests I wasn't even aware of- and he called me here tonight, in secret, to offer me a place in the highest, selected ranks of the Essene Order. All the sacred wisdom held by the Essenes would be mine, I would have a powerful voice in the path the Order took as a whole, and my testing and study here would be complete. Did I agree?

I was speechless, to say the least, and more than a bit confused. Since when did the Essenes, who spoke passionately about equality and the sanctity of all life, have an inner circle? But, no matter, my response was immediate. I declined, reminding him that my intent was to serve women and children by offering healing work and empowerment, then I stood and bade him a good night so I could resume my interrupted sleep.

He scowled at me, told me to sit down. He said I **would** be assisting many by holding this position within the Order- I would be a carrier of Light, of information, and I would be training and directing the next generation to bring the Essene wisdom and healing out into the world. I would travel between Essene communities and places like Lake Moeris, sharing my wisdom and guidance with students and teachers alike.

At this, I paused. I remembered how ghastly the conditions were in the slave camp, how my heart broke every moment I was there, how each one that died, especially the children in my care, took a little piece of me with them. And although I had reviewed that experience with my teachers, and healed the emotional scarring by accepting that that was their choice, their path to return to the Source because they had completed their journey, part of me feared that if I were in a similar situation, I would again lose myself in their illusion. My compassion ran deep. It was a blessing and a curse. To be able to wash my hands of all suffering and be of great assistance anyway? Yes, I was truly tempted.

Then, I thought of how all my years as a student compared to the journeys of healing I

had been on. The life Yonis was offering me now sounded a lot like the orderly life of a scholar, although a much glorified version- still, I would not be doing what gave my heart the greatest sense of rightness, of peace- which had always been working with people, supporting them by offering them tools to change their lives for the better. “I am truly honored, Yonis, but I must refuse.”

Now, the Master Yonis never got angry, he just got **big**. Big in energy, big in directness, forceful, and very scary. He asked if I doubted his wisdom.

“No,” I stammered, then caught myself. “Yes! Yonis, I have spent years here studying and testing, because I thought I would better learn how to assist slaves and women and children. Now you’re telling me this role as an Essene leader was what this was all about?”

He dismissed me, flicking his hand toward the door, glowering with a gaze that burned like fire beneath his bushy eyebrows.

With shaky knees, I left and went back to my room, wondering if I should pack my things and leave Moeris in the morning, or wait for someone to tell me I was no longer welcome there. I sank down onto my bed and cried, tears of frustration and the frightening feeling that I had lost my mentor and my guide- I had never felt this alone and adrift in my life, not even in the slave camp. I hadn’t realized how much I relied on Master Yonis until his support was taken away.

The next morning, I saw Josiah in the student dining area, hunched over his breakfast. I had gone there thinking I would at least fill my stomach before heading out. I sat next to him, feeling sorry for myself, then noticed **he** looked glum- which for him, was unusual. I asked him what was wrong, did he feel ill? He told me that last night, Master Yonis had offered him a place in the Order that was to be, in many ways, a blue robe leading the Essenes.

“Really?” I said, trying to hide my surprise. “And did you accept?”

“Of course not,” Josiah murmured. “And I still don’t understand it. I thought he knew me better than that.”

“Well, guess what? He asked me too. And **I** said no.”

Josiah looked at me in shock. Before he could respond, another student, a friend of ours from Engaddi, swaggered up, leaned on the table and said to us in a low murmur, “I won’t be in your classes any more. The Master Yonis asked me to be in charge of the sacred scrolls and books in the library. Isn’t that fantastic? But it’s a secret- don’t tell anyone!”

The student’s eyes sparkled with such pride and accomplishment, for he had great

passion for books and sacred knowledge. I gathered my wits and congratulated him, then nudged Josiah under the table, for he just stared. Josiah snapped out of his trance and congratulated him, but our friend barely heard- he had spotted his girlfriend across the room and left to share his news.

I frowned. It seemed awfully strange that Master Yonis had woken us all in the dead of night for a secret offer that just happened to be a prestigious role in the precise area of our greatest interest. I had a sudden thought. “Josiah, do you suppose that was a test?”

His eyes widened. “Maybe. But for what purpose?”

“I don’t know.” I helped myself to some of the fruit on his plate. “How do you think we did?”

“Not well. I’ve never seen the Master Yonis so displeased.”

When I agreed sadly, thinking my head still burned from the glare he bored into the back of my skull as I left his room, Josiah started to grin. “I ranted at Master Yonis that if the Essene Order had a secret inner circle, they were no better than the Jewish temples.” We shared a hearty laugh that lifted our gloomy moods, and he threw his arm around me in a hug. “Well, we’ll just go out into the world together and do our work without the blessing of any Order. We don’t need them.”

