The Journey of Transformation
by Leonard Roy Frank
Epigraph: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” — Paul (Romans 12:2)

1 - A PATH BEGINS WITHIN
Let me tell you a story. It’s my own, the one I know best, and illustrates in part the theories I will elaborate on later in this essay.

Born in 1932, I grew up in a middle-class family in Brooklyn. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, I served a two-year stint in the U.S. Army. Three lackluster years as a real estate salesman in New York and Florida were followed by my moving, in 1959, to San Francisco, where I soon decided that my life was unsatisfying and that I wasn’t living up to my potential as a human being.

I realized, to paraphrase William James, that there was something fundamentally wrong about me as I then was, and that the way to correct this situation was to make, in his words, “proper connection with the higher powers.” The melting season had arrived: I was ready to shake off the old skin to make way for the new.

So I withdrew from society and undertook a self-imposed and self-directed course of study aimed at making connection with the higher powers in order to achieve self-realization. For close to three years, I devoted myself to my studies, while excluding just about everything else a young person might want to do.

My time was largely taken up with reading. The most important books and authors I remember reading wereMohandas K. Gandhi’s An Autobiography, The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Carl G. Jung, Arnold J. Toynbee’s A Study of History, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces.

The reading process was entirely organic. There was no pre-set list of books to read: each book suggested the next one to be read. All of this, as might be expected, took a profound toll on me. I was soon questioning everything I believed, and the answers I came up with were coherent and well thought out. I drew from my reading than with those I previously had held.

My parents, who were then living in Manhattan, visited me several times during this period. They became increasingly concerned about the changes they observed in me. After a while, they hardly recognized me: We were living on the same planet but in different worlds. The changes I saw as positive they regarded as negative, and, moreover, evidence of my being “mentally ill.” They urged me to see a psychiatrist and, when I wouldn’t, had me institutionalized.

I was locked up for about seven months, beginning in October 1962, first in the psychiatric ward of a San Francisco hospital for a few days, then in a state hospital in Northern California for about a month, and finally in a private psychiatric hospital located just south of San Francisco.

The case history section of the “Certificate of Medical Examination,” filed in by the doctors, read as follows: “Reportedly has shown progressive personality changes over past 2 or 3 years. Grew withdrew and inclined not to work. Grew a beard, ate only vegetarian food and lived a life of a bachelor — to a certain extent.” Later, I was diagnosed as a “paranoid schizophrenic” and eventually forced to undergo court-ordered combined insulin coma-electroshock “treatment.”

I was subjected to 50 insulin comas and 35 electroshocks (electroconvulsive treatment,ECT), according to my psychiatrist’s records, which I obtained in 1974. The major effect of the shocks was memory loss. My high school and college educations were effectively destroyed. At least as significantly, there remained but few traces of memory for the three years that preceded the last shock session, including the period of study before commencement, which I believe was the most meaningful and creative in my life up to that point.

Although the use of combined insulin coma-electroshock in psychiatry was discontinued around 1965, electroshock (electroconvulsive treatment,ECT) is currently being administered annually to between one and two million people worldwide (including an estimated 100,000 Americans) and can produce similarly devastating effects, especially when applied intensively.

After being released from the hospital, I returned to my studies and spent the next six years first catching up to where I had been and then moving on to new learning and further development. Following that, I managed my own art gallery in downtown San Francisco for five years, and became deeply involved in the psychiatric survivor movement, first, in 1972, as a staff member of Madness Network News, soon after that as co-founder of the Network Against Psychiatric Assault, and now as a member of MindFreedom International.

In 1978, I edited and self-published The History of Shock Treatment and, beginning in 1998, Random House published eight collections of quotations I’ve edited, most notably Random House’s Webster’s Quotationary, which has now sold nearly 150,000 copies. Last year, I published on the Internet: The Electroshock Quotationary, a freely downloadable 156-page book with a good deal more information than most people would ever want to know about psychiatry’s most controversial procedure.

