

# The Wisdom of Narnia:

Exploring the Inner Journey in



The Lion, the Witch  
and the Wardrobe

*Christopher Page*

THE WISDOM OF NARNIA:  
Exploring the Inner Journey in  
*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

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For Rachel and Naomi  
my first and still my favourite audience for  
the Chronicles of Narnia

The Rev. Christopher Page is the rector of  
St. Philip's Anglican Church, Oak Bay, in Victoria  
and the author of two books; *Christ Wisdom Spiritual  
Practice in the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer* and  
*Mark's Gospel, Awakening the Voice Within*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study began one day nearly twenty years ago when I sat down on the sofa with a four year old little girl on one side of me and a two year old on the other. By the end of that day I had read, and they had listened to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Those two little girls are grown now and moving out into the world to discover their own adventures. But Rachel and Naomi remain my most delightful audience for C.S. Lewis' magical tales. In those two little girls, grown now into beautiful young women, I see every day the magic of Narnia and the wonder of that magic at work in the world. I bless them and thank them for the gift they are in my life.

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NB: All page numbers for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* are from the Puffin Books edition, reprinted 1975.

All biblical quotations are from *The New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible.

## INTRODUCTION

Any text can be read in a variety of ways. The way we decide to read a text will shape the meaning we discover in that text. The following study encourages the reader to read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as a mythic adventure. In mythic adventure one of the central characters of the story is largely missing from the text. The missing character is the reader. The reader is a central character in the text because, when we read a text as a mythic adventure, we are reading the text as if it were a description of the human journey. We are reading the text as if it were telling our story.

In a number of places in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis addresses the reader directly. He wants us to know that we are included in this story. In fact, just as the children will enter Narnia through the wardrobe we are invited to enter our own lives in a deeper way through the wardrobe that is Lewis' text. This story is not just about ideas, theology, or concepts. This story is about the reader. Lewis addresses in this text the great questions of every reader's life.

What does it really mean to be human? What is our true destiny as human beings? How do we need to relate to one another in order to be fully human? What is our destiny as beings created by God? How can we hope to know the invisible God who transcends all of creation? What is the true human response to the reality of suffering?

Lewis does not address these questions from a dispassionate, distant, intellectual perspective. He probes the deepest questions of life from a position of passionate faith and commitment to a Christian worldview and to the God who Lewis believed embodied this worldview in the person of Jesus. We do not need to share Lewis' understanding in order to enjoy reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. It is a lovely story simply as a story. But, if we are going to penetrate the depths of this text, we must be willing to allow something deep within ourselves to be stirred and we must be willing to follow wherever that stirring might lead.

In order to truly appreciate Lewis' work we need to bring to it as readers something of the quality of spirit that informed the writer. To fully benefit from this work we must approach it with gentleness and a willingness to be changed. It is no mistake that Lewis has framed his story in terms of a children's fantasy.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18:16, 17). "Little children" have not yet learned to protect themselves. They have not yet built walls around their hearts. They do not have the deadly adult skills that enable us to keep life at a distance. Children are open, innocent, and receptive. These are the qualities that will make it possible for us to read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* with the depth and insight from which it was written.

In approaching this book we need to lay aside some of the familiar tools with which we normally seek to control our world and create a safe place for ourselves. We will need to let Lewis' words get inside our hearts. We must be willing to find ourselves in Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy. Each child describes a different way of engaging in the enterprise of life. Each processes events and circumstances in different ways. Sometimes their responses lead them closer to the light; at other times each child makes choices that move him or her towards darkness and death. None of these children is all good or all bad. Lewis paints a much more complex picture of the human condition than we often embrace. He understood that human beings are deeply complex and often profoundly conflicted. But he believed ultimately that there was good in all.

The inner journey into which Lewis invites us in this book is a journey towards the discovery of that which is best within us. It is a journey towards the discovery of our true nature. There will be many distractions and dead-ends along the way. But if we follow faithfully where the journey leads, we will come to a place of light and truth. We will discover the radiant divinity that is our true destiny. And we will be empowered to live more deeply in communion with God.

The deep questions of life cannot be answered on the surface. If we ever hope to experience any kind of resolution to the tensions and unease of existence in this world, it will only be as we open within ourselves to a deeper reality. Our peace in this world depends largely upon our willingness to embrace the possibility of realities that transcend this world. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis invites us to embrace the possibility of another reality that intersects our commonly known reality but refuses to be confined to our normal faculties of perception. This journey goes beyond our usual ways of knowing into the land of mystery, wonder, and "magic." This is the land of Narnia. The way to this land is by having the eyes of our hearts opened to the unknown depths of the human condition. We will make this journey as we open to the God who breathes life into stone and creates hope where there once was only darkness.

## CHAPTER I - Lucy looks into a Wardrobe

C.S. Lewis' classic children's tale *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* begins in a broken world. Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy have been "sent away from London during the war because of the air-raids" (9). This is a world of alienation and exile, a world in which children are forced by the horrors of war to be taken away from their families, from all that is familiar and comforting.

In Christian tradition, this world is the world of the desert landscape, or the wilderness terrain. This is the place to which Jesus was driven at the beginning of his ministry when he was "led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). For Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy, their exile is to "the heart of the country, ten miles from the nearest railway station and two miles from the nearest post office" (9). They are sent to the house of the old Professor where they are cut off from all normal means of commerce and communication in their culture.

When we go into the wilderness, the normal scaffolding of our lives is dismantled. Those familiar strategies we use to preserve our sense of self suddenly do not work anymore. We are left in the wilderness to explore the deeply complex and mysterious passageways of our inner being and finally to come face to face with ourselves. Lewis portrays the journey into this inner world using the picture of four children exploring the mysterious hidden world of the house to which they have been sent. It is a house "that you never seem to come to the end of, and it was full of unexpected places" (11). On their journey through this house the children

came to a very long room full of pictures and there they found a suit of armour; and after that was a room all hung with green, with a harp in one corner; and then came three steps down and five steps up, and then a kind of little balcony, and then a whole series of rooms that led into each other and were lined with books – most of them very old books and some bigger than a Bible in a church. (11)

The inner life of every human being is a complex maze of winding passageways and long rooms, some empty others filled with memories, pictures, images, and stories. There are stairs that go up leading to stairs that go down. Some of the passageways in this house that is our lives hold great promise but we find they lead nowhere. Other hallways that appear to lead only to rooms that are empty and dull are in reality places where we begin to discover the true adventure of our lives.

The great fourth-century Christian theologian Gregory of Nyssa once wrote that "It is characteristic of divinity to be incomprehensible: this must also be true of the image."<sup>1</sup> We human beings are vastly more complex and mysterious than we often give ourselves credit for. There is an enormous array of forces that work together to make us the people we have become. Our lives are shaped by our genetic inheritance, the social and

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (New York: New City Press, 1993), p.78. ▼

economic environment in which we were raised, the character of those who raised us, the decisions and choices we make in life, and hidden unconscious forces that we can neither name nor control.

When we become conscious of the mystery and the brokenness of life, there is a tendency to believe that there is some malignant force at work in the world that is intent on harming us. The morning after the children's arrival at the old Professor's house "there was a steady rain falling, so thick that when you looked out of the window you could see neither the mountains nor the woods nor even the stream in the garden" (10-11). Edmund concludes that this is some cosmic plot to hinder his enjoyment in life. "'Of course it *would* be raining!' said Edmund" (11).

If the cosmos is personally antagonistic towards us, it only makes sense to find a safe place to hide and to withdraw from the adventure of life. It is tempting to seek some pleasing distraction to avoid facing the complex and complicated realities that make up human existence. There is, however, another possibility. The mystery and the pain of life can motivate us to a deep inner journey. They can become the motivation for an inner exploration for meaning and depth that will shape our lives and bring us new insight and wisdom.

If we are willing to explore the vast mystery of our own inner lives, we will discover eventually that we must face ourselves. And so, the children in exploring the Professor's house come finally to "a room that was quite empty except for one big wardrobe." And this wardrobe was "the sort that has a looking-glass in the door" (11).

Peter is determined to explore this world: "I'm going to explore in the house," he announces the first morning of their stay as Edmund grumbles about the rain that has kept them inside. But the child with the whole-hearted commitment to go all the way in this exploration is not Peter but Lucy. When they discover the apparently empty room containing the wardrobe, Peter declares, "'Nothing there!' ...and they all trooped out again – all except Lucy. She stayed behind because she thought it would be worth while trying the door of the wardrobe, even though she felt almost sure that it would be locked" (11-12).

After the resurrection of Jesus, when Simon Peter and another disciple came to the tomb they saw "Nothing there!" So "the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb" (John 20:10, 11). Lucy in Narnia and Mary in Jerusalem were the first to witness the miracle of a reality beyond the complex and confusing world in which we find ourselves. Mary and Lucy were not willing to give up and simply walk away. They were determined to leave no stone unturned in their search for truth and life.

The Gospel presents us with an invitation to participate in a journey. When Jesus encountered his first followers, they asked him, "'Rabbi' [which translated means 'Teacher'], where are you staying?" In response, Jesus did not draw his disciples a map. He did not give them a lecture on geography or a lesson on the spiritual life. Instead, Jesus simply said, "Come and see" (John 1:38, 39). Jesus invited them to join

him on a journey. He encouraged them to step into the unknown in trust and faith that they would be guided on the journey and brought to the place for which their hearts longed.

As with any journey, there is uncertainty and challenge. As she walked through the wardrobe for the first time, “Lucy felt a little frightened, but she felt very inquisitive and excited as well” (13). Will we allow that inner inquisitive voice to draw us on, to be our guide? Will we follow where that voice may lead, walking “forward, *crunch-crunch* over the snow and through the wood towards the other light” (14)?

### A. The Story

1. How does Lewis describe the Professor’s house as the children begin to explore?
2. What compels Lucy to proceed further than the other children in her exploration of the wardrobe?
3. What is it that guides Lucy as she begins to emerge from the wardrobe into Narnia?

### B. Your Experience

1. How does it feel to be cut off from everything in your world that is familiar and comforting?

What is the effect of such an experience?

What are the normal coping mechanisms we resort to when we find ourselves in exile?

2. What are the factors in our lives that cause us to look at the surface of life and conclude that there is “Nothing there!”?
3. What might there have been about Lucy in the story and Mary in the gospel of John that causes them to persevere and look deeper into the mystery of life?
4. What might it cost us to become more like Lucy and Mary?

### C. A Spiritual Task

Observe your tendency to look at life as if there were “Nothing there!” and see what happens if you pause a little longer and look a little deeper.

## CHAPTER II - What Lucy found there

To make the challenging journey within, we must be willing to be confronted with questions. Some of the questions we face will be difficult to answer. If we are to persevere in the inner journey, we must accept that there are questions that are not going to be immediately or easily answered.

In his *Letters To A Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke pleads with his reader

I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love *the questions themselves* as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. <sup>2</sup>

Narnia is filled with unanswered questions. To push prematurely for an answer to a difficult question is to prevent the question from doing its real work in our lives. The spiritual journey means living with the tension, the uncertainty, the doubt, even the fear of unanswered and sometimes unanswerable questions. Richard Rohr suggests that "Faith is the only way of knowing that is patient with also not knowing."<sup>3</sup> The inner journey requires that we be at peace with the mystery of not knowing.

The landscape of Narnia is different than any we have encountered in the normal routines of living in the external sphere of life. We will see sights, hear sounds, and experience things that are not familiar. We will be driven again and again to confront questions of our identity, who we are, and where we have come from. How did we get here? What does it really mean to be human? And what is the goal of human living?

The questions start for Lucy right at the beginning of her adventure. When she meets Mr. Tumnus he asks, "Excuse me – I don't want to be inquisitive – but should I be right in thinking that you are a Daughter of Eve?" Lucy is uncertain even of the meaning of the faun's question: "My name's Lucy," said she, not quite understanding him." Mr. Tumnus pushes the question again: "But you are – forgive me – you are what they call a girl?" (16).

Then he wants to know how she came to be in Narnia. "And may I ask, O Lucy Daughter of Eve," said Mr. Tumnus, "how you have come into Narnia?" Here, as with many of the most penetrating questions of life, Lucy can answer only with a question of her own: "Narnia? What's that?" said Lucy" (16). Like the house Lucy and her siblings have come to visit from London, the questions of life form endless intersecting

<sup>2</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters To A Young Poet* trans. Stephen Mitchell (NY: Vintage Books, 1986), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), p. 106.

passageways, wandering halls, and mysterious rooms with windows looking out on to the vast spaces of the world around.

It is surely significant that the first of the four children in our story to stumble into Narnia is Lucy. Lucy is the youngest of the four children. Young children ask questions. Young children have a natural curiosity, an inquisitiveness that pushes them forward to encounter the world in all of its newness and strangeness. Buddhists call this quality “beginner’s mind.” The renowned Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki in the “Prologue” to his *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* says that “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in the expert’s mind there are few.”<sup>4</sup>

Lucy’s mind is open, free of preconceptions. She is willing to accept Mr. Tumnus’ questions and to acknowledge that she may not understand or always know the correct answers. So, it is Lucy who opens to the inner world and embraces the possibility that there might be something beyond an empty room and a wardrobe. It is this openness that pushes Lucy forward and draws her into the adventure by which she will discover deeper truth about herself and her true nature.