And to that, I agreed.

Strangely, my mother arrived at Moeris that morning. Her timing was, as always, impeccable. Josiah and I sat her down and told her what had happened the night before, and of our decision to leave our studies. She listened with her usual love and patience, not weighing in one way or another, then said simply that we shouldn’t leave quite yet because there was a great celebration being held this evening and we would do well to attend. Josiah said we could easily be barred from the gathering, given the events of last night, but my mother just reiterated her suggestion.

As it turned out, we were not banished, and Josiah and I trooped along with crowds of Masters and high level students from many Orders. We entered a grand room, the biggest indoor area in the complex and sat on the polished mosaic inlay stone floor with the rest. To my surprise, Jeshua Joseph bar Joseph knelt in the center of the room on a beautiful Essene rug. He was deep in meditation.

When everyone had arrived and silence fell in the grand room, Jeshua’s Master father,

wearing the blue robe, spoke. He introduced Jeshua as his beloved son, and began listing Jeshua's accomplishments, one after another. He described to all how Jeshua had travelled to the major religions of our time, like the Essene, the Persian and the Indian, the Druid and Egyptian, how he had trained and studied and been tested and initiated to the highest level of all of them. We were all silent in awe. Even after spending days with Jeshua in travel, I had no idea this humble man had achieved so much! His father ended the recitation with the statement that after becoming a confirmed Master seven times over, his son had requested only one reward- the hand of a certain woman in marriage.

And at that point, Jeshua's love, the Druid daughter and High Priestess in her own right, was brought before us. She knelt next to Jeshua on her own rug which was woven with Druid symbols, her exquisite light golden hair cascading over her shoulders.

Nobody in the room, and there were hundreds of us, breathed. All eyes turned to the girl's father, the Arch Druid, and her High Priestess mother who stood nearby. He stepped forward in his grand white cloak and said that he had been asked by Jeshua for the hand of his beloved daughter in marriage, and that he would agree based on one request, one condition- that Jeshua give up his *messiah ship*, which simply meant his role as a messenger from God, and cease his travels around the countryside healing and teaching and return with them to the land of the Druids, where he would be able to live in peace with his bride.

I gasped, appalled that her father would ask this of Jeshua, who clearly came to this Earth as a living embodiment of the Christed consciousness to teach and to heal. How could this man also refuse and such a magnificent son? How could he ask Jeshua to choose between the woman he loved and the role that he had been prepared for by countless Master teachers his whole life, a role which he did out of love for all the so-called common people? For Josiah and me to leave the Order was one thing, but Jeshua Joseph bar Joseph was another matter entirely!

Jeshua lifted his head, which had been bowed, and I saw his shock. He was in agony, torn to the depths of his soul. He looked first at his father, whose loving but otherwise neutral expression reminded me so much of my mother when I had a painful decision to make. Jeshua next sent a pleading gaze to the Arch Druid, who glowered back, unmoving, waiting only his response. Finally, Jeshua looked at his love, and I saw the torment written on both their faces.

Eventually, after what felt like eons, Jeshua spoke. "I love this woman more than my very life," he said, "and I will sacrifice anything for her. I agree to the conditions of marriage."

Shocked murmurs rumbled through the crowd. His beloved looked up at her father, who now seemed quite satisfied. She said, in a pretty voice that rang like a bell, "Father, I love this one because of who he is, and he will not give up his messiah ship because of me. I relinquish my place in the Druids to join this one at his side." And with that, she took Jeshua's hand, and I could see how hers trembled. He protested quietly, but she silenced him.

How courageous and bold she was! From my own Druid initiation I knew she was actually risking death. The silence was deafening as everyone in the room waited to see what would happen.

I flinched as the Arch Druid bellowed triumphantly, suddenly beaming with happiness. Jeshua's father raised his arms with a joyous shout: "Behold! My son and his chosen mate! All who are present are witnesses- they each chose the path of love over duty and tradition. From this moment onward, let no one stand between my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased, and my beloved daughter, who is matched to my son in courage and in heart! Let no one stand between my son and his messiah ship, his path as ambassador for the Christ. This I have declared with the power of love, and so it is!"

The place erupted into a pandemonium of celebration. With tears of joy, Jeshua stood and drew his bride into his arms. She was sobbing with joy and relief. I cried too, realizing Jeshua had been tested, as was his wife, tested as to the power of their love for each other and what they would give up for it, but truly, no one had to give up anything for love because it was neither the will nor the way of God.