I want to backtrack now and discuss some of the ideas I may have learned during the period of withdrawal preceding my commitment. I say “may have learned,” for the shock-induced memory loss makes it difficult for me to differentiae between what I learned from my precommitment studies and what I learned afterwards when I reread at least some of the books I remembered having read during the earlier period.

A friend who visited my studio apartment in the early 1960s told me later that shelves filled with books covered one of its walls, but I remember only a dozen or so of their titles. All the books were destroyed when I was committed.

2 - THE PATH OF SATYAGRAHA: NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE
Gandhi’s Autobiography opened me to a new way of looking at myself and the world. From that work and other writings of his, I discovered some of the underlying ideas and principles of which has now become my unwritten credo. But I didn’t just incorporate them into a belief system; where possible, I began practicing them, and still practice them.

I learned from Gandhi (1869-1948) about nonviolence and became a satyagrahi, that is, someone who practices nonviolent resistance to wrongdoing and violence. The root meaning of satyagraha is “holding onto truth,” which Gandhi considered as “truth-force.” He believed that “exploitation is the essence of violence.” From this, I reasoned that non-exploitation is the essence of nonviolence, so I resolved to cease taking advantage of people.

Gandhi believed there are three possible responses to violence: violent resistance, nonresistance, and nonviolent resistance. Violent resistance is rejected because it perpetuates and increases the violence; meeting violence with violence is like fighting fire by dousing it with gasoline. It also makes the violent resister an accomplice, an active accomplice, in the wrongdoing. Nonresistance is ruled out because it fails to stop the violence and makes the nonresister a passive accomplice and a coward.

The only moral choice, as Gandhi saw it, is nonviolent resistance, that is, taking action individually and in groups to end the violence, (A) by refusing to cooperate with those carrying out the violence, and (B) by ceasing to assist the wrongdoer directly or indirectly, (B) by throwing up obstacles to the proposed or ongoing violence and exploitation through demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, and, if necessary, deliberate law-breaking or civil disobedience; and (C) by serving the common good through purposeful, constructive engage­ment. As Gandhi wrote, “cooperation with good is as much a duty as noncooperation with evil.”

Gandhi taught me that all people and all animals are part of one family, and that the principle of nonviolence and nonexploitation applies to every member of that family, so I became a vegetarian and, later, a vegan, a non-eater and non-user of all animal products.

He persuaded me that God exists, so I became a monotheist. He taught me that “no human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption,” that “given the opportunity, every human being has the same possibility for spiritual growth,” and that as children of “one and the same God” we are “absolutely equal.”

I learned from Gandhi, from his writings and his life, that it is possible for a spiritual person to be active in the politicaleconomic world without self-sacrifice or sacrificing his or her spirituality. I thus decided that when finished with my studies I would return to the everyday world, pursue some kind of career, and do what I could to make the world a better place.
Begin Within—Reflections on Transformation

“Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

Reflections by Leonard Roy Frank

The American physician Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. wrote in The Autocrat at the Breakfast-Table (1858), “I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving. To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it — but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor.”

The journey of transformation has no predetermined schedule and no road map. Those who undertake it need to chart their own course as they go along. It is not unlike repairing a damaged plane in flight while piloting it.

The American minister and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in Ebony magazine (September 1966): “Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls.”

The American philosopher Jean Huston wrote in The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By (1989): “While most people are concentrating on the news reported in the media — news that focuses primarily on disasters, wars, and conflicts — something transformative is happening in the culture that you do not see until you begin to change.”

The Buddhist saying: “He who fear what they should not fear and those who do not fear what they should fear tread the downward path.”

The German novelist Herman Hesse wrote in Siddhartha (1922): “We are not going around in circles, we are going upwards. The path is a spiral.”

We are all called upon to practice lovingkindness in everything we say and do with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our might.

“Give as you would receive.” (English saying)

They fare best on the journey of transformation who let go without giving up, fall forward when they must, and are always ready — if necessary — to take a leap in the dark or in the opposite direction, sometimes both at once.