For the journey within is ultimately a journey towards our true self. It is a journey in which we move further from those illusions to which we have clung for a sense of self and discover our true nature. Mr. Tumnus points the direction of this journey right at the outset. Having lured Lucy to his cave and provided her with “a wonderful tea,” he has taken “from its case on the dresser a strange little flute that looked as if it were made of straw and began to play.” The tune he played “made Lucy want to cry and laugh and dance and go to sleep all at the same time” (21). Mr. Tumnus is lulling Lucy into a trance in order to hand her over to the White Witch. His charming gentle innocence is not what it appears on the surface. There is a darker underside to this faun.

But, confronted by the trusting innocence of Lucy, Mr. Tumnus faces a moment of truth, breaks down, and weeps. Then he confesses to Lucy, telling her

Would you believe that I’m the sort of Faun to meet a poor innocent child in the wood, one that had never done me any harm, and pretend to be friendly with it, and invite it home to my cave, all for the sake of lulling it asleep and then handing it over to the White Witch? (23)

Mr. Tumnus has been the first to make the journey of Narnia. He has faced himself, seen the dark side of his nature, and surrendered to the light that Lucy has brought with her. To see our true nature is to understand that the broken world that has brought Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy to a strange house in the English countryside is simply a reflection of the complex broken nature within ourselves. The world is broken because the human inhabitants of the world are broken.

<sup>4</sup> Shunryu Suzuki *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind: Informal talks on Zen meditation and practice* (NY: Weatherhill, 1970), p. 21.

John the Baptist pointed the way towards the Gospel by calling his audience to “Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2). To repent is to do as Mr. Tumnus has done. To repent is to recognize that we are not always within as we appear to be on the surface. There is a disconnection between the ways we live and our true nature. Despite his actions, Mr. Tumnus has come to understand that, in fact, he is not at all the kind of faun who would kidnap a young child and hand her over to the destructive violence of the Wicked Witch. So, despite personal danger, Mr. Tumnus determines to live in tune with his deeper nature, his more true self, saying, “Of course I can’t give you up to the Witch; not now that I know you” (25). To live in tune with our truer nature is to respond to the deeper promptings of love, rather than the surface desire for safety and self-protection.

Those who concern themselves with the inner journey are sometimes accused of being self-obsessed. But the purpose of the journey within is to discover freedom from the illusions of the self and to be liberated for the life of love. Thomas Keating writes that the disciplines of the inner journey are “a preparation for action, for action that emerges from the inspiration of the Spirit in the silencing of our own agitation, desires and hang-ups.”<sup>5</sup> Mr. Tumnus has come into contact with a deeper, more real part of his being. In responding to this more true dimension of his nature, he has performed a self-sacrificial act of love. This is the place to which the inner journey will always lead us. If we do not desire to know our true self and to give our selves away in love to others, we would be better never to cross the threshold of the wardrobe and enter that inner world of the spirit.

## A. The Story

1. What does the Faun want to know about Lucy?
2. What is Lucy’s initial experience of Mr. Tumnus’ home?  
How is the reality different from her experience?
3. What causes Mr. Tumnus to have a change of heart?

## B. Your Experience

1. What are the questions you find it difficult to live with?

What makes these questions particularly difficult for you?

What work might the questions be doing in you if you allow them just to be unresolved in all of their mystery?

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart*, (New York: Continuum, 1986), p. 64.

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2. What is wrong with Mr. Tumnus when Lucy first meets him?

What brings him to a more truthful place?

What are the forces at work in our own lives and in our world that help incline us either to fall prey to the illusions of the world or to live more honestly in tune with our true nature?

**C. A Spiritual Task**

Listen to those promptings in your being that seem to come from that place within yourself that is the most true and authentic; observe what actions flow from this place.

### CHAPTER III - Edmund and the Wardrobe

In the third and fourth centuries of the Christian church, a remarkable spiritual movement took place. The Christian church was beginning to emerge from two centuries of obscurity and persecution to assume social respectability and even power. Just at this point in history, as Christianity began to discover a new position in society, thousands of Christian men and women began to withdraw from the established urban centres where the majority of Christians were living. They left everything and fled into the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria to explore what life might look like lived in radical discipleship as followers of Jesus Christ.

They walked away from the values of mainstream society and lived according to an entirely different order. They responded to a gravitational pull from above rather than living by the dominant dictates of their contemporary social context. They sought an inner freedom that could live without needing to constantly conform to the forces and pressures of the world in which they had been living. By any standards of normal assessment they could only have been viewed as mad.

Abba Anthony, one of the earliest of the desert dwellers and popularly viewed as the father of Christian monasticism, warned his followers,

A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him saying, “You are mad, you are not like us.”<sup>6</sup>

When Lucy returns to her brothers and sisters from her journey into Narnia, she discovers the truth of Anthony’s warning. Edmund cruelly speaks what the others may have felt but were too kind to say: “‘Batty!’ said Edmund, tapping his head. ‘Quite batty’” (27). Lucy’s familiar world has been turned upside down. The world she once knew and believed she understood has become now suddenly foreign territory.

Lucy has experienced a dimension of existence closed to her siblings. They have not seen Narnia. They have no experience of Narnia and no framework by which to even imagine such a strange land. Lucy cannot explain or adequately describe the reality of her experience to the others. She cannot convince them of the truth of what she has seen simply by using words. She has become an alien among her own people. Until the others have the experience Lucy has had, they are separated by an unbridgeable gulf.

Jesus had the same experience as Lucy.

Then when he went home; and the crowd came together again,  
so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it,  
they went out to restrain him, for people were saying,  
“He has gone out of his mind. (Mark 3:19b-21)

<sup>6</sup> Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* ([Kalamzoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1975](#)), p. 6.

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The risk of the inner journey is that it will often make me feel ill-equipped for life in the routine day to day world. As my values shift and as I distance myself from those forces that motivate the majority of people, I find increasingly that my interests change. Things that once seemed so important seem less significant in the light of the glimpse I have had of that other dimension of reality. The centre of gravity has shifted in my life. Having glimpsed another world I am less motivated by the forces of this physical, material, sensual world that once shaped all my choices and decisions.

As the rest of the children carry on with their lives as if nothing had changed, Lucy finds herself increasingly cut off from their activities and interests.

What made it worse was that these days ought to have been delightful. The weather was fine and they were out of doors from morning to night, bathing, fishing, climbing trees, and lying in the heather. But Lucy could not properly enjoy any of it. (29)

It is difficult to live with the awareness that there is another dimension to life without some tangible community support for this experience of reality. It is tempting to begin to doubt one's own experience when one is surrounded by those whose worldview contradicts one's own convictions.

Lucy went to the room where the wardrobe was. She did not mean to hide in the wardrobe, because she knew that would only set the others talking again about the whole wretched business. But she did want to have one more look inside it; for by this time she was beginning to wonder herself whether Narnia and the Faun had not been a dream. (29)

While it is encouraging to have the support of other people, in the end, the inner journey is a journey each of us must walk for ourselves. There is no second-hand awareness of the divine dimension of existence. We must each get there on our own, in the way that is suited to us, by the guidance that is uniquely provided for and suited to the people we have become.

Paul says, "all must carry their own loads" (Galatians 6:5). We cannot look to church, or priest, or seminar, or workshop to give us a spiritual life. We must seize the opportunities of life to find our way into an awareness of the other dimension of life. Our lives are given to us as the journey we need to walk into the presence of the divine. When we resist our lives as they come to us, we miss the lessons life has to offer and avoid the guidance that will bring us into the awareness of the deeper dimensions of being. For those who will see, the guidance we need is everywhere.

In Christ, the prophecy of Joel has been fulfilled

I will pour out my flesh on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:28,29)

No one is excluded. The Spirit is available to all as the indwelling living presence of God at the centre of our being. Our only task is to open personally to the gentle voice of this Spirit, to follow wherever the Spirit might lead. We need to have the courage to face ourselves with truth. The way into the deep dimensions of life is through self-awareness, honesty, and authenticity.

### **A. The Story**

1. What is the cause of Lucy's unhappiness?
2. How do the other children respond to Lucy? Are there ways they might have responded that might have been more helpful?
3. What is beginning to happen to Lucy that draws her back into the wardrobe?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. How does it feel to be misunderstood?

How do we want to be dealt with when we feel misunderstood?

How do we deal with others when we do not understand them?

2. What are the things in life that cause us to begin to doubt the truth of our own experience?

What happens to us when we doubt our own experience?

What do we need to do in order to hold firm to our awareness of reality when so much seems to call our perceptions into question?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

Listen carefully to a person whose experience is different from your own. Try to discern the truth in their experience and to understand what their experience might have to teach you.

## CHAPTER IV - Turkish Delight

At the beginning of Chapter 4, Edmund is confronted by the same questions Lucy faced upon her first arrival in Narnia. The White Queen wants to know from Edmund who or what he is, where he has come from, and how he got to Narnia. These are the questions of self-identity. They suggest again that the path into the inner world begins with self-reflection. We enter Narnia through the wardrobe. But, in order to enter the wardrobe, we must pass through the door with the looking-glass on the front.

In Edmund's case the process of self-reflection is cut short by his desire to avoid facing reality and instead escape into illusion. If self-honesty is the path into the spiritual life, self-deception is a sure path away from the encounter with the divine. Our refusal to face ourselves shuts us off from an awareness of that dimension of life in which we become conscious of God's presence. When we choose the distractions of the world, we lose our ability to see beyond this world. We set our feet upon the path to unreality by following our desires for gratification and self-will rather than the deeper, more challenging journey of the inner life.

The Queen asks Edmund "What would you like best to eat?" (36). What do you really desire? What are you looking for in life? What do you really want out of this life? Food is used in many works of literature to speak about the motivations of the human heart. Images of food occur at least fourteen times in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the Gospels in the New Testament, food is frequently used as a metaphor to speak about spiritual realities. Jesus refers to himself as "the bread of life." In every gospel he is shown feeding large crowds. And, of course at the end of his life, Jesus celebrates the Passover meal with his friends giving it a new significance by pointing to himself as the fulfillment of this ancient Jewish feast.

In his own confrontation with the tempter, Jesus faced the temptation to use his powers to satisfy his own hunger for physical sustenance: "The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread'" (Matthew 4:3). In response, Jesus replied, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

It is a fundamental human question – what will satisfy the deepest longings of the human spirit? What is true human food?

The world offers innumerable answers to the question– "What would you like best to eat?" We would like power, influence, comfort, security, beauty, health, wealth, unlimited sensual experiences with no detrimental consequences. We are convinced that, if only we can get our way, we will find satisfaction and contentment in life. C.S. Lewis sums up all of those places we look to for satisfaction that will leave us hungry and craving something more in one image. Edmund replies to the Queen saying that what he would "like best to eat" is "Turkish Delight, please, your Majesty" (36).

But seeking satisfaction in food that is less than we humans were created to consume only causes us to move further away from the dignity of our created nature. “At first Edmund tried to remember that it is rude to speak with one’s mouth full, but soon he forgot about this and thought only of trying to shovel down as much Turkish Delight as he could.” We descend to the level of that to which we give ourselves. We become whatever we seek satisfaction from. And the more we give ourselves to any influence the more the power of that to which we give ourselves will grow in our lives– “the more he ate the more he wanted to eat” (37).

The Queen knew when she gave Edmund his first taste of Turkish Delight “that this was enchanted Turkish Delight and that anyone who had once tasted it would want more and more of it, and would even, if they were allowed, go on eating it till they killed themselves” (38). All addictions arise from our unwillingness to face ourselves. The difference between Edmund and Lucy is that Lucy is willing to see and be seen as she is. In the ancient desert tradition of the Christian faith, the Abbot Poemen used to say, “If you want to find rest in this life and the next, say at every turn ‘Who am I?’”<sup>7</sup> In order to enter into the spiritual journey we must be willing to ask who we are. What is our true identity? To answer the question of identity requires that we choose to remain conscious.

Edmund has chosen unconsciousness. As Edmund stuffs his face with Turkish Delight, the Queen queries him about his siblings, but Lewis says, Edmund “never asked himself why the Queen should be so inquisitive” (37). Edmund is unwilling to see reality. Even when his addiction is causing him profound discomfort and when Lucy confronts him with the truth about the source of the Turkish Delight, Edmund chooses to turn away from the real world.

Edmund was already feeling uncomfortable from having eaten too many sweets, and when he heard that the Lady he had made friends with was a dangerous witch he felt even more uncomfortable. But he still wanted to taste that Turkish Delight again more than he wanted anything else. (42)

Jesus said, “No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Luke 16:13). Edmund has chosen to serve a “wealth” that is no wealth at all. He has given himself completely to the momentary thrill provided by the high of instant physical gratification.

But the further Edmund gets from reality, the more he becomes cut off from his feelings. The less he really knows himself until he loses any intuitive sense capable of guiding him out of harm’s way – “When he had first got on to the sledge he had been afraid that she might drive away with him to some unknown place from which he would not be able to get back; but he had forgotten about that fear now” (38-39).