We celebrated their union with songs and feast and music until daylight, truly I doubt there has not been such a gathering of rejoicing Masters ever since. Being there also satisfied a deep part of myself. The marriage represented what God wanted for all of us- a love and union that I had not chosen in this life- in being there to witness and celebrate, their beloved union became mine too. I wept tears of joy until Josiah gave me an exasperated, one-armed hug with a smile that said he understood how I felt.

The following day, Josiah and I prepared to depart Moeris to begin our lives as Order-less healers and teachers. We didn't expect anyone to take notice as we walked across the courtyard to the main gates, about to leave forever the lives we had both known. But my beloved mother stood by the gates and beckoned. She said that some people wanted to speak with us before we left- and without another word, turned and walked back into the complex expecting us to follow.

Josiah and I exchanged glances, then shrugged- he loved my mother too and neither of us would refuse her this seemingly simple request.

In the room she led us to was Jeshua Joseph bar Joseph, who had a peaceful happy glow about him. With him stood his blue robe Master father, the Master Yonis, my Persian Master teachers from the ship, and a few others.

Master Yonis asked us where we were going, and why. We told him the truth, that we assumed that our time as students had ended, and we were heading out to the countryside to continue our healing work. One of the Persians pressed for details, and Josiah told of his desire to bring teachings of liberation to those who suffered under Roman and Jewish law by speaking of individual responsibility and God's all inclusive love. I told of my desire to assist similarly, in particular women and children and slaves, and to offer healing as well. We finished by saying we had agreed to work and travel together, empowering and assisting as many as we could.

At this, the others all turned to look at Jeshua. He smiled broadly at us, pleased by what we had shared. Then he said, "I am travelling shortly too, and I will be bringing a message of freedom and hope to those who have ears to hear. Might we travel together?"

Josiah and I looked at each other, aghast. Yes, of course, we said simultaneously, and I added that it would be a great honor to travel with the embodiment of God in flesh (there was a specific term for that).

After Jeshua declared that this decision was wonderful indeed, I shot a confused glance toward the Master Yonis, who raised his eyebrows at me. I something to the effect that the other night, when he had been so displeased, I was sure I had deeply disappointed him. Josiah chimed in that he felt the same way.

"Mm," the Master Yonis said mildly. "Yes. That would be called a test."

We all laughed heartily. First I, then Josiah embraced Jeshua and vowed to serve him well. I remember understanding in that moment that we had been chosen for a great deed, a very special purpose, and that we had been tested all along to see if we had what Jeshua might need and want- and the funny thing is, we **did** have it because we had bucked the system to follow our hearts. I'm still, to this day, in awe of how we had received the greatest honor by actually refusing our teachers, refusing to be special.

What I did **not** understand at the time I agreed to travel with Jeshua was that it meant I had also agreed to another round of training and education! But that day, Josiah and I were split

up and began lessons in certain sacred knowledge that they had decided Jeshua would need on his journey. My healing ability and knowledge, which was already fairly substantial, was expanded upon. Two Masters taught me, for example, how to prepare a dead body for reanimation by the life essence of the departed one- basically the original intent of mummification that had been corrupted and misunderstood by pharaohs, since the knowledge had been brought forth from Atlantis.

My training took on a new level of urgency- I was being prepared for a role that I didn't fully understand, but I trusted my heart and the Masters involved in this planning, determined to be ready when the time came to support Jeshua on his mission. Since I had already dedicated my life many times over to serve God, love, and the Light that shone on this weary world, my commitment to Jeshua fell right in line. They called me "the serious one"- because I embraced my supportive role and training with a fervent passion. While I truly did not know all that lay in store for us, in retrospect, that omission was a very wise decision our teachers made.

I also learned that there were four others who had been chosen to travel with Jeshua on his final, most important journey, and together, the seven of us, four men and three women, represented what some might call the original seven soul families, seven spokes on a wheel that made up a whole of humanity. Although each quite different, we all shared an internal soul driven destiny to assist humanity. And there was so much need for assistance! Between the Romans and the Jewish temples and taxes and slavery and the myriad of laws- the masses all suffered under the heel of elite, slaves to the illusion of powerlessness. There was no rivalry among us or a vying to be Jeshua's favorite- we got along beautifully based on the common desire to assist humanity, indeed, seven hearts that beat as one.

About a year later, the time came for us to depart Moeris. Never before had I experienced so many people streaming out of the complex to see us off- it was quite overwhelming, so many congratulating us, acknowledging our accomplishments and what we were about to do. I hid shyly behind Josiah and tried to remain invisible. He, on the other hand, loved this celebration- this journey was what he had prepared for all his life. While I sensed his satisfaction on a deep level, I didn't realize what exactly that meant, until later.