The light is reached not by turning back from the darkness, but by going through it.

 Paths clear before those who know where they’re going and are determined to get there.

“Wisdom and compassion are two wheels of the cart.” (Buddhist saying)

“When your cart reaches the foot of the mountain, a path will appear.” (Chinese saying)

At Sinai’s summit there is room enough for everyone who makes the climb.

“He leads me to paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, “I fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” (Psalms 23:3-4)
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3. THE PATH OF THE PROPHETS

In his autobiography, Gandhi named several books that strongly influenced him during his formative years. One was the New Testament. Although I was born a Jew, I was raised in a more or less secular home and later, when I was about 15, I read the Bible, the New Testament, and a few Christian Scriptures, was based on the Hebrew Scriptures, which preceded them, so I made some for me to read the latter before the former.

The Hebrew Scriptures provided me with some of the key guidesposts I needed for the story of my journey of transformation. Because I had no preconceived ideas about the book, I was able to read it with fresh and critical eyes. I soon realized that not all of it is to be taken literally, that some of it was not to be taken at all, that it was part history and part mythology, part wisdom and part nonsense. I found that along with the many beneficial laws and teachings were some harmful and immoral ones, no longer valid in religious authority, I decided which was what accords to my own inner light.

What impressed me most were the words of Moses and the prophets: their teachings about the one God, a living God, a personal God whom human beings can speak to directly, their teachings about idolatry, about right and wrong, and about the need not only to avoid wrongdoing but, in Hosea’s words, to “practice kindness, justice and righteousness.”

In Isaiah’s words, “to break every yoke... to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house.” Implicit in their message was the idea that there is a universal moral law, obedience to which is freedom.

The Hebrew Scriptures also taught me a new way of understanding history. Built into the text, as I read it, is a theory of history—a brief history of the world, the story of His journey from the Garden of Eden to the Kingdom of Heaven. But it is not just God’s story—it is our story as well, as about us, I and others believe, that God can complete His/Her journey only with the active and fully conscious participation of humanity. In other words, God needs us no less than we need God. We are, in fact, a partnership, and it is up to us together to create an earthly kingdom of peace, freedom, and prosperity, a kingdom in which God and humankind can live indefinitely.

4. THE PATH OF THE PEACEMAKER

Next, I turned to the Christian Scriptures, primarily to the example and teachings of Jesus, and found much that fit into my newly formulated belief system. From Jesus, I learned about loving not only our neighbors, but also our enemies; about looking not another as fully as God loves each of us. I learned about the Beatitudes, the blessedness of the humble, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peaceable. We are made in the image of God. Jesus believed that he was an incarnation of God. “I and the Father [meaning God] are one.”

That was blasphemy in its most extreme form to both Jews and Romans, the latter being occupiers of Judea during the lifetime of Jesus whose religion held that the Roman emperor was God. Jesus paid for his “blasphemy” with his life. I asked myself, was he or was he not God incarnate? And my answer was, yes he was in the same way that every human being is God incarnate. But if that were true, how is it that we human beings, throughout history, have often been so cruel to one another and to ourselves? Perhaps, I thought, it is because we are unaware of who we truly are and that once awakened from our slumber we would be inspired to act in accord with our guilty nature.

5. THE PATH OF HISTORY

At one point during the course of my studies, I read several books by the English historian Arnold J. Toynbee. His twelve-volume Study of History (1934-1961) has significant similarities in the development and decline of more than 200 of the world’s major civilizations. Toynbee recognized three of his most meaningful historical principles were “challenge and response,” “withdrawal,” and “return.”

Regarding challenge and response, Toynbee wrote, “Civilizations... come to birth and proceed to grow by successfully responding to successive challenges. They break down and go to pieces if and when a challenge confronts them they fail to meet.”

With respect to withdrawal and return, he wrote, “The creative movement [is]... a disengagement and temporary withdrawal of the creative personality from his social milieu, and his subsequent return to the same milieu transformed in a new capacity and with new powers.”