<sup>7</sup> *Western Asceticism*, ed. Owen Chadwick (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), p. 103)

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Having followed his addictions and become completely cut off from his inner self, Edmund is totally lost: “‘I don’t even know the way back to my own country,’ pleaded Edmund” (40). And he is not the least worried about his lost condition. Even as the Queen guides Edmund back to the old Professor’s house and the possibility of safety, all he can think of is the comfort of Turkish Delight: “‘Please, please,’ said Edmund suddenly, ‘please couldn’t I have just one piece of Turkish Delight to eat on the way home?’” (40-41).

Edmund has entered into the bottomless pit of human desire. The more the desire is fed by the artificial satisfaction of Turkish Delight, the deeper grows the pit. Like salt to the thirsty, the solution offered to Edmund’s desire *only* increases his longing. The more Edmund chases after the artificial food of Turkish Delight the more he sinks into self-delusion and unreality. The refusal to embark upon the inner journey will always lead us into a confusing and chaotic land of lies and illusion. This land of unreality is far more frightening than any of the horrors we might try to deny by avoiding the shadow lands of our own inner journey.

### A. The Story

1. What does Edmund experience when he first tastes the Queen’s Turkish Delight?
2. What is the impact upon Edmund of the Turkish Delight?
3. What is Lucy’s hope at the end of this chapter?

### B. Your Experience

1. What form might “Turkish Delight” take in our lives?  
 What is the impact of “Turkish Delight” in our lives?  
 Why are we so drawn to “Turkish Delight”? What are we hoping to gain?
2. What might help fortify us against the temptations of “Turkish Delight”?  
 What role might the community of faith play in helping us with our struggle against “Turkish Delight”?  
 What might make it difficult for the community to play this role?

### C. A Spiritual Task

Watch for any tendencies toward addictive behaviour and try to understand what fear or pain you might be trying to avoid by resorting to this behaviour

## CHAPTER V - Back on This Side of the Door

In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Thomas Merton wrote, “Life is, or should be, nothing but a struggle to seek truth.”<sup>8</sup> In chapter 5 of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Peter and Susan set out to “seek truth.” They go to see “the Professor” who is the owner of the house in which they are staying and who, at the outset of the story, has made a positive impression on each of the children. They hope to get help from the Professor in understanding the true nature of their young sister Lucy’s condition. She has unsettled them all by insisting that she has passed through the wardrobe they have all seen in the empty room and discovered a world she calls Narnia filled with trees and snow and inhabited by a Faun and a Witch.

Everything in Peter and Susan’s experience tells them that Lucy’s tale is completely fantastic and utterly unbelievable. They have examined the wardrobe and know that “it’s just an ordinary wardrobe” (28). Even though they want to believe Lucy, they have hard empirical evidence that her vision of Narnia has no bearing in reality. At Lucy’s insistence they have examined the wardrobe.

Then everyone looked in and pulled the coats apart; and they all saw – Lucy herself saw – a perfectly ordinary wardrobe. There was no wood and no snow, only the back of the wardrobe, with hooks on it. Peter went in and rapped his knuckles on it to make sure that it was solid. (28)

Their senses tell them clearly that the world ends at the hard solid wood of the back of the wardrobe. As good rationalist post-Enlightenment children they have been taught to believe in nothing that is not concretely verifiable by their senses. There is no place in their worldview for mystery or for the unknown. As Peter has already pointed out on their first visit into the room that contains the wardrobe, there is “‘Nothing there!’” (11). Peter’s world is a one-dimensional empty room with “a dead blue-bottle on the window-sill” (11). It is a room no one bothers to enter any more. It is not a useful room, not a place upon which responsible intelligent adults would waste their valuable time. Susan sums up the common position on anything that cannot be seen by saying of Lucy’s Narnia simply, “this couldn’t be true” (47).

To Peter and Susan’s astonishment, the Professor who is supposed to represent the intelligent rational adult world does not immediately accept the obvious truth of their narrow worldview. He seems to be willing to entertain the possibility that Lucy might in fact be telling the truth: “‘How do you know,’ he asked, ‘that your sister’s story is not true?’” (46). The Professor then goes on to give Peter and Susan three options. Either Lucy is lying, “or she is mad, or she is telling the truth” (47).

The Professor proposes to the children the possibility that life is vastly more complex than their simple linear view of reality might lead them to believe. “‘I should warn you,’” he says, “‘that this is a very strange house, and even I know very little about it’”

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, (New York: Image Books, 1968), p. 184.

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(48). The world in which we live and our lives themselves are vastly more mysterious than we might at first be willing to imagine. When we leave the category of mystery out of the equation, our view of reality will always be tragically incomplete. A world without inexplicable realities is a sadly truncated place.

The Professor describes to Peter and Susan the possibility of a sort of invisible parallel universe existing alongside what we normally think of as the “real” world. Such a possibility has never occurred to Peter: “‘But do you really mean, sir,’ said Peter, ‘that there could be other worlds— all over the place, just round the corner – like that?’ ‘Nothing is more probable,’ said the Professor, taking off his spectacles and beginning to polish them” (49).

Our problem is that we are not able to see with a large enough vision. We need to have our “spectacles” polished, our vision of life needs to be expanded. We need to find a place in our worldview for the reality of mystery. We need to begin to be able to see with the inner wisdom of the heart, rather than simply with the eye of the mind and the information provided by the senses. If we are to perceive this other dimension to life, we must be willing to let go of our senses and respond to a deeper prompting. We must be willing to respond to the stirring of love and the wisdom of faith.

For both Peter and Susan, the most difficult aspect of their experience to incorporate into their sceptical worldview is not the evidence of their senses but the experience of their heart. When Susan proposes that Narnia cannot be real because “‘Edmund said they had only been pretending,’” the Professor responds by “‘asking the question— ‘does your experience lead you to regard your brother or your sister as the more reliable? I mean, which is the more truthful?’” (47). This question begins to move Peter and Susan to a deeper place within. It opens them to the place of trust, the place beyond reason or tangible sensory experience. They are beginning to move into another dimension of being, a place perhaps more true than the place that is confined exclusively to the reasoning faculty of our brain.

Christian spiritual teaching suggests that, if we are to enter the deeper inner spiritual realms of human existence, we must be willing for a time to lay aside the evidence of our senses and the reasoning of our minds and open ourselves to that which simply cannot be known by sensory or rational means alone. Evelyn Underhill describes our problem saying, “The senses have grown stronger than their masters, monopolized the field of perception, dominated an organism which was made for greater activities, and built up those barriers of individuality which must be done away.”<sup>9</sup> By “senses” Underhill means all those human faculties by which we most commonly operate in life. These she says can lead us only so far and eventually they will lead us to a dead-end. Then she goes on to describe the solution to our dilemma, saying, “the self emerges from long and varied acts of purification to find that it is able to apprehend another order of reality.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1961), p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p233.

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As we are purified from our attachment to sensual stimulation and the intellect, we begin to become “able to apprehend another order of reality.” It is this dimension of human existence that was closed to all four of the children when they first came to the Professor’s house. Lucy was the first to make the transition from a narrow materialistic worldview to a more complex understanding of existence as a multi-layered spectrum of being ranging from the most basic living organisms into dimensions of existence with a complexity, wonder, and mystery that surpasses anything the human brain might ever begin to comprehend.

In the New Testament, Paul alludes to this complex multi-layered vision of reality when he writes, “I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows” (2 Corinthians 12:2). If we are going to embark upon the journey within, we must be willing to entertain the possibility that there is more to reality than is immediately perceptible or verifiable by our routine human faculties. We must begin to develop a new way of seeing, a more subtle faculty of perception. This is the vision for which our hearts long. We were created knowing that there must be something more to this life than our basic senses could apprehend. As we make the journey within, we begin to discover that indeed the house of our lives is vastly more complex and mysterious than we might ever have imagined.

### **A. The Story**

1. On page 46, Lucy says of her three siblings, “you are all beasts, beasts.” What is the irony in the label and what truth might it point towards?
2. What is the logic the Professor holds out to Peter and Susan?
3. What suggestion does Peter think the Professor is making on page 49?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. In what ways does the Professor’s logic feel true to your experience, or in what ways is it contradicted by your experience?
2. What experience do you have of “other worlds – all over the place, just round the corner”?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

Open your vision to the possibility that life is more than one-dimensional. Be willing to see beneath the surface to the possibility of other dimensions to existence.

## Chapter VI - Into the Forest

Every journey needs to have some sense of direction. We do not wander aimlessly through life with no intention of getting anywhere. We want to find our way. And there are times when we are unsure of the way forward.

Edmund is the first to raise the question of direction in Chapter Six: “‘I say,’ began Edmund presently, ‘oughtn’t we to be bearing a bit more to the left?’” (54). Susan picks up the question a page later asking, “‘Where *are* we going anyway?’” (55). And the question of direction on this journey is made explicit when Peter suggests that Lucy should be their leader.

Everyone agreed to this and off they went walking briskly and stamping their feet. Lucy proved a good leader. At first she wondered whether she would be able to find the way. (55)

The question is how *do* we find our way. How do we figure out where we are going and how to get there?

When Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy first came to the old Professor’s house, they had been removed from everything in their lives that had ever been familiar. Before coming to the Professor’s house they had lived in London. Now they are in a rambling old home deep in the English countryside. Everything is new and strange. In Narnia the strangeness of the landscape is even more startling for the children.

When we enter upon the inner journey, none of the old familiar landmarks are the same; the terrain is different; it can be difficult to get our bearings. Most of us learned at an early age to guide our lives by self-interest. The goal was to get our way, to assert our will upon the world, to make life turn out as we thought it should turn out. We thought if we could only learn to assert our will and to impose it upon the rest of the world, we would be able to make a good and happy life for ourselves.

In Matthew chapter 21 Jesus tells the story of two sons both of whom are approached by their father and told to “go and work in the vineyard today” (Matthew 21 :28). The first son refuses but then goes. The second son said he would go and then did not. Jesus asks the question, “Which of the two did the will of his father?” (Matthew 21:31). His audience answers without hesitation, “The first.” The first son replaced his own will (“I do not want to go to work in the vineyard today”) with his father’s will (“go and work in the vineyard today”). He exchanges self-will for the higher will of his father.

The two sons exist in each of us. We all have within our innermost being two wills. We have a higher will and a lower will. There is that part of ourselves that desperately wants to go its own way and do its own thing, and hopes to find satisfaction and peace by ordering the world according to its wishes. Then there is a part of ourselves, sometimes a terribly faint little voice within, that knows there is a greater will at work in the world and in our lives to which we can choose to conform ourselves.

The conversation between these two wills in Chapter Six of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* takes place between Susan and Lucy. Susan listens to the smaller voice, the frightened voice of insecurity and doubt. She desires to flee to a place of safety and security. This voice sounds very much like the voice of reason.

‘I – I wonder if there’s any point in going on,’ said Susan. ‘I mean, it doesn’t seem particularly safe here and it looks as if it won’t be much fun either. And it’s getting colder every minute, and we’ve brought nothing to eat. What about just going home?’ (57)

Susan suggests a reasonable course of action. The way they have been travelling seems to be fraught with danger, uncertainty, and risk. Surely, it would be more sensible to return to that which is familiar, predictable, and safe. Susan’s voice suggests that it is possible to find a safe place in this world where we will not need to feel cold and hungry, afraid, or alone.

Lucy is listening to a deeper voice. Lucy is responding to the inner voice of compassion and love. She reminds the other children of Mr Tumnus’ sacrifice on her behalf and pleads, “We simply must try to rescue him” (57). In the end, the tension is embodied in a conversation that takes place within Susan herself:

‘I’ve a horrid feeling that Lu is right,’ said Susan. ‘I don’t want to go a step further and I wish we’d never come. But I think we must try to do something for Mr. Whatever-his-name is – I mean the Faun.’ (58).

This is the human dilemma famously expressed by Paul in his letter to the Romans when he lamented,

I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (Romans 7:21-23)

We are divided beings, at war with ourselves. We are caught in the tension between that which is most true about ourselves and a law at work in our lower self that would lead us to be something less than the exalted beings we in fact are.

Finally Susan decides she is willing to put aside self-will and self-interest in order to follow the deeper prompting of that voice within which represents her more true self. And whenever we intend this openness and willingness to follow the higher will of our true nature, the guidance we need in life will be given. Lucy who, having had a little more practice at listening to that inner prompting, has begun to become accustomed to the ways of Narnia sees a robin, “with such a red breast,” and thinks “I wonder can birds talk in Narnia?” Then, as the children take a step towards the bird, Lucy observes “I really believe he means us to follow him”: “It kept going from tree to tree, always a

few yards ahead of them, but always so near that they could easily follow it. In this way it led them on” (59).

The guidance we need on this journey will be given. We have not been left alone. The only requirement is the willingness to open to possibilities we might not have before embraced. As we begin to become more sensitive to the subtle promptings of our inner life, we begin to discover that even the robins can speak. In fact, everything “speaks.” All of life begins to open up to us as a transmitter of the divine reality. God is not without witnesses wherever we look. The word that we need to guide us forward on this journey is always available. The seed has been sown. Our only task is to receive that word with softness and allow it to take root in our lives.