After much fanfare, we left Lake Moeris and started on foot down the dirt road that would eventually lead us to Jerusalem. I remember the seven of us laughing and singing and enjoying ourselves thoroughly, flushed and empowered from the joyous celebration. As we put

distance between us and Moeris, however, the flavor of our journey quickly changed.

People had heard of Jeshua, and everywhere we travelled they turned out in droves to follow him around, to hear him speak, to watch him work, to be with him, to ask for healing. He would perform what the people considered miracles to demonstrate what **anyone** could do if they stopped viewing themselves as limited and separate from the Whole. Unfortunately, many did not understand this teaching, this part of his message, and he was put on a pedestal and revered, none of which pleased him. He would sometimes refuse a request if he felt the one asking for assistance intended him to save them from themselves, or if someone wanted him to prove that he was God walking the Earth.

I was mobbed as well, approached by many slaves and women with babes in their arms and children in tow, ones who felt they couldn't ask this great man for assistance because they didn't deserve it, but could I help them somehow? I felt such profound peace and sense of rightness doing what I loved, and for so many! We were also driven out of towns by angry priests who realized they were losing their following, and by the Roman soldiers they summoned. We would leave usually at the very last minute, but we always got away unscathed, for Jeshua's sense of timing was flawless, knowing just when to leave and which road to take to escape. He had said our destination was Jerusalem, and for that, nothing could stop us.

Our group would also splinter off periodically, mostly Josiah and the other men would travel ahead and bring news of Jeshua's impending arrival, to encourage everyone who had ears to hear and eyes to see to come and witness the messiah, the one who carried a message from God, a message of truth and freedom.

One evening, as we walked a broad, busy caravan road, Josiah and two of the other men were making plans to go in advance to Jerusalem prepare the people for Jeshua's arrival. Jeshua lifted his head to listen, as if he heard a faraway sound. "Delay your departure until the morning light," he said, "for a storm approaches."

Quickly, and just in time, we sought shelter in a rocky cliff. Josiah and I huddled together, using our cloaks as meager protection. The driving sand and howling wind made talk impossible, so we leaned against each other for warmth and comfort. When the storm passed just as abruptly as it hit, the desert night twinkled bright with stars, and the waxing moon rose over the horizon.

I sensed that Josiah was still awake, even though he had lain back and drawn his cloak

over his face as he always did for sleep. I looked up the stars, then watched the moon's progression, still resting against my very first and very best friend. I loved him so much, so completely, and I wondered what lay ahead, and how we would reunite after Jerusalem. It was bound to turn dangerously chaotic once Jeshua got there, for we had heard that the Jewish priests had pleaded with the Romans to remove this threat to their livelihoods for once and for all. How would I find him? Should we arrange to meet in a nearby town? Or at home?

"Little sister," came Josiah's quiet, muffled murmur from inside his cloak, "remember this well. We will always be together. Never doubt that. I will find you, lifetime after lifetime."

I drew a sharp breath, realizing he had heard my thoughts, knowing his answer confirmed a foreboding that this would be the last time we would be together. I felt his arm around my waist, and he drew me close. As tears slipped from my eyes, he added, "This is my choice. Let it bring you only joy, for I am completing my journey on this Earth, and completing it well."

I held on tight to that ultimate truth, that wisdom, as dawn broke and he and the other men took their leave. I hugged Josiah goodbye. Through eyes that burned with unshed tears, I watched the three of them stride down the road that led to the great city of Jerusalem. He took one last look back, beamed a magnificent smile at me, and then he was gone.

I turned to notice Jeshua gazing at me, and the compassion on his face was almost my undoing. But I took a slow, deep breath and reached for God's strength, drawing it in to fill me with clarity and centeredness on the job that **I** had to do. Then I smiled at Jeshua to reassure him, and said we should go as well, for we were expected at a nearby town.

I had become close friends with one of the seven, a woman named Matiya, also an Essene, for we both had been given only one directive before we left Moeris- we were to stay with Jeshua for the entire journey. We were told we would simply know when our mission was complete and we could return home. That was all they said, and apparently that was all that was needed. So, she and I and the third woman in our party headed with Jeshua into the next town, and then the next, and when Jeshua announced that it was time, (for he **always** knew), we took the fork in the road that would lead us into the heart of Jerusalem.

It was a hot afternoon, and the gritty dust that had become our constant companion puffed up around each step of our feet. We climbed a low hill and paused at the top- down below we could see a Roman checkpoint. A dozen or so soldiers guarded our road into Jerusalem, stopping merchants and travelers alike, collecting taxes and searching for contraband, thieves, or slaves on

the run. Even from a distance, the way the soldiers bullied and harassed a group of frightened families told me they were just looking for an excuse to run someone through with their swords.