As an example of this two-step process, Toynbee cited Paul, a Jewish proselytizer and probably a Pharisee, who on the road to Damascus experienced a revelation that converted him to Christianity—such as it was, only a few decades after its founder’s death. This led to his “withdrawal” from society for more than ten years, during which time he learned as much as he could about the fledgling religion, preparatory to returning to society and becoming its leading theologian and missionary.

About the chariot metaphor, Toynbee wrote, “If religion is a chariot, it looks as if the wheels on which it mounts towards Heaven may be the periodic downfall of civilizations on Earth. It looks as if the movement of civilizations may be cyclic and recurrent, while the movement of religion may be on a single continuous upward line. The continuous upward movement of religion may be served and promoted by the cyclic movement of civilizations round the cycle of birth, death, birth.”

Toynbee explained that the chariot metaphor by making a connection between Judaism-Christianity and the Roman Empire, the former representing a “Challenge,” and the latter, the wheels of the chariot. The new religion was carried forward by the political, social, and technological advances of the earth’s once-dominant but then dying empire. The development of the city-state, the postal system, and land and sea transportation facilitated the proselytizing activities of Paul and the other Christian missionaries.

Finally, after some 300 years of persecuting Christians, the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as its official religion in a failled attempt to save itself from dissolution. From this perspective, the larger historical purpose of the Roman empire was to serve as a vehicle for the spread and advancement of Christianity.

Toynbee then analyzed the world situation to that which existed during the last days of the Roman era, believing that Western Civilization has replaced the Roman Empire and that some new religion, as yet unknown and about which we have little or no inkling, may possibly arise to replace Christianity and other religions. He believed that the scientific advances for which Western Civilization has been most notable, such as the printing press, the steam engine, radio, television, and, since Toynbee’s death in 1976, satellite and Internet communication — would make possible the replacement of the new religion to every region on the earth, resulting finally in the unification of the human race.

6. THE PATH OF THE HERO

As noted earlier, I recalled having read, sometime during the pre-commitment period, Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces, which was published in 1949. This was one of the first books I re- read after regaining my freedom. Campbell (1904-1987), a scholar of myth, best known for his televised interviews with Bill Moyers during the 1980s, detailed the hero’s journey, basing his concepts on myths drawn from the world’s cultures, myths that had sprung up more or less spontaneously in various places with little cross-fertilization. He then noted that these stories appeared in many of these myths, and picked together these themes into a coherent plot, which he summarized as follows: “The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage in a journey of initiation which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero returns back to his world transformed by his adventures.”

The hero’s journey is not for the half-hearted. It is a full-scale, world conquest, and Campbell’s word for Toynbee’s “withdrawal,” necessarily involves facing oneself, one’s fear and doubt, and learning to be very trying. As the Swiss psychiatrist Carl G. Jung (1875-1961) has written, “Nothing is more feared than self-contemplation.” We are confronted with “springing up more or less spontaneously in various places with little cross-fertilization. He then noted that these stories appeared in many of these myths, and picked together these themes into a coherent plot, which he summarized as follows: “The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage in a journey of initiation which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero returns back to his world transformed by his adventures.”

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butterfly. At this point, one may be lifted to a higher level of existence and filled with boundless, unconditional love for every living being. After separation and initiation (the inner journey), we come to the hero's return (the outer journey), which is fraught with danger but without which he or her journey of transformation will be a failure, a wasted effort. According to Campbell, "The returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world."

The hero, wanting to share with others the wisdom and love seemingly granted her or him, soon discovers that only those who have themselves been initiated can fully appreciate what is being offered. The uninstructed are likely to see the returning hero as a threat to their sense of self and to their worldly interests, so the hero must be ready, again in Campbell's words, to "throw the return blow of reasonable questions, hard resentment and good people at a loss to comprehend."

The returning hero is also forced to contend with the character Campbell names Holdfast. "Holdfast is the keeper of the past... He is Holdfast not because he keeps the past but because he keeps."