### **A. The Story**

1. What is the children’s situation when they first arrive in Narnia?
2. What makes it possible for Lucy to perceive the robin as a possible guide?
3. What are the different forces motivating each of the children as they move through this chapter?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. What are the various forces at play in our lives that battle each other to shape our choices and decisions?
2. What will make it possible for us to respond more deeply to the inner prompting of our deeper nature?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

Be aware of the forces that come into play in your life in every decision and choice you make. Ask yourself what it might feel like to respond from a deeper place within.

## CHAPTER VII - A Day with the Beavers

At the beginning of Chapter 7 the children have been following a robin that has guided them to a dense clump of trees. Then suddenly the robin has flown away and the children notice “something moving among the trees” (61).

And then, though nobody said it out loud, everyone suddenly realized the same fact that Edmund had whispered to Peter at the end of the last chapter. They were lost.” (61)

When we suddenly know that we have lost our way, it is tempting to panic. To be lost is to feel out of control. A small child wanders away from her parent in a busy mall. At first the child is distracted by the glittering sights of the stores. Then, suddenly, the lost child recognizes that she has become disconnected from the one thing in her universe that offers a sense of safety and security. She does not know where her parent is. She is lost. The rising awareness of her situation is paralyzing. All she can do is scream and cry uncontrollably in the face of her most horrifying condition.

Jesus told a story about being lost. In Luke chapter 15, Jesus portrays a shepherd who has a flock of one hundred sheep. Jesus asks, if one of those sheep goes missing, what kind of shepherd would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go in search of the one missing sheep. When we are lost we want to know that someone is looking for us. The child lost in the mall might be slightly comforted if she could imagine the frantic search of her mother for her lost child.

If we are to know that, even in our lostness, we are being sought, we must follow the advice of Mr. Beaver. Beckoning to the lost children from behind a tree, Mr. Beaver urges them on saying, “Further in, come further in” (63). This is the central call of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Like the children we are urged to come “further in,” to penetrate to the depths of life by entering into the innermost place of our being, which is the place wherein we will discover the dwelling of the divine and the safety and security that can only be provided by the inner conviction that, as lost as we may feel, there is One who seeks to bring us home.

In one of his rare statements on prayer, Jesus said to his followers, “whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:6). Ancient Christian tradition teaches that this room is the room of the human heart. It is within the secret inner room of our innermost being that we encounter the Divine One in whom alone will we find rest and peace. Kabir Helminski in his book *Living Presence* suggests that “The well-being, the beauty, and the love we seek outside of ourselves is truly within.”<sup>11</sup>

It is by following Mr. Beaver’s instruction to come “further in” that the children hear their first hint of the existence of Aslan. And “At the name of Aslan each one of the

<sup>11</sup> Kabir Helminski, *Living Presence: A Sufi Way to Mindfulness and the Essential Self* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1992), p. 30.

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children felt something jump in its inside” (65). The Spirit stirs within. Although none of the children has any idea whom Aslan may be, at the mere mention of his name, Peter, Susan, and Lucy all feel in their hearts something stirring.

Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer. (65)

Some beauty deep within stirs in each of these three children. Their hearts respond with trust and openness. If we are to progress on the inner journey, we must heed this inner stirring. We must attend to the winds of beauty, the gentle movement of love, and the spirit of truth as we feel its breath upon our souls. We look at the beautiful face of a newborn infant and we sense ourselves soften and open. We need to stay with that softness and allow it to do its work within. We listen to birdsong in the forest, or the stirring strains of an orchestral symphony, and something in the depths of our being begins to move. We need to heed that movement and trust that it will lead us to life.

To continue on the inner journey, we must listen to this inner calling. We must know that the journey is calling us. The journey itself is drawing us on, not because we are such fine noble people, but because it is the nature of God to summon human beings into deeper relationship. When the children first found their way into Narnia, it was as if they were compelled onto this journey by some mysterious force, “whether it was that they lost their heads, or that Mrs Macready was trying to catch them, or that some magic in the house had come to life and was chasing them into Narnia” (51-52).

Only Edmund remains apart from the rest of the children. For Edmund Aslan does not suggest life and beauty. When he hears the name of Aslan “Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror” (65). Increasingly Edmund is experiencing the effects of his choices. His alignment with the White Witch is working in Edmund’s heart turning his spirit to winter and his soul to stone. Yet, throughout Chapter 7, Lewis makes it clear that Edmund is included with the other children. As much as Edmund might be withdrawing from the light and the warmth of their love, the love and grace that will be embodied in Aslan continues to reach out to him. This is most noticeable towards the end of the chapter when the children arrive at Mr. and Mrs. Beaver’s house and Lewis says, “they **all** went in” (68). Then, as the feast is prepared, “**everyone** was drawing up their stools” to the feasting table (70). And at the end of the feast “when **each person** had got his (or her) cup of tea, **each person** shoved back his (or her) stool so as to be able to lean against the wall and gave a long sigh of contentment” (71-72).

Grace does not exclude. Grace does not draw lines that shut anyone out. We may step outside the circle of God’s grace. But God’s desire is always to include. When Jesus washed his disciples’ feet he did not exclude his betrayer. Jesus performed the function of a slave even towards the one who was about to turn him over to those who desired his destruction. Even at this point Judas has the opportunity to turn and rejoin the circle of those who include themselves within God’s gracious embrace.

Going further in does not separate us from one another. It is staying on the surface that causes division and discord. The further in we go, the more deeply we discover that we belong to one another. We are all included. We are all invited to participate in the feast of grace. We are all drawn together to the place in which we can discover the safety and security that comes from knowing ourselves to have been found by God. We do not take this journey alone. There are companions on the way. We are united in a bond of fellowship with all those who intend to follow the call to journey within.

Jesus says, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16). The way into the “flock” is by listening to the shepherd. The shepherd’s voice may sound faint and distant at first. But the shepherd is faithful and longs for the sheep. The more we listen, the more familiar we become with the tone of his voice, and the more we know that we belong to the flock of his sheep and the safety of his protection.

### **A. The Story**

1. What do the children experience when they first hear the name Aslan?
2. How is Edmund’s experience different from the others?
3. What is the feeling of the meal the children enjoy with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. When have you experienced “something jump” inside?  
 What caused this experience?  
 How did you respond?
2. When have you experienced such an abundance of life as Mr. and Mrs. Beaver bestowed upon the children?  
 How did this feel?  
 What was the impact upon you?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

See where life offers an experience of abundance. Observe the impact of abundance in your heart.

## Chapter VIII - What happened after Dinner

In Chapter 8 Edmund's separation from the rest of the children becomes complete. He leaves the Beavers' house and sets out on his way to find the Witch. He has made a decisive turn away from his true human condition. He has separated himself from the community of grace. Increasingly, Edmund has become like the one to whom he has begun to look for satisfaction. Mr. Beaver explains that

the moment I set eyes on that brother of yours I said to myself, "Traacherous." He had the look of one who has been with the Witch and eaten her food. You can always tell them if you've lived long in Narnia; something about their eyes. (80)

We become what we look at. The writer of the First Letter of John says, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (I John 3:2). The way to become "like him" is to look "at him." Edmund has been looking at the Witch and feeding on her food. So Edmund is becoming increasingly like that which he was never created to be.

The Witch is distinguished from humans in one fundamental way. Mr. Beaver explains, "there may be two views about humans (meaning no offence to the present company). But there's no two views about things that look like humans and aren't" (77). The "two views about humans" are that they are either all good or all bad. But, as Mrs. Beaver has already explained, the Witch is "bad all through" (76).

For Lewis the picture of human nature is more complex. Humans have the ability to become something that they are not. Mr. Beaver warns the children to be on guard against that which "used to be human once and isn't now" (77). But in their essence in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* human beings are distinct from the Witch in that they are never entirely and fully evil. Even Edmund at his worst has not lost the essential spark of goodness that is at the core of all human beings. In the next chapter Edmund has deserted his brother and sisters and is determined to betray them to the Witch. Yet even at this dark moment in his life as Edmund gets closer to the Witch's castle, Lewis explains, "You mustn't think that even now Edmund was quite so bad that he actually wanted his brother and sisters to be turned into stone" (82). And then Lewis makes it clear that "deep down inside him he really knew that the White Witch was bad and cruel" (83).

Edmund has not been able to silence the voice of truth within himself. For all his bad choices and all his treacherous ways, Edmund has not been able to undo that essential goodness that lies at his core even though it may be obscured by his self-will and his misdirected appetites. The inner journey is not the creation of something new that did not exist before. Jesus instructed his followers that they must be "born again" (John 3:7). To be "born again" is to return to our original state, to rediscover within ourselves the original image of God in which we were created. It is to come home again to our true selves.

The great third century Christian theologian Origen wrote:

Each one of our souls contains a well of living water. It has in it . . . a buried image of God. It is this well . . . that the hostile powers have blocked up with earth . . . you will find the silver coin in you. For the image of the heavenly king is in you . . . his image may indeed be obscured by neglect, but never destroyed by evil. The image of God remains in you always.<sup>12</sup>

In order to give ourselves fully to the inner journey, we must have confidence that our journey will bring us to something that is good. When we let go of the false superficial surface personalities we have developed over the years, we will not be left with nothing, or with something dark and evil. We will encounter that which God originally placed within us.

Thomas Merton in his early book, *The Ascent to Truth*, states that “We do not have a high enough opinion of our own nature.”<sup>13</sup> Genesis declares that after God had finished creating humanity, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that this original goodness has ever been completely eliminated. As Origen suggests, it may have been “obscured by neglect, but never destroyed by evil.” As the Prologue to John’s Gospel says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5).

We are familiar with the idea of Jesus being “the light of the world” (John 8:12). We may be less familiar, or less comfortable, with the fact that in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus also says to his disciples “**You** are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). That which Jesus is, we are called to be. There is a goodness and a truth at the centre of our being that is our true identity. The spiritual journey is a process of uncovering that which we truly are.

Lewis hints at our true identity as the children venture together for the first time into Narnia. As they leave the wardrobe they become conscious of how cold it is in Narnia. At Susan’s suggestion they take the coats from the wardrobe and put them on. Lewis says, “The coats were rather too big for them so that they came down to their heels and looked more like royal robes than coats when they had put them on” (54). We humans are created to be royalty. I Peter says, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (I Peter 2:9). It may be a long journey to discover our royalty. But that is our destination.

Edmund is not the only one who must make this journey. Edmund may make the journey through the darkest terrain. But Peter, Susan, and even Lucy all have things to face about themselves before they are able to know the truly royal beings they were created to be. As we persevere on the inner journey, we will face difficult realities about ourselves. We

<sup>12</sup> Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, (New York: New City Press, 1993), p. 131.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Ascent To Truth*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1951), p. 199.

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will walk through dark, violent, and sometimes unbearable places. But, if we walk in the faith of the Gospel, we will always walk with hope knowing that we are moving towards greater light and truth. We are discovering our true nature. We are coming to that place within ourselves where we, like Jesus, can hear that voice that echoes the voice Jesus heard after his baptism when God said to him, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

### A. The Story

1. What force is motivating Lucy and begins to motivate Peter and Susan in chapter 8?
2. What relationship does Mr. Beaver portray between Aslan and the White Queen?
3. What are the “two views about humans” and what is the problem Mr. Beaver identifies on page 77?

### B. Your Experience

1. What conditions help enable us to experience compassion?  
 What are the forces within us that work against compassion?  
 How might we encourage one another to be compassionate?
2. What does your experience lead you to believe about the “two views about humans”?  
 When you meet something that “used to be human once and isn’t now, or ought to be human and isn’t” why might it be necessary to “keep your eyes on it and feel for your hatchet”?  
 In what ways might a person be characterized as one who “used to be human once and isn’t now, or ought to be human and isn’t”?

### C. A Spiritual Task

Explore your vision of what it means to be truly and fully human and watch for any forces within yourself or the world that seem to be working to make you something less than this vision of full humanness.

## Chapter IX - In the Witch's House

There is a stillness and silence that is life. And there is a stillness and silence that is death. In the middle of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Edmund is immersed in the stillness and silence of death. He approaches the lair of the Wicked Witch to find that “There was nothing stirring; not the slightest sound anywhere” (86).

In the ancient Hebrew book of Deuteronomy Moses confronts his people and declares to them,

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

We face the choice between life and death every moment of our lives. When we find ourselves in a place like Edmund where “The silence and the loneliness were dreadful” (84), it is tempting to choose death. It is tempting to determine that we must assert our own wills over the world in an attempt to force life to conform to our wishes. But the more we assert our determination to control the unruly forces of life, the more lost and confused we become. We are trying to guide our lives by the night light of the moon and the moon cannot lead us into the sun.

Finally, the clouds rolled away and the moon came out. It was a full moon and, shining on all that snow, it made everything almost as bright as day – only the shadows were rather confusing. (85)

The landscape of death seems threatening and uncertain. There are confusing shadows everywhere we look. As bright as the light of the moon may be, it never brings real clarity. Around every corner there lies more darkness where the light cannot reach; fear is our constant companion. When Edmund finally creeps into the courtyard of the Queen's castle, “He stood there so long that his teeth would have been chattering with cold even if they had not been chattering with fear” (86).