Now, we had already been warned that Roman soldiers would be looking for Jeshua, that the priests and local Jewish governing bodies had complained that this man and his message were cutting into the Roman profits (and of course, theirs as well), because he taught that paying crops and livestock to governments and temples was simply **not** necessary to earn God's unconditional love, or the right to a peaceful life! I really didn't think the Romans felt threatened by Jeshua, but I knew they would not like the idea of losing coin and the power they wielded through the priests.

Turning to Jeshua, I suggested we wait until nightfall to circumvent the checkpoint, or turn back and find another way in that wasn't so closely guarded. My concern was that the soldiers would figure out who he was and arrest us before we reached the city.

He looked at me with his wise, loving eyes and said, "Why are we here, sister, if not to serve?" A statement which, as usual, had many layers of meaning. So, down we went, straight into the arms of the Romans.

The soldiers spotted us, and started asking Jeshua (as the only male in our party) very aggressively who we were, where we were going, and why. They acted very suspicious, and I could read their thoughts- they were wondering if this was the Jewish rabble-rouser they were told to watch out for.

Jeshua said, "I am but a poor traveler, and these are my companions. What is it you seek among these people?" He indicated the terrorized band of peasant families.

"None of your business, Jew," was the essence of their response, "this is the business of the Roman Empire."

Jeshua looked past the soldier to a woman that I had noticed as well, one of the band of families was quite ill, and she had a newborn in her arms. She was ghostly pale, I could tell that she was weak from childbirth and a lack of proper postpartum care. I knew, and I'm sure Jeshua did as well, that without help soon she would probably die- I recognized her terrible, utter exhaustion and despair.

To the soldier, Jeshua said, "The woman over there requires assistance, and my companion is a healer, wise in the ways of women."

I started toward the woman, and a sword flashed to stop me, pointed at my abdomen,

glittering razor sharp in the sun. The soldier said something to the effect of, he didn't care if Jewish dogs died.

“Ah,” said Jeshua, “But that one carries a son in her arms. Might not the Roman Empire have use for a strong man when he is grown?”

Jeshua had a knack for saying exactly what a person needed to hear. The soldier barked over to the woman, demanding to know the gender of her pup- and her nervous, hovering husband stripped off the swaddle to display the child's penis. So the guard lowered his sword from my belly and jerked his head in their direction.

I knelt next to her and got to work, feeding her a tincture of blood strengthener and antibiotic herbs, working on her energetic bodies as well as her physical. As I helped her body seal the area where her life force still flowed out from the birthing process, I realized that she was subconsciously bleeding her life force into her infant still, and that had to stop. She thought it was the only way to ensure his survival, for sons were more important than women in her mind, and she was willingly giving him everything she had even at the cost of her own life. She was young, and this was her first child. I addressed all of that by talking to her about the sacred role of motherhood, quietly so the Romans wouldn't hear. Who will raise this fine son to manhood, I said, and swaddle him and care for him? Who will kiss his bruises and teach him how to love and laugh? She responded to my care quickly, her willingness to hear my words and embrace her own healing demonstrated to me that her life path was not to end any time soon. I was pleased. Unless something happened and she allowed herself to again accept the idea that she was disposable, this child would have his momma.

When my work was done, I stood and gathered my things, smiling at the husband who bowed repeatedly, refusing the small bags of dried food he tried to thrust at me for payment. I said, “This is God's work, and God has no desire for your goods, only for your life.” Meaning, a life that was not separate from God.

Jeshua had continued talking to the Romans until I returned, and he looked over at the woman to assess my work- his nod and smile made my heart glow with humble pride. The soldiers seemed confused now, not at all cocky or sure of themselves after whatever Jeshua had said to them. They told us to continue on to Jerusalem, that he was not the one they sought. They had been told to look for a man who proclaimed to be the King of Jews, (which Jeshua never called himself, actually), and such a man wouldn't travel with a couple of women anyway.

The soldier spat at my feet in disdain, which honestly didn't bother me in the slightest, then went to intercept a merchant caravan trundling down the hill.

As we neared the city, Jeshua turned quiet. Normally, he would tell stories that had multiple layers of meaning, or we would take turns making up goofy songs. I asked if something troubled him.

He gave me a loving, somber look that I will never forget, a look that sent chills down my back. The time is near, he said, the Romans wait with the priests. Our journey is almost complete. I knew there was more than he was telling me- and I soon found out exactly what that was.

One of the seven, one of the men who had travelled ahead with Josiah, met us just outside the city. When I saw he was alone, I suddenly knew what Jeshua had sensed, and our companion confirmed it- Josiah had been arrested for inciting the community to worship idols, (Jeshua) which was against the Law. He was soon to be executed, stoned by a mob whipped to a frenzy by the angry priests.

At this point of the story, my memory becomes disjointed. I do remember feeling momentarily paralyzed by dread- do I follow the directive I had been given to stay with Jeshua, or do I go find Josiah and try to secure his release?

Jeshua heard my silent anguish. He turned to me and said, "Beloved sister, this one knew his path, all of it. But this choice is yours, you may go."

But I wouldn't- couldn't- leave Jeshua. He was right, of course, and I simply said no, I would stay with him, but I did pull my hood up over my head as we walked and cried a little. I reached for Josiah's energy and felt his calm strength and peace, and I sent my love out to him and simply held it there. I did know the moment he died, because I felt a rush of energy, a burst of his beingness into the light into God.

As it turned out, his arrest and stoning, all very public events, had helped prime the people. They were quite excited to come see the man that someone like Josiah, so bold and beautiful and charismatic, would willingly die for. I knew there to be to others too, equally as eloquent, who had come to speak from the heart and bring news of Jeshua. A crowd that jammed the streets greeted us.

Jeshua's arrival brought the city's normal business to a grinding halt. He spoke in packed public squares that no one need follow a religion or a man, only one's heart and the light of God

that lives within each of us. He told of true freedom, a divine right that did need to be exercised in daily choices, and guarded vigilantly from interference by the laws and ego of man.

In the crowds, I would catch glimpses of members of the Order, Masters dressed as commoners who had come to witness Jeshua's final test. I would see them like apparitions while I was busy urging women to respect and honor themselves, embracing their sacred power as the life givers and care givers of God's children- whether they bore them physically or not, the divine responsibility was the same. I spoke of not allowing anything, man or law, to interfere with their hearts and their knowingness, especially concerning the children in their communities that trusted them for nurturing and loving and guidance to adulthood. That is your sacred duty, I taught, not giving your life to please a temple or even a mighty empire.

I poured my heart into my work, not really caring what happened to me personally, only that my message be delivered as best as I could, reaching out to those who wanted assistance but who were either barred or felt undeserving of joining the predominantly male crowds that mushroomed up around Jeshua.

Now, I honestly don't remember anything about a last supper, or betrayal by a disciple- but I do remember this: Jeshua was standing on a raised stone wall in the center of great public square, speaking to by far the biggest crowd yet. Matiya and I split up to move on the outskirts, looking for what we might do to assist, when I suddenly saw Roman soldiers, about a dozen of them, coming. I knew in that instant that they were here for Jeshua. This was it- he was about to be arrested.

I intercepted the soldiers in a desperate attempt to stop them, to delay them. We had so many people yet to reach, so many eager souls to assist! They just pushed me aside, saying they were here for the Jew causing all the trouble, and my plea for them to arrest me instead brought disdainful laughter. King of Jews, indeed, they said, we'll see how easily this legend falls. But I could read in their energy that their swagger masked trepidation- they feared Jeshua's reportedly miraculous powers and a backlash from the crowd.

In total helplessness, I watched the soldiers muscle through the crowd with drawn swords. I heard one say to Jeshua that he was under arrest for inciting rebellion against the Roman Empire.

Now, and this is important to note- Jeshua, with all of his training and initiations into mystic traditions, could have done anything at that point. He could have simply disappeared,

raising the matter that made up his body into pure energy and re-solidifying it safety somewhere else. He could have called down lightning and hail from the clear blue sky, indeed, he could have felled them with a glance right where they stood. But this magnificent, loving man simply looked out at the crowd and delivered his final message in a quiet voice that somehow all could hear, and what he said was this: Behold, (look and listen) these are the laws that you obey, where a message of a freedom is silenced, where truth is suppressed, truth that that no man need follow another man, or a religion or a government. This is the suppression and denial of the love that God has for each and every one of you. Do not allow fear or any authority to take that truth from you.

And with that, he allowed the soldiers to arrest him. They hauled him off roughly, clearly relishing the power they had, so pleased with themselves that they had subdued him and the hundreds of people who looked on silently.

I watched in horror, thinking we weren't done. This couldn't be the end! As I started after them, I spotted Matiya doing the same, obeying the directive to be with Jeshua until he had completed his journey. My mind reeled with possibilities, I could stop them, secure his freedom from the soldiers- it wouldn't take much, for the Druid arts I had learned were powerful- when I literally ran straight into Master Yonis. Panicked, I blurted that they had taken Jeshua, that he was under arrest for treason, and that they would surely put him on trial and condemn him, but he wasn't finished with his teaching for still more souls came to hear him.