Although most of us live much of our lives in relative safety, fear is a not infrequent companion on our journey. We learn fear early in our lives. We learn to fear that someone is going to take something away from us, something we cannot live without. The fundamental human fear is the fear of annihilation. We confront forces we know we cannot control and feel vulnerable. To embark upon the spiritual journey means being willing to face our fears and at times to live with the knowledge that they cannot be easily removed. Many of the things we fear are not real and cannot be resolved. When our fears are generated by illusions, they cannot be undone until the illusions are faced.

In the night things are not as they appear to be. A lion “crouched as if it was ready to spring” (86) seems so real that Edmund can only stand paralyzed in fear until finally he recognizes that the lion he has feared is only a stone statue. It has no power. This stone lion cannot leap and has no ability to harm Edmund.

Many of the things we fear as we move towards death have no power over us. We create fears in our minds by reflecting constantly upon the circumstances and events of our lives. We tell ourselves endless stories about the antagonistic forces at work in the world seeking our destruction. And we find ourselves paralysed by things that are only shadow reflections of our own doubts and insecurities.

And then, just when we finally conclude we have figured out how the game is played, the rules change and we are returned to the uncertainty and confusion of the darkness we have chosen. Edmund makes his way through the castle past endless stone statues. Until he comes to a door where “Across the threshold lay a great wolf” (90). Not to be fooled twice by a threatening stone statue, Edmund reassures himself: “‘It’s all right, it’s all right,’ he kept saying to himself; ‘it’s only a stone wolf. It can’t hurt me’” (90). But although the lion Edmund thought was living was in fact stone, the wolf he thinks is stone is in fact alive. In his ignorance Edmund moves forward and “raised his leg to step over it. Instantly the huge creature rose, with all the hair bristling along its back, opened a great, red mouth and said in a growling voice: ‘Who’s there? Who’s there?’” (90).

Edmund’s fear has led him to the doorway of the Witch. When he finally faces the Witch herself, Edmund’s only desire is to relieve his own suffering. In his attempt to alleviate his pain and ease his fears, Edmund tells the Witch the location of his siblings, and reports to her all the news that he heard while he was enjoying the gracious hospitality of the Beavers’ home. But Edmund’s strategies are a terrible failure. The more he tells her, the more outraged the Queen becomes and the more frightening her response to Edmund.

When we try to control our circumstances in order to alleviate our fears and ease our pain, we inevitably create more fear and deepen the pain we experience. By trying to protect ourselves from the harm we perceive, we only make ourselves more fearful. By his own sense of insecurity, his lack of feeling a real place in the world, and his inability to experience his own worth as a human being, Edmund has been driven to attempt through violent means to establish for himself a sense of worth and power. He finds himself feeling only weaker, more hopeless, and less empowered in his life.

Thomas Merton writes that “Fear is the ‘impurity’ of the soul that aspires to be omnipotent.”<sup>14</sup> Edmund has been driven all along by the desire to rule over his brother and sisters. At the very outset of his journey the Queen has promised Edmund

You are to be the Prince and – later on – the King; that is understood. But you must have courtiers and nobles. I will make your brother a Duke and your sisters Duchesses. (39)

We long for power in the hopes that if we have enough power, we will finally no longer need to be afraid. Jesus understood that the path of power would lead only to violence and that violence always leads to more violence. When Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, one of his followers “put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear” (Matthew 26:51). Jesus rebuked this act of

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1957), p. 18.

violence saying to the swordsman, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). Violence begets violence and will never bring an end to fear.

The writer of the First letter of John says that the antidote to fear is not violence but love – “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (I John 4:18). Love requires the willingness to let go of the self, to lay down one’s life for the other. In the house of the Wicked Witch, there is room only for self-will and the determination to gain control over those forces that are experienced as threatening.

If we are going to progress on the inner journey, it will only be as we learn to practice the gesture of love. The gesture of love is surrender in the interests of the well-being of the other. Edmund is unable, or at this stage in his journey unwilling, to surrender. But one way or another we all surrender to something. For Edmund surrender to the dark force of the evil Queen will be demanded. In his choice for darkness, Edmund will lose the ability to give his surrender to the force of life and love. When we submit to the forces of violence and death, we give up the freedom to be the exalted beings we were created to be. Our freedom will be regained only by a sacrifice of pain and by suffering far greater than that which we tried to evade by demanding control over the circumstances of our lives.

### **A. The Story**

1. What prevents Edmund from appreciating the meal at the Beavers’ home?
2. What is Edmund’s dominant experience as he proceeds towards the Queen’s castle?
3. Why does Edmund deface the stone lion in the Queen’s courtyard? Why does he receive so little satisfaction from this action?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. What are the situations in our lives that cause us to experience fear?  
  
How do we respond when we find ourselves feeling fearful? What might be a more helpful response to the presence of fear?
2. What are the methods we use to try to help ourselves feel strong and courageous?  
  
Why do these methods so often fail?

What might be healthier, more fulfilling ways to experience inner courage and strength?

**C. A Spiritual Task**

Pay attention when fear rises up within you, observing its causes and how you respond.

## Chapter X - The Spell begins to break

Chapter Ten in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is called “The Spell begins to break.” The Witch’s hold over Narnia is beginning to loosen. Mr. Beaver announces that “It looks as if her power was already crumbling” (98).

The Witch’s spell has ordained that in Narnia it should be “always winter and never Christmas” (98). So the first sign of the dramatic change that is taking place in the land is the arrival of “Father Christmas.” Father Christmas gives gifts, first to Mrs Beaver, then to her husband, and finally to Peter, Susan and Lucy.

At the beginning of the journey into Narnia, Lucy and Edmund were both confronted with the question “Who are you?” As the Witch’s spell begins to lose its power, the identity of each child begins to emerge more fully and more clearly.

Peter will emerge gradually as the great warrior king. He will need a sword and a shield as he prepares to go into battle. Susan is the gentle voice of truth, speaking throughout the story with transparent honesty and candour. The horn that she receives is a symbol of her truth telling; the bow and arrow she is given fit her ability to hit the target when she speaks. Lucy is a valiant healer. She is given a dagger for protection and a little bottle containing healing cordial with which to restore those who are wounded in battle.

To progress in the inner journey is to discover more fully who we are and how our individual and unique identity equips us specifically for the tasks in life to which we are called. As Father Christmas bestows his gifts he warns the children “they are tools not toys” (99). After this challenge, Father Christmas produces “a large tray containing five cups and saucers, a bowl of lump sugar, a jug of cream, and a great big teapot all sizzling and piping hot” (101).

The inner journey is not just about getting new jobs and the tools to perform those jobs. The tools for life are accompanied by the promise of provision for the journey. When Jesus was confronted by a hungry crowd in “a deserted place,” where the provision of food would be difficult, he fed them all with five loaves and two fish. And, after five thousand men had eaten and “were filled, they collected up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish” (Mark 6:42, 43). Jesus provided ample provision for the journey with extras left over.

The purpose of the inner journey is to find that place of abundance within ourselves. In the last chapter of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, after the children and all of Aslan’s troops have fought their final great battle against the Queen, they prepare for their march to Cair Paravel. But before they are able to make the journey they must rest and be fed. Lewis observes, “How Aslan provided food for them all I don’t know; but somehow or other they found themselves all sitting down on the grass to a fine high tea at about eight o’clock” (164). This is the promise of the journey. If we are willing to stay with the struggle and to face the difficulties we encounter, we will find ourselves provided with all that we need to carry on.

In the ancient wisdom of the mystical text *The Philokalia*, St. Mark the Ascetic is reported to have said, “Everyone baptized in the orthodox manner has received mystically the fullness of grace.”<sup>15</sup> We have been given all that we need. Too often we view life from a perspective of scarcity rather than fullness. We approach the tasks of life as if they represented an insurmountable burden. The resources available seem just too scarce to fulfill the demands we face.

But the problem is not with the resources available. The problem is that, believing there is not enough to go around, we try to hoard what we have. Hoarding creates scarcity. Giving opens us to the awareness of abundance. Jesus said, “give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap” (Luke 6:38).

The tools Father Christmas gives to the children are given to be used not to be hoarded. After their great battle when Edmund lies dying on the field, Lucy finally remembers the vial of healing cordial she has been given. She pours “a few drops into her brother’s mouth,” and then watches with eager expectation to see the healing miracle take place. As she waits beside her brother, an uncomfortable exchange occurs:

‘There are other people wounded,’ said Aslan while she was still looking eagerly into Edmund’s pale face and wondering if the cordial would have any result. ‘Yes, I know,’ said Lucy crossly. ‘Wait a minute.’ ‘Daughter of Eve,’ said Aslan in a graver voice, ‘others also are at the point of death. Must *more* people die for Edmund?’ (163)

Lucy has forgotten that a gift not shared ceases to be a gift. When we hoard our provisions, they begin to be exhausted. The only way to experience the fullness of God’s provision is to give away that which we have received.

But if we are going to give away that which we have been given we must first come to the place of faith that experiences God’s provision as inexhaustible. There is nothing that can make God’s giving stop, nothing that can cause the abundance of God’s grace to be exhausted. As the Witch’s hold over Narnia begins to dissolve, the power of life surfaces everywhere:

Soon there were more wonderful things happening. Coming suddenly round a corner into a glade of silver birch trees Edmund saw the ground covered in all directions with little yellow flowers – celandines. The noise of water grew louder. Presently they actually crossed a stream. Beyond it they found snowdrops growing. (110)

It is God’s nature to give and to give and to give. When we remain connected to this abundant Source of life, we become able to function within the flowing stream of God’s grace. Nothing can stop the force of life. And that same endless well-spring of life dwells within the centre of our being. Just as we never doubt that the sun will melt the

<sup>15</sup> *The Philokalia*, compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Markios of Corinth, Vol. One (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 133. ▼

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snows of winter and the Spring will bring the budding of the flowers, we must not doubt that God provides faithfully to all those who give away that with which they have been provided.

The inner journey is a journey into the fecund depths of being where God is known. When we have come to the end of all our coping mechanisms, when we have run out of all our strategies to feed ourselves, we come finally to that place where we must trust in the endless provision of God. We come to that well-spring described in Ephesians as “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23). It is here that we discover our true identity. Here in this place of fullness we recover the strength and the nourishment that is God’s presence dwelling within our being. As we come to this place of fullness we will be empowered to live the new lives to which we have been called by God.

The inner journey is not an escape from the demands of life, it is a journey to that place where we know ourselves to be empowered and strengthened to meet life’s demands with the transforming power that has been granted to us by God.

### **A. The Story**

1. What is Mrs. Beaver’s concern that delays their departure?
2. What is the first sign that the Witch’s power is “already crumbling”? Why is this such an appropriate sign of her declining power?
3. What gifts are given to each of the children and what do they appear to signify?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. What food do we need if we are going to “set out on” the inner journey?  
Where we will find this food?  
Who is going to make sure we do not “set out on a journey with nothing to eat”?
2. What gifts can you identify within yourself that equip you for the inner journey?  
How are these gifts uniquely suited to you?  
What do you need to do to use well these “tools” that are “not toys”?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

Identify the gifts within yourself that have been given to you to equip you to live the spiritual life and notice how these gifts help you on the journey.

## Chapter XI - Aslan is nearer

People who commit time and energy to the pursuit of the inner life are often accused of being self-indulgent and escapist. The inner path is viewed by many as being in opposition to the call to live justly in relation to the poor and compassionately to ward our neighbour. But Christian tradition has always held that the journey within will lead to a deeper, more healing encounter with the rest of the world and the whole of creation.

As Edmund's journey carries him closer to Aslan, something begins to open in his heart. He begins to find himself capable of feeling concern for others. When the Wicked Witch comes across a small party celebrating Christmas, she is so infuriated that she bit "her lips so that a drop of blood appeared on her white cheeks" (106). "Then she raised her wand" to turn them all to stone. In an act of selfless bravery Edmund tries to intercede: "'Oh, don't, don't please don't,' shouted Edmund." But his attempt is futile and the little party are all turned to stone. Then "Edmund for the first time in this story felt sorry for someone besides himself" (107).

The closer we travel to the light and truth of God, the more our nature is transformed into the likeness of that God to whom we have begun to open.

Thomas Merton thought deeply and wrote profoundly about the relationship between spiritual practice and the life of compassionate action on behalf of others. In his journal on April 23, 1961, Merton reflected upon the practice of non-violence taught by Mahatma Ghandi and he concluded, "you cannot practice Gandhian non-violence without deep spiritual roots in prayer and abandonment to God."<sup>16</sup>

Spiritual practice reveals the false, self-centered, selfish motives in our hearts and allows us to begin to see the ways in which our ego drives so many of our actions. Deep spiritual practice enables us to let go of the ego and begin to respond to the world around us from a free place within ourselves. The only hope of action that is less self-interested lies in the honesty and self-awareness that are the heart of all true spiritual practice. Belden Lane says that "true love, a love that is unacquisitive and free, cannot exist when the person loved is being used as an object for the satisfaction of another's needs."<sup>17</sup> We need to face our own tendency to use others to meet our unexpressed, even unacknowledged, needs before we will ever be free to enter into truly healing relationships.

In order for an action to be compassionate, that action must be as free as possible from our own compulsions, agendas, needs, and demands. The only actions that can bring freedom and life to others are those actions that spring from a liberated place within ourselves. As long as our actions are driven by external forces they will always be at the service of those external forces. As long as we *need* to make a difference, we will always

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Journals of Thomas Merton* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 111. ◀

<sup>17</sup> Belden Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert And Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 172.