The Master Yonis held up a hand, and leveled a stare that drove straight into my soul. "Do **not** interfere."

I shrank back, grappling with my mind and emotions, turning away from the terror and seeking the clarity and eternal peace of a Master's mind, as I had been taught by so many. And he stood there, and watched me, until he saw that I had recovered, then he simply ducked away into the crowd.

I ran, catching up to Matiya, who was now walking following the soldiers surrounding Jeshua at a respectful, female distance. The look on her face helped reinforce my serenity- she was very calm, very purposeful

We camped outside the government building where they held him under arrest, for as women we were forbidden to enter, then followed again as they took him to the main square for trial. He had been beaten, we could see dried blood on his face and legs, but his expression and

his energy radiated only a profound peace.

The trial, such as it was, was a joke- clearly, the priests and the Romans wanted to make an example of Jeshua so no one would be tempted to incite rebellion again. As the governing body announced a list of grievances against him, Matiya and I walked through the crowd, reminding people of their divine power and rights, urging them to speak up, to claim their independence from authority. I remember the indifference - people were engrossed in the trial and cared not what I had to say. They felt safety in the idea that the laws they clung to and the society they obeyed was the absolute authority, and the most I got was a sympathetic shrug. I honestly had to work hard not to lose my focus to anger and frustration.

When it was Jeshua's turn to speak, he did not defend himself against the charges. All he said was that this trial was not about him personally, it was about the suppression of everyone who would want freedom, the oppression of all souls who allowed themselves to be controlled by another, that no one need follow an authority outside the God force within. They pronounced him a dead man and hauled him off after making sure the crowd was sufficiently impressed.

The next thing I remember, he was walking down a street lugging a huge wooden cross. I saw how he had been tortured, for they had stripped off all of his clothing except a cloth that covered his groin, and apparently the jailers took great delight in tormenting this magnificent man. Now, again, it is important to note that Jeshua certainly had the ability to heal his own body in an instant- and yet he chose not to. I battled disgust that bubbled inside of me at the gawking people who came out of their homes and shops to watch him pass by, downtrodden, miserable people unwilling to stand up for themselves and their right to freedom! I heard Jeshua's soothing voice in my head, where he projected this message to me: "Sister, it is as it was planned. I am not suffering. Why should you?"

In a clearing outside of town, marked by cliffs and boulders, the soldiers stopped him. I stood with Matiya a few yards away. We watched the soldiers drag him roughly to the top of the cross and drive long sharp spikes into his beautiful healing hands. I lowered my gaze and breathed steadily and evenly, holding my serenity while they finished. Then they dropped the bottom part of the cross into a deep hole in the ground that had obviously been used many times before, and pushed the cross upright. There was Jeshua, in the light of the sun, hanging by his hands and feet, looking so peaceful and perfect. He had a faraway look in his eyes, like he was already busy preparing for the rest of his test and took no notice of any of it.

A few soldiers remained behind to make sure no one took him down, but because I was just a woman they allowed me to approach the cross. I reached up and touched his feet, wiping the blood with my robe, making sure my hands and my intent held only God's love for him and not a human attachment to the outcome of his path. Then I returned to Matiya's side and we sat together to wait, breathing a Master's breath, building an energy of serenity and power of unconditional love as we had been taught, trusting that to carry me through the final steps of my duty. And indeed, I remained in that detached, observing and aware space until shortly before the end of my own life.

Jeshua left his body quickly, for the next I remember the soldiers were commenting in surprise that he was already dead. I opened my eyes and looked, for I had been deep in meditation- his head was hanging and there was no life left in the body. The soldiers debated for a while, whether to leave it up there for three days and three nights as they had been instructed, or to finish the job now. One of them was sent to fetch a superior officer, who gave the order to bring the cross down, saying it was better to be done with this Jew business so they could move on to more important things.

As the cross was lifted out of the hole and dropped rudely onto the ground, one of the soldiers with cold hard eyes said to us, look at how easily your weak lord fell- he didn't even last a full day. And he drove his spear into Jeshua's side in emphasis.

There were a few others who had gathered near us, I noticed, and they had the power, the flavor of an Order that I could sense. I knew they were there to help us carry out our final directive, a thought confirmed when a man among them met my gaze in subtle recognition.

"Might we have the body?" I asked the soldiers, just as I had been instructed a lifetime ago in Lake Moeris. "Jewish law states he is entitled to a proper burial."

More discussion, more debate among the soldiers. I pressed my case, using a technique I had been taught to push my intent into their minds so that my wish became their own. I said we were doing them a favor, that they wouldn't have a lingering issue about the lack of a proper burial.

When they agreed, the men from Moeris stepped forward and surrounded the cross. I now noticed the third woman from our original seven among them, she carried a cloth bag of supplies we would need. They removed the body from the cross, and wrapped it in white linen for ease of carrying, and started down a trail deeper into the cliffs- they obviously knew where they were going. Matiya and I followed

We ducked under the low opening of a cave, where torches had already been lit. The men lay the body gently down on a slab of rock that seemed to have been placed there for this very purpose. They left to stand guard outside the mouth of the cave while Matiya and I got to work. Someone had made sure that witnesses would be present, for I could hear them talking to curious people who had come to see what happened, I could hear them telling the story of his death and that his body was being purified for burial.

But, in fact, Matiya and I were preparing the body for reanimation, as we had been taught by the Egyptian Masters. I'm not sure why this was so important, for I knew Jeshua didn't need it - he could have reanimated any body, no matter what the condition, for it was a relatively simple matter of directing life force energy back into a form. However, we had our orders, for part of Jeshua's mission was to fulfill a certain ancient prophecy, and we set about cleaning dirt and blood from the body, rubbing it with myrrh and other sacred herbs, focusing our intent on creating a bubble of high vibrational energy so no decay could begin. Finally, we dressed the body in a clean white robe. We gathered our supplies and the dirty cloth that had held the body for its trip from the cross to the cave, went outside to the others and declared our work complete. The men, about a dozen of them, watched by a group of onlookers who were unaware that they were chosen witnesses, rolled a boulder over the mouth of the cave to seal it.

I stood there for a few minutes, listening to the men talk, learning that they would stand guard until Jeshua moved the rock back out of the way and walked out of the cave in three days time. Clearly, my job was done.

I turned and left, going away from everyone, deeper into the maze of cliffs and rocks, until I came upon an outcropping that reminded me of the little desert haven I had encountered ages ago, the one that had begun this journey of mine. I sat beneath the rock and picked up a pebble, let it roll from one hand to another, then dropped it and started to cry. I wept bitterly for Josiah, grieving not for his death, but for the fact that he would leave me. I wept for what happened to Jeshua, not because he suffered, he really didn't- but because of what I had witnessed- the complete indifference of the common man and woman, those he worked so hard to bring a message of hope and freedom. They didn't care that he was brutally tortured, unfairly tried and put to death. There wasn't even a crowd to watch the crucifixion- the people feared the Romans and priests so much that very few dared to be linked to him once he was arrested. The people obviously weren't willing to accept the message we brought, the hope I had so eagerly

offered. It felt like a punch in the gut.

Remember, this is what I had lived for, worked for, trained for- to bring a message of individual empowerment and God's unconditional love, only to find that no one really wanted to hear it.

Warning bells went off in my mind. I was teetering on the brink of illusion again. I had become attached to the outcome of my work. Instead of grieving, I should be elated that we had all achieved our goals. Jeshua had accomplished his mission, of that I was sure- he would reanimate his body and reappear to his chosen disciples, urging them to carry on his message, **our** message. He would then return to his beloved bride, triumphant and free to travel with her to the holy of the holies, (and I am told they had four children and lived long, happy lives together). I could get up, dust myself off, and go back to Moeris to join the great celebration that I knew would be held. I could accept a role as a teacher and a healer, a guide to young adults, whatever I wanted. For that matter, I could even have a mate, and have children, or adopt unwanted ones like myself. The role I had prepared for, as dictated by my heart and soul, was fulfilled. I could feel it, a new openness and freedom to do with my life whatever I chose.

But, I did not.

Even though I knew better, and had all the training to ensure that this very thing did not happen to me, my heart was broken by a deep disappointment in the people, my brother sister souls. The **apathy**. And I was angry at the Light- although nonphysical beings came to assist me in my darkest hour, I could feel their arms of love- I pushed them away. I really didn't see the point to all of this, some stupid prophecy being fulfilled, what difference would that really make? Jeshua's message would probably be twisted as time went on, used as the foundation for some equally oppressive and misleading religion- and all of this work we did out of love for the people would be for naught.

I was done. Really done.

And so, even though I knew damn well this act would start me down a cycle of lifetimes wandering in darkness like the majority of humanity that believed the illusion of this world, separated from God by choice, I lay back in the dirt and began the process I had learned from the Druids to will my consciousness out of my body. Then I cut the cord that bound me to my life in the physical, and there I died.

THE END