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do subtle violence to those we are trying to change. Unless we fearlessly face our own needs, wants, desires, insecurities, and fears, we will never be able to participate in allowing others to find within themselves that true place of freedom.

Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24). At the beginning of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, as the children have begun to experience the excitement of their new surroundings in the Professor’s house, they express the most common understanding of freedom. It is Peter who voices the popular perception of freedom.

‘We’ve fallen on our feet and no mistake,’ said Peter. ‘This is going to be perfectly splendid. That old chap will let us do anything we like.’ (9)

Freedom is most commonly understood as the removal of all restraints. Freedom is popularly viewed as the ability to “do anything we like.”

In Christian tradition, freedom is not the freedom to do anything we want. It is the freedom to do those things that are most in tune with our true nature. As winter begins to thaw, Edmund begins to rediscover his true self and to find within himself the power to live in tune with the person he was truly created to be. Confronted with the possibility of life, something spontaneously responds within his being: “his heart gave a great leap (though he hardly knew why)” (108). Edmund begins to be able to appreciate beauty again and to remember the sounds that life makes: “Then all at once he did remember. It was the noise of running water” (108). The mystery of being is stirring again in the stone of Edmund’s heart. As Aslan’s approach brings the warmth of Spring to the land of Narnia, so it begins to bring a thaw to the cold heart that has characterized all of Edmund’s behaviour up to this point in the story.

The inner journey is the essential prerequisite to the development of compassion. In the desert tradition of the early Church, men and women fled to the desert to live often completely solitary lives. But alone in the desert, they discovered a freedom that allowed their true nature to be uncovered and they exhibited a compassion and love that inspired all who saw their actions.

Belden Lane explains this mysterious birth of compassion in the desert saying,

The fathers and mothers of early Christian asceticism learned to risk everything for the sake of compassion because they already had lost everything in the harsh renunciation demanded by desert life. Their unrelenting theology of the cross brought them to love by way of death.<sup>18</sup>

Edmund’s renunciation has not been voluntary. But, under his harsh treatment by the Witch and her dwarf, he has been stripped of everything. Edmund has been driven into the uttermost wilderness of desolation and abandonment.

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<sup>18</sup> Belden Lane, *ibid.* p. 176

This was a terrible journey for Edmund, who had no coat. Before they had been going quarter of an hour all the front of him was covered with snow – he soon stopped trying to shake it off because, as quickly as he did that, a new lot gathered, and he was so tired. Soon he was wet to the skin. And oh how miserable he was! It didn't look now as if the Witch intended to make him a King. (104)

Edmund has lost everything. He has been stripped of his relations, his dignity, his power, and any hope of redemption. It is in this wilderness place of desolation that Edmund begins to discover within himself the birth of compassion for others. We can make this journey voluntarily, or life will force it upon us in ways more painful and wretched than we might ever have been able to imagine.

We can choose voluntarily the way of Jesus who challenged those who would become his followers, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). To “take up” our cross is to be willing to be stripped of everything. It is to surrender all dignity and power. It is here, at this place of complete abandonment, that compassion and love are born. It is at the foot of this cross that we discover the indwelling presence of a love that is free to love no matter the cost and no matter the outcome. This is the love that is true compassion.

### A. The Story

1. How does the meal Edmund receives in Chapter 11 compare to the meal he shared in chapter 7?
2. To what strategy does Edmund resort in a futile attempt to find some form of comfort as he labours in the Witch's clutches? (104)
3. As Spring begins to take hold in Narnia, what changes begin to take place in Edmund?

### B. Your Experience

1. What are the last illusions to which we cling in an attempt to find comfort in the midst of the difficulties and struggles life often brings?

What is the impact upon our lives of continuing to cling to these illusions?

What might help us surrender these last vestiges of self-delusion?

2. What does compassion look like?

What are the forces at work in our lives that work against the development of compassion?

What helps us become more compassionate?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

Identify any illusions to which you cling and the effect these illusions have upon your spiritual life and your relationship to the world around you.

## Chapter XII - Peter's First Battle

The instinctive response to the dawning awareness of the return of true life is silence: "They walked on in silence drinking it all in" (113). "They were pretty tired by now of course; but not what I'd call bitterly tired— only slow and feeling very dreamy and quiet inside as one does when one is coming to the end of a long day in the open" (114).

Silence and stillness are both the way to and the recognition of the presence of the Divine. Through the Psalmist, God instructs us to "Be still and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10). The prophet Habakkuk observes "the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!" (Habakkuk 2:20). In silence and stillness our spirits are opened to a deeper reality. These are the pathways by which we proceed "further in."

The noisy, distracted restlessness of our days keeps us trapped on the surface. We must step aside from the chaos of normal existence and reconnect with the depths of our being wherein it becomes possible to know again that God is present wherever we may be.

When Aslan finally welcomes Peter, Susan, Lucy, and He-Beaver and She-Beaver, Lewis describes the scene saying, "His voice was deep and rich and somehow took the fidgets out of them. They now felt glad and quiet and it didn't seem awkward to them to stand and say nothing" (117). The "fidgets" are all those things we do in life to distract us from facing the silence that feels like emptiness but is in fact the fullness of God. The "fidgets" are those restless habits we have by which we seek to control our lives and avoid facing the poverty of our own spirits when we try to gain power over the chaotic forces of life.

It is difficult when we have not been confronted by the reality of a power greater than ourselves to "to stand and say nothing." We are overwhelmed with "the fidgets." We believe we must do something, say something, get somewhere other than where we are. We feel the need to prove the meaningfulness of our existence, to impress the world with our presence and to make our mark on civilization.

There is always somewhere better to be, something more to achieve, some bigger kingdom to build. In his book *No Man Is An Island*, Thomas Merton offers a dissenting opinion to the prevailing achievement-oriented paradigm of modern Western civilization. Merton suggests

We do not live most fully merely by doing more, seeing more, tasting more, and experiencing more than we ever have before. On the contrary, some of us need to discover that we will not begin to live more fully until we have the courage to do and see and taste and experience much less than usual.<sup>19</sup>

We need to stop. We need to be quiet. We need to move outside the tangle of our likes and our dislikes, of the constant judgment of our thinking mind. Silence is the place of

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Merton, *No Man Is An Island* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1955), p. 122

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non-judgment in which we experience the presence of God because we are willing to receive life as it presents itself, without demand, without condition, without expectation.

In silence we let go of our power, we surrender our determination to work things out, to set the world straight. We spend so much of our lives trying to figure everything out, to sort life into acceptable categories that we think might make sense of our world. In silence, we finally stop sorting, stop categorizing, stop trying to run the show. In silence, we resign ourselves finally to simply being.

Aslan points the way when he is confronted by Peter's confession that he has been in part to blame for Edmund's treachery. Aslan does not judge or condemn, instead he "said nothing either to excuse Peter or to blame him but merely stood looking at him with his great unchanging eyes. And it seemed to all of them that there was nothing to be said." (118) Aslan does not blame; he does not sort. He does not try to fit Peter into any tidy little category of "good guy" or "bad guy." Aslan simply allows Peter to be what he is, and allows the situation to be as it is.

Much of the time there is "nothing to be said." But that does not stop the endless flow of words by which we try to make sense of our condition. The fact that there may be "nothing to be said," does not prevent us from attempting to impose our judgments upon life. It does not stop us from constantly fidgeting to make things right, to gain control over difficult and uncontrollable circumstances.

Gradually, the children are beginning to understand that, faced with the presence of Aslan, the best they can do is do nothing and say nothing. "And once more Peter said nothing" (119). There is a lovely Coleman Barks rendition of a Rumi couplet that instructs us to "Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking. / Live in silence."<sup>20</sup> Silence is the place where the knots and "fidgets" of our lives begin to untangle. Silence and stillness are the sign that we have begun to find some sort of reconciliation with the uneasy confusion and chaos of our lives.

Silence has the capacity to accept and even welcome the complexities of life. Lewis describes Aslan thus: "People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time. If the children had ever thought so, they were cured of it now" (117). In silence, the polarities and contradictions of life can be received and embraced. When we spend time in silence, we learn that not everything has to be resolved. We learn that we can live with unfinished business, with imperfection, and with the pain and the suffering of the world. In silence we learn to stop trying to impose our will upon life.

Thomas Merton says, "silence makes us whole if we let it. Silence helps draw together the scattered and dissipated energies of a fragmented existence."<sup>21</sup> In silence we discover our true destiny.

<sup>20</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *The Essential Rumi* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Merton, *Love and Living* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1965), p.43.

Peter with his sword still drawn in his hand went with the Lion to the eastern edge of the hilltop. There a beautiful sight met their eyes. . . . [J]ust where the land of Narnia met the sea – in fact, at the mouth of the great river – there was something on a little hill, shining. It was shining because it was a castle and of course the sunlight was reflected from all the windows which looked towards Peter and the sunset. . . . ‘That, O Man,’ said Aslan, ‘is Cair Paravel of the four thrones, in one of which you must sit as King.’ (118-19)

This is the place where unity and order are restored, the place to which Peter, Susan, Lucy, and ultimately even Edmund have been guided. They will sit upon four thrones and discover within themselves that the disparate parts of life come together in a divine vision of light.

### **A. The Story**

1. What is the reaction of those who meet Aslan?
2. How is Aslan described?
3. How does Aslan respond to Peter’s confession of wrong?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. What kinds of experiences cause you to walk “on in silence drinking it all in”?  
 What might hinder you from being available to receive such experiences?  
 What might help you to be open to such encounters?
2. What are “the fidgets”?  
 What are we trying to do when we have “the fidgets”?  
 What is the solution to “the fidgets”?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

Experience stillness and silence. Stay close to those things that nurture within you the stillness and silence that is at the centre of your true nature.

## Chapter XIII - Deep Magic from the Dawn of Time

Under the direction of the Queen, Edmund has become completely lost. He has lost touch with his siblings, with the world around him, and with himself. He is completely alienated from life.

Edmund simply sank down and lay on his face doing nothing at all and not even caring what was going to happen next provided they would let him lie still. He was too tired even to notice how hungry and thirsty he was. (122)

In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul states that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Paul is not speaking here about punishment, as if somehow death were the punishment administered to humans in response to human sin. Paul is speaking simply of consequences. Death is the result of sin. Death is what comes about whenever human beings miss the high call of their exalted nature as it was created by God.

It is possible to be physically alive and yet dead within. Whenever we give ourselves over to the forces of death rather than life, something within us dies. Winter creeps into our souls. The water of life freezes solid and, although we may appear to those around us to be alive, we in fact carry death in our being.

For Edmund the way back to life begins with a drink of wine (124). In the New Testament, the Gospel of John records Jesus’ first miracle in Cana of Galilee as turning water into wine. The wine in John chapter two is the wine of life, of celebration, of God’s Spirit. It signifies the fact that Jesus came in order that human beings “may have life and may have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

The tragedy of Edmund’s life is not that he was an evil person, but that he was looking for the right things in all the wrong places. This is the essence of sin as it is understood in biblical tradition. To sin is to seek the right thing in the wrong way and in the wrong place. The original Greek word most commonly used in the New Testament to refer to sin is a term borrowed from archery. It means “to miss the mark.” When we sin we are aiming in the wrong direction, focusing on the wrong target. So, we will never get to the place we truly want to go, using the means we have chosen.

The inner journey calls us to recognize that those deep human longings for connection, love, purpose, and life that we have sought to meet by using external means can be met only within. Human beings were not designed to find contentment on the surface of life. To sin is to live contrary to the design of our nature.

All the time Edmund was chasing after the Witch and longing for Turkish Delight, he was really longing for life and looking for love, security, hope, and light. These are the things for which we all search and the processes of life exist to teach us that they cannot be found outside of ourselves.

In *The Sign of Jonas*, the collection of writings from his early journals, Thomas Merton says,

Every creature that enters my life, every instant of my days, will be designed to wound me with the realization of the world's insufficiency, until I become so detached that I will be able to find God alone in everything. Only then will all things bring me joy.<sup>22</sup>

The spiritual journey is in large part a process of deconstruction in which we discover how all of those things towards which we have looked for a sense of life and satisfaction have let us down. They have failed to satisfy the deepest inner longings of our lives. We need to come to that place where, like Edmund, we know ourselves to be paralyzed by our own need.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor," and "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst" (Matthew 5:3, 6). Poverty, hunger, and thirst are designed by God to lead us through the things of this world to that invisible inner place where we discover that we are left with nothing but the Beloved. There are no further consolations, no other hopes to which we can look. There is only the stark emptiness of existence apart from God. This is the place where the "Deep Magic" can begin to do its work.

The Deep Magic that must be fulfilled is simply the way God has designed the universe to work. The sacrifice that is required of Aslan is not to appease God, or to satisfy some remote, demanding sense of justice. Olivier Clement comments on the Christian understanding of sacrifice saying,

Christ's sacrifice was not in the least demanded by the Father, as the only thing that could satisfy divine justice, appease the wrath of God, and incline him favourably towards the human race. That would be a regression to a non-biblical idea of sacrifice. . . . Christ's sacrifice is a sacrifice of praise, of sanctification, of restoration, by which he offers the whole of creation to the Father so that the Father may bring it to life in the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Aslan's sacrifice simply satisfies the realities of the way the universe works. Although the Witch does not understand the truth of the Deeper Magic, she understands that it is the Deep Magic that "will be appeased" in Aslan's death (140). The Deep Magic says that there is nothing apart from self-giving, sacrificial love that can make whole the depths of the human condition. There is no hope or light apart from the reality of this love; in the Christian tradition, this love has come to be embodied in the person of Jesus.

The "Deep Magic" teaches that the way to renewal is through the death of the self. Creation is reborn when we are willing to sacrifice our own will, our own desires, needs, wants, and demands. The inner journey is always the journey towards letting go. It is always the journey to that final surrender that we call "death." In this final surrender we discover the place within ourselves to which all our journeys have been calling.

The final place for which we all long is that place to which Edmund comes when he "was on the other side of Aslan, looking all the time at Aslan's face" (129). This is the place

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1953), p. 51.

<sup>23</sup> Olivier Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, ibid., p. 44.

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Jesus promised to his followers when he called them to “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

### **A. The Story**

1. What is Edmund’s condition at the beginning of Chapter 13?
2. When the children are reunited with Edmund, why does Aslan say, “there is no need to talk to him about what is past”? (See Isaiah 65:16.)
3. Who created the “Deep Magic”?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. Identify a time when you may have felt paralysed and despondent.  
  
Trace the forces and decisions that brought you to this place. What enabled you to move on?
2. What is your understanding of forgiveness?  
  
What is the impact of forgiveness on the one who is forgiven and the one who does the forgiving?  
  
What makes it possible for us to truly forgive?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

Read I Corinthians 2:7. Reflect upon the reality of “God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.” See how you might discover this wisdom working in your life.

## Chapter XIV - The Triumph of the Witch

At the time of his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, one of Jesus' disciples took a sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Jesus rebuked this act of violence, pointing out, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). This is a central text in understanding the events that are to follow. No one takes anything from Jesus that he does not freely and, although reluctantly, willingly surrender.

In Chapter 8 of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Mr. Beaver describes Aslan as "the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-sea" (75). And he describes the power of Aslan in relation to the Witch saying, "If she can stand on her two feet and look him in the face it'll be the most she can do and more than I expect of her" (74). Later, Lewis makes it clear that Mr. Beaver's assessment of the Witch's power in relation to Aslan was accurate. When Aslan and the Witch finally meet,

It was the oddest thing to see those two faces – the golden face and the dead-white face – so close together. Not that the Witch looked Aslan exactly in his eyes; Mrs. Beaver particularly noticed this. (128)

Even when she believes that victory is in her grasp, the Witch cannot face Aslan. So great is Aslan's might and so noble his bearing that the Witch is unable to confront him with any confidence in her own power.

So as Aslan's destruction approaches, it is not surprising that Susan and Lucy, who watch from a distance, anticipate that at any moment "the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-sea" will rise up and destroy his persecutors: "Lucy and Susan held their breaths waiting for Aslan's roar and his spring upon his enemies." But to their dismay and shock, "it never came" (138). Aslan is rolled over on his back and his four paws are tied, leaving him helpless before the gibbering mob "shouting and cheering as if they had done something brave." Even at this point, Lewis reminds us, "though, had the Lion chosen, one of those paws could have been the death of them all" (138).

The point of this passage comes in the middle of the paragraph describing Aslan's "defeat." Like Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, when Aslan was attacked, "he made no resistance at all" (138). Containing within himself all the power imaginable to any living being, Aslan holds back. He does not destroy his attackers. He chooses to accept the fate that destiny has brought to him. Aslan allows the Deep Magic of the universe to unfold as it must and, in this way, Aslan prepares for the ultimate liberation of all Creation.

But we must not rush too quickly to Aslan's ultimate victory. Chapter 14 is called "The Triumph of the Witch." And her "triumph" does look real. In this chapter Aslan is "very, very tired" (135) and "sad and lonely" (136). The struggle is real. The forces of evil are not to be trifled with. The cross that stands at the heart of Christian faith

demonstrates that when human beings live in a way contrary to our true nature, we do incalculable damage, to ourselves, to other people, and to the creation in which we live.

We do not want to face the consequences of our choices. We want someone to shield us from the “wages” of sin. We want an easy escape. But the only escape is through the cross. We must face the devastation we have wrought and accept the death that is the only path to reconciliation and restoration.

This is the gospel. The good news of the Deep Magic is that, by accepting and embracing the realities of life as they come to us, we are set free from our bondage to those forces in the world that work against God’s purposes. The howling mob no longer has any power over the person who has resigned to the Deep Magic. Surrender always produces triumph for the willing victim. Bede Griffiths writes, “To accept the will of God in everything that comes, in total self-surrender is the most perfect way and the most universal.”<sup>24</sup>

The story is told of a Buddhist monk in a small village confronted by the tanks of an occupying army. When he knelt in the street the soldiers approached him saying, “Don’t you know that we have the power to kill you?” The monk replied, “Don’t you know that I have the power to let you?” This is the power of non-resistance, the ultimate victory of non-violence over the ways of the world. It is the power of one who is truly free.

As we penetrate more deeply on the way of the inner journey we learn the wisdom of Jesus’ instruction, “Do not resist an evildoer” (Matthew 5:39). For the person who has met Aslan, there is no longer anything that needs to be protected. There may still be battles to fight and evil to be addressed. But, in the end it is not the sword of Peter or the dagger of Lucy that will win the victory. Victory belongs to Aslan. As Mr. Beaver has declared, “He’ll put all to rights”: “It is he, not you, that will save Mr. Tumnus” (74). The children’s only job is to make real that which has already been achieved by Aslan.

All along the Witch’s principal power has been “that she could make things look like what they aren’t” (125). The inner journey is the journey towards reality and truth. It is the journey to that place within ourselves where we come to recognize that, whatever appearances might seem to suggest, love does conquer hate, good is stronger and more real than evil, and truth will always have the final word in God’s creation.

There is nothing to fear from the “Cruels and Hags and Incubuses, Wraiths, Horrors, Efreets, Sprites, Orknies, Wooses, and Ettins” (138). As the great Easter hymn declares, “The strife is o’er, the battle done; / Now is the Victor’s triumph won; / O let the song of praise be sung.”<sup>25</sup> Christian faith is a victory song. But it is a song that does not always look exactly as we might hope. Christ’s victory does not always mean that everything goes perfectly in this world. There are still shards of broken glass everywhere we look.

<sup>24</sup> Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion: A Christian Commentary On The Bhagavad Gita* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate Publishers, 1987), p. 225.

<sup>25</sup> *The Book of Common Praise* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1938), #163.

The suffering is real; the pain in life cannot be denied. But suffering, pain, and darkness are not the final word.

In the chorus of his song "Anthem," poet Leonard Cohen sings,

Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.

At the moment of Jesus' death "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). The way to an awareness of God's presence in the world is opened. The last barrier separating human beings from consciousness of the Divine is removed. The willing sacrifice of the innocent victim opens a new way into that dimension of life the Bible calls "eternal."

The inner journey enables us to peer through that curtain into the mystery of God. The inner journey opens to us that other dimension of life in which we know that access to God can never be denied and that our lives are founded upon the living presence of God at the heart of all creation. But if we are going to see this deeper dimension of reality, we must be willing to stay with Susan and Lucy. We must be willing to walk to the Stone Table. We must be willing to see into the ultimate depths of the sadness and loneliness of life and to see the worst violence and suffering that can be inflicted upon any being. It is only through this openness to the reality of suffering that we will come into the fullness of light and truth that is promised to us along the path that Jesus walked.

### **A. The Story**

1. Read Matthew 26:38. What do Jesus and Aslan appear to desire at this difficult moment? Is there anything surprising in this?
2. What are the similarities between the picture of Aslan and the picture of Jesus in Matthew 27:29?
3. What is the final temptation the Witch uses in her attempt to defeat Aslan?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. What do we need when we are feeling betrayed and alone?  
  
What might prevent us from accessing this resource in our times of need?  
  
How might we ensure that this support will be present when we most need it but least feel like asking?
2. How does it feel to be mocked and ridiculed?  
  
What is our natural reaction when we find ourselves the victims of unjust accusations and attacks?  
  
How might we respond in a more life-giving manner?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

Look at your relationships and try to discern which ones you might be able to turn to in times of struggle and difficulty.

## Chapter XV - Deeper Magic from before the Dawn of Time

At the beginning of Chapter 15, Aslan is dead and Susan and Lucy, who were present at his execution, are sunk in despair and horror. “[I]t was all more lonely and hopeless and horrid than I know how to describe” (143). So desperate is their inner state that, when the “vile rabble” of the Witch’s troops “came sweeping off the hill-top and down the slope right past their hiding-place” they could no longer even feel frightened: “At any other time they would have trembled with fear; but now the sadness and shame and horror of Aslan’s death so filled their minds that they hardly thought of it” (142).

Susan and Lucy have experienced the extremity of emptiness possible in the human condition. They have seen love crucified, death triumph over life, hatred conquer goodness, darkness destroy light, and violence defeat the flowering of love. They have stood on the edge of the abyss and peered over into the black emptiness below and recognized that there is nothing at the centre of the universe with the power to hold them. They have come to the end of human hope and they are paralyzed by the experience:

if you’ve been up all night and cried till you have no more tears left in you— you will know that there comes in the end a sort of quietness. You feel as if nothing was ever going to happen again. At any rate that was how it felt to these two. Hours and hours seemed to go by in this dead calm, and they hardly noticed that they were getting colder and colder. (144)

The return of Spring that had begun when Aslan was first “on the move” seems to have been reversed. The icy grip of winter has returned to hold the land in its frozen clutches.

So complete is the hopelessness of this moment that, when the girls observe tiny grey mice “nibbling away at the cords” that bind Aslan, Lucy who, up until now has always been hopeful and positive, observes, ““Poor little things— they don’t realize he’s dead. They think it’ll do some good untying him”” (144).

The inner journey passes through dark terrain at times, often moving from light into dark and then back into the light again. Jesus never pretended that the journey would not have profoundly difficult times. In John 16:33 Jesus says, “In the world you face persecution.” The Greek word translated “persecution” is “thlipsis.” “Thlipsis” covers a lot more territory than just “persecution.” The word literally means “pressing together, friction.” Jesus never pretended to his followers that life would be any different than we all know that it is. He stated clearly that there would always be friction in our lives as long as we remain in this broken, imperfect world.

The good news of the Gospel is not that things go better with Jesus. The good news of the Gospel is that, even when life is profoundly difficult, dark, and painful, even when we feel we are being pressed on every side, we are not alone. We have not been forsaken. Jesus has been here before us. We follow a Messiah who has experienced the full depths of human despair and despondency.

The Gospel of Matthew describes the moment of Jesus' death on the cross saying,

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45,46)

This is not a dispassionate sermon illustration Jesus preached from the cross. This was his experience. Jesus entered into the human experience of forsakenness. He allowed himself to be cut off from God, to enter into the abyss of nothingness that is human existence bereft of the divine. This is the experience Jesus feared and fought against in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is the ultimate human despair Susan and Lucy experienced as they lay beside the dead body of their beloved Aslan.

And this is the very moment at which the universe began to turn: "Lucy noticed two other things. One was that the sky on the east side of the hill was a little less dark than it had been an hour ago" (144). The light is beginning to return and then

In the wood behind them a bird gave a chuckling sound. It had been so still for hours and hours that it startled them. Then another bird answered it. Soon there were birds singing all over the place. It was quite definitely early morning now, not late night. (145)

As the light returns, Lucy and Susan begin to awaken to themselves: "'I'm so cold,' said Lucy." And, as feeling returns, so does the ability to take action. 'So am I,' said Susan. 'Let's walk about a bit'" (145). The paralyzing power of winter has been broken. Life has been restored. Aslan has returned. "They looked round. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself" (147).

Now the inner journey is transformed. No longer will the children journey alone. No longer will they need to work under their own power to find their way. Aslan says,

'We have a long journey to go. You must ride on me.' And he crouched down and the children climbed on to his warm, golden back, and Susan sat first, holding on tightly to his mane and Lucy sat behind holding on tightly to Susan. And with a great heave he rose underneath them and then shot off, faster than any horse could go, down hill and into the thick of the forest. (149)

The promise of the inner journey is that we will find that place within ourselves where, no matter how dark or difficult life may seem, we will know ourselves to be carried. The messianic promise given by God through the prophet Isaiah will be fulfilled in our experience:

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I

am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. (Isaiah 46:3,4)

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' final words to his disciples were "remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Through the inner journey we come to discover that there is nothing that can overcome this presence. There is no force on earth mightier than the presence of God known to the human spirit in the risen life of Christ.

Beneath all the chaos and suffering that characterizes so much of the world, there is always a "Deeper Magic." Events in our lives may seem haphazard and even at times malicious; but there is always a deeper reality. As we follow the inner journey, we will connect more and more with this deeper truth, until we know that it is with us always. There is nothing that can drive away the reality of divine Presence. There is no force that can ever overcome the truth and the light of God's reality in our lives.

### **A. The Story**

1. What are Susan and Lucy experiencing at the beginning of Chapter 15?
2. What has broken the power of the "Deep Magic"?
3. What is the girls' experience by the end of this chapter?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. What makes you feel powerless?

What is your usual response to such an experience?

What is there in this tale of Aslan that might help you face the experience of feeling powerless?

2. When have you had an experience of being carried?

What caused this experience in your life?

How might you become more sensitive to the experience of being carried?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

When you feel stuck, don't fight. Trust that even in difficult moments there is a "deeper magic," at work and that this force will see you through to the other side.

## Chapter XVI - What happened about the Statues

The inner journey does not end with the victory of the Lion over the Witch. The inner journey never comes to an end in this life. But the energy of our journey shifts. We come to sense that we are being carried on this journey, not by our own energy, but by the Spirit. If we are going to persevere on this inner journey we must recognize that we cannot do the journey in our own strength. We are dependent upon a force greater than our will or our personal power in order to continue on the way.

But there is another sense in which continuing on the inner journey means coming to a place where we learn to walk for ourselves. It means being willing to accept responsibility for our own lives, our decisions, our choices, and the directions that we take in life.

Before his betrayal and death in John's Gospel, Jesus is shown washing his disciples' feet. When he comes to wash Peter's feet, Peter tries to refuse this gesture of servanthood. Jesus answers Peter saying, "Unless I was you, you have no share with me." In his impetuous enthusiastic way, Peter answers, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" But Jesus tells Peter, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet" (John 13:8-10).

When Aslan enters the castle of the Witch, he breathes on all of the stone statues he finds there and they return to life. When Aslan comes to the giant Rumblebuffin, "Lucy looked and saw that Aslan had just breathed on the feet of the stone giant. 'It's all right!' shouted Aslan joyously. 'Once the feet are put right, all the rest of him will follow'" (153). The salvation Aslan has brought to Narnia does not merely liberate the inhabitants of Narnia from their bondage to the Wicked Witch; it liberates them to live new lives. They are set free to walk in the way of the Lion King.

In John chapter 8, Jesus is reported to have said to those who believed in him, "if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31, 32). Paul says it is "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1). With the coming of Aslan, the Queen's castle is transformed from a wintry image of bondage and death into a celebration of freedom and life:

The whole castle stood empty with every door and window open and the light and the sweet spring air flooding into all the dark and evil places which needed them so badly. The whole crowd of liberated statues surged back into the courtyard.  
(156)

The story of Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy began with the question of identity – what does it really mean to be human? In the liberation brought by Aslan, the question is finally answered. To be human means to be free and radiant like the Lion himself.

As the creatures of Narnia are gathered for their final battle, Aslan instructs: "Those who are good with their noses must come in front with us lions to smell out where the battle

is” (158). The power of his affirmation is not lost upon the once stone lion of Narnia who had so frightened Edmund when he first entered the Queen’s Castle.

The most pleased of the lot was the other lion who kept running about everywhere pretending to be very busy but really in order to say to everyone he met, ‘Did you hear what he said? *Us Lions*. That means him and me. *Us Lions*. That’s what I like about Aslan. No side, no stand-off-ishness. *Us Lions* That meant him and me.’ (158)

In fact, it is not only lions who are part of the “us” declared by the King. We are all included. In his great prayer for all those who will come to believe in him through the first disciples’ testimony, Jesus asks God “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us. . . . The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me” (John 17:21, 22, 23). “Us” is all those who will believe. Jesus draws all his followers for all time into the extraordinary dignity of the fellowship of the divine.

The great second-century theologian of the church, Irenaeus, said simply, “The Son of God was made man so that man might become son of God.”<sup>26</sup> In Christ, God became what we are in order that we might become what Christ is. Human nature was caught up into divinity in the person of Christ and finally transformed, returned to the beauty and light in which it was originally created. The inner journey uncovers our true nature, the true divinity of that which God has created. The wonder and the mystery of the human condition is that we are enabled to be divine by God’s Spirit.

The intimacy of this relationship is symbolized by Jesus and by Aslan using the vision of breath. Jesus “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). The breath that is the life-force of divinity enters into the recipient. The stone statues in Narnia receive from Aslan the breath of life, not just any life, but *his* life. The death of the sacrificial victim has enabled the final transaction to be fulfilled. That which we were not able to become by our own power, and through our own will, we have become through the gift of Christ’s self-sacrifice on our behalf. The primordial temptation to “be like God” (Genesis 3:5) has at last been realized through the gift of grace. That which human kind strove to seize by self-will and self-determination has been granted by God’s gracious act in Christ.

On the inner journey we discover our true dignity as human beings created in the image of God. We discover our freedom to live in response to divinity. No longer do we need to fear those forces outside of ourselves that once drove our lives. We are free to live in accordance with the divine reality that exists at the centre of our being. The journey through Narnia is the journey towards true freedom, the ultimate liberation of being able to live in conformity with our true identity.

We are not stone statues. We are not “beasts, beasts” (46). We are the Kings and Queens of Narnia, set free to live without the barriers and confines that had previously restricted

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Oliver Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p. 89.

us. There is nowhere that the free people of God cannot go, no forces at work in the world that we must fear. In contrast to this freedom and our newly recovered identity, Turkish Delight has no appeal and no power. We no longer need anything from the White Witch. We have seen that she has nothing to give us. We know that we have been fed by the presence and reality of the divine living in us.

In Helminski's version of the Rumi poem,

Everyone is so afraid of death,  
but the real Sufis just laugh:  
nothing tyrannizes their hearts.  
What strikes the oyster shell  
doesn't damage the pearl.<sup>27</sup>

Death has been conquered. There is nothing left to fear. The inner journey has brought us to that place where we have found the "pearl of great value" (Matthew 13:46). And nothing can damage that pearl. As long as we stay attached to that pearl within, which is the presence of God, there is no force on earth that can destroy us. We live in the face of the assaults of the world with a confident freedom and strength that comes from being conscious of the invisible core at the centre of our being that is our true nature. No Witch can undo this reality. No winter can destroy this endless spring. We have come to the place of freedom where we know that we carry within us at all times the transcendent mystery of God in Christ Jesus.

### A. The Story

1. How does Rumblebuffin describe his condition before Aslan breathes on him?
2. What is Rumblebuffin's first task after he comes to life?
3. Why is "the other lion" so thrilled with Aslan's statement on page 158?

### B. Your Experience

1. What are the obstacles that might need to be overcome in your life to keep you from being spiritually asleep?

What helps you to identify these obstacles?

How can they be overcome?

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<sup>27</sup> Rumi, *The Pocket Rumi*, trans. Kabir Helminski (Boston: Shambala, 2001), p. 98.

2. What does it mean for us to be able to say we are one with Christ?

How do you experience this oneness?

How can we deepen our vision of what it means for us to be united with Christ?

**C. A Spiritual Task**

Reflect upon the statement in 2 Corinthians 4:7 that “we have this treasure in clay jars.” Learn to see yourself as a container of the divine Spirit dwelling within.

## Chapter XVII - The Hunting of the White Stag

The purpose of the journey is not to escape into Narnia forever. The purpose of the journey is to return to the place from which you came but to return as a person who has become more truly the person you were created to be than you were when you began the journey. T.S. Eliot has written

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.<sup>28</sup>

After Edmund has recovered from his battle wounds, Lucy hurries back from her healing work to be with him and finds her brother “looking better than she had seen him look – oh, for ages. . . . He had become his real old self again and could look you in the face” (163). Edmund has returned to himself. He has returned to the human community. But he has returned as something fuller than he was when he left. He is now not just Edmund; he is now “King Edmund the Just” (167). Having taken the journey “further in” Edmund has uncovered his true nature. He has connected with that which is more real about himself. He, along with Peter, Susan, and Lucy, is now ready to return to the Professor’s house with his true identity more deeply formed.

From this point on in the journey, there is only one task for the children. The last instruction is given to them by the Professor who tells them, “Keep your eyes open” (170-71). They need only to pay attention, pay attention to those times when they begin to fall back into the sleep of doubt, uncertainty, and temptation. They need to keep their eyes open to see all those “other worlds – all over the place, just round the corner” (49).

The paradigmatic healing miracle in the New Testament is the opening of the eyes of the blind. In Mark chapter 13:23-37, Jesus tells his disciples over and over to keep their eyes open. In verse 23 he tells them to “be alert,” in verse 33, “Beware, keep alert,” in verse 34, “be on the watch,” in verse 35 “keep awake,” and again in verse 37 “keep awake.” All of these expressions translate one or the other of only two Greek words: *blepo* meaning “open your eyes,” and *gregoro* meaning “wake up.” Jesus is instructing his disciples to be aware, to pay attention to themselves, to others, and to the world around them.

When he was dying, the great desert mystic of early Christian tradition, Abba Bessarion, gave his disciples one last description of what their lives needed to be like. He said “A monk ought to be all eye, like the Cherubim and Seraphim.”<sup>29</sup> Over and over Edmund’s problem as he moves away from the light and towards the darkness of the Witch’s house is that he chooses not to see that which he knows to be true. Edmund chooses instead to lie to himself.

<sup>28</sup> T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding” *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> *Western Asceticism*, *ibid.*, p. 132

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Having deserted his brother and his sisters Edmund makes his way towards the Queen. As he travels toward the Witch he fills his mind with excuses about why he was in fact making good choices. But Lewis says they aren't very good excuses "for deep down inside him he really knew that the White Witch was bad and cruel" (83). But Edmund chooses not to pay attention to this "deep down inside" knowing.

It is that "deep down inside" place that is calling us to live true, authentic, and genuine lives. It is that deep inner place within us that is "the image of God" in which we were created. It is this part of our being that can never be undone, can never be completely destroyed. Even when we are on our way to consort with the embodiment of evil and illusion, something remains at the centre of our being that speaks truth in our lives. The challenge of the inner journey is to heed that voice of truth, to listen to the Spirit who speaks gently and quietly within, and to keep ourselves open and sensitive to the guidance and direction of that Spirit.

In John's Gospel Jesus is reported to have said, "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). The Good News of the Gospel tells us that we have within ourselves all the wisdom and the truth we need for the journey of life. We do not need to travel across continents and oceans to discover the presence of life and Truth. We need only to open ourselves to the reality that lies at the centre of our beings. The way into this awareness is found in the ordinary mundane details of our daily lives. Every room contains a wardrobe that we can pass through into the presence of a deeper, more real awareness. We need only to truly open to what is, to embrace life as it comes to us, to stop trying to be something other than what we are.

When the children question the old Professor about whether they will ever get back into Narnia, he replies "'Yes, of course you'll get back to Narnia again some day.'" But then he goes on to warn them, "'But don't go trying to use the same route twice. Indeed, don't try to get there at all'" (170). Self-effort will always lead in the wrong direction. The inner journey is a land of grace. It is a land where we discover all that we cannot do and resign ourselves to the fact that we are powerless to recreate ourselves; it must be done for us, by a power greater than we can muster on our own.

In the lovely short story "Babette's Feast," Isak Dinesen tells of the moment when General Loewenhielm suddenly received the gift of "second-sightedness," by which he sees through the material world of a sumptuous feast into the land of grace. The General stands up at dinner and delivers a speech in which he declares,

in our human foolishness and short-sightedness we imagine divine grace to be finite. For this reason we tremble...But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realise that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Isak Dinesen, "Babette's Feast," *Anecdotes of Destiny* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1958), pp. 58-59.

This is the vision to which Narnia invites us. This is the vision to which the inner journey will lead us if we are willing to follow all the way to the end.

Aslan is the saviour of Narnia as Christ is the saviour of the world. Their sacrifice brings the grace of life and hope to all human beings. The human task is to open and receive the gift given. We need only to keep the door ajar so that the grace can find its way in. Each time the children enter Narnia, Lewis is careful to remind his readers that “it is very foolish to shut oneself into any wardrobe” (12). Only Edmund, when he entered the enchanted land, “jumped in and shut the door, forgetting what a very foolish thing this is to do” (30). We need to keep the doors open.

In the prophetic Revelation of John at the end of the New Testament, Jesus is pictured saying, “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me” (Revelation 3:20). Our only task is to open. God’s Spirit will do the rest. God’s Spirit will draw us into that deep intimate relationship of love symbolized over and over in Jesus’ life and in Narnia by the fellowship of a shared meal. We are invited to join the banquet of love. We are invited to receive the grace that gives without condition.

In a land where once it was “always winter and never Christmas,” the invitation of Narnia is the invitation of a spring that transcends all winters. As we open to the light of the King, that light will burn inside the depth of our being and we will discover ourselves being recreated by the breath of God’s Spirit in each moment of our days.

### **A. The Story**

1. What clever strategy did Edmund use that allowed him to disable the power of the Witch? Why is this significant?
2. What is Lucy’s role after the battle and why does Aslan rebuke her?
3. What guides the children back to the old Professor’s house? What is the significance of their return?

### **B. Your Experience**

1. In what ways might we be called to join Lucy as a force for healing in the lives of others?
2. If you have ever been on retreat you may know how challenging it can be to return to the routines of your regular life. What might help with the return journey from Narnia?

### **C. A Spiritual Task**

Keep your eyes open. Pay attention to the wisdom of Narnia wherever you encounter it.