Holdfast symbolizes the powers that be, he occupies the seat of power and, no matter the count, his is always the deciding vote.

Holdfast is the hero's arch-enemy because he defends the status quo, which the hero wants to replace with new social arrangements. The planet isn't big enough to accommodate these two, one or the other must go — unless a reconciliation can somehow be brought about. The reconciliation, if there is to be one, requires the transformation of Holdfast, and the hero must take the lead in making that happen. If the hero accomplishes this task, the way will be open for him or her to do the same with people in the community, or conceivably, society at large. From Campbell's perspective, "in so far as the hero's act coincides with that for which his society itself is ready, he seems to ride on the great rhythm of the historical process."

-7. THE PATH OF SELF-REALIZATION

Campbell's hero is the hero writ large, the hero of the great myths. But the British psychologist P.W. Martin (1893-7), in his little-known work, Experiment in Depth: A Study of the Work of Jung, Elias and Toynbee (1955), succeeded in bringing the mythical hero down to earth. In fact, there's hardly any place for heroes, as such, in Martin's theory. Instead, he focuses on ordinary people following the hero's path in order to achieve wholeness, or self-realization, in what Jung laid out as the "individuation process." Martin believed the hero's journey was potential, everyone's journey.

Martin combined Toynbee's "withdrawal and return" principle with Jung's "constructive technique," to form what he called "the experiment in depth." Martin believed that the experiment in depth, or journey of transformation, may be undertaken alone, with a counselor or teacher (preferably someone who has already made the journey), or with a group of individuals (ideally, in my opinion, including family members) who have decided to embark on the journey together. In the last case, the "two great integrative factors" are "the fellowship of a working group and contact with the deep center," the deep center being what is called, in psychology, "the unconscious" and in religion, the soul or God's presence in man. From the fellowship group, there is emotional and perhaps material support. Feedback on one's thoughts and conduct, advice on solving the numerous problems that may arise, and the joy that comes from working with others in an activity having a transcendent purpose. Martin saw the possibility of the experiment in depth evolving into "a fellowship in depth."

But whether the journeyers choose to go it alone or with others, they do not need to devote themselves exclusively to the enterprise; they can continue their normal social and vocational activities. Rather than "withdrawing" from society for an extended period and then "returning," the journeyers may choose to make the round-trip each day. As a practical matter, I now believe this, if possible, is the best way to proceed.

The "constructive technique," the other part of Martin's experiment in depth, was central to Jung's "individuation process," or method of self-realization. The journey of transformation has one destination: each of us becomes who we truly are. Toward this end, contact with "the deep center" is indispensable, for it is from this source that we receive the guidance and grace necessary to complete the journey.

"The guidance comes in the form of symbols channeled into our minds through dreams, visions, voices, fantasies, meditation, contemplation, prayer, intuition, and signs. The difficulty for many of us lies in our inability to understand these symbols, owing largely to our culture's inattention to the language of symbols. The constructive technique fills this gap in our learning."

Understood correctly, these symbols help us become reconciled with the past, understand the present, and anticipate the future. They serve a compensatory function for certain harmful or unrealistic conscious attitudes. They help keep our egos balanced and our emotions on an even keel by lifting us when we are down and bringing us up when we are feeling self-important. They provide us with the moral imperatives for purposeful and honorable living.

In moments of personal and social crisis, they can be crucial. At those times, they can appear in Jung's phrase, as "transforming symbols," which not only enable us to ride out a particular storm but bring us, individually and/or collectively, closer, even dramatically closer, to our goal. As for the other part of the guidance-grace equation, I believe that trust, self-discipline, and virtue invite grace.

Martin warns prospective journeyers of the dangers of the constructive technique. Here, slightly modified, are a few of them.

One danger is accepting the guiding symbols and messages literally or as commands to be obeyed, without regard to common sense and to the laws and mores of one's social environment. Another danger is hubris — pride or ego-inflation — which may lead to arrogance, misconduct, and the belief that we are able to perform magical deeds. Still another hazard is the
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Peace Prize for their "silent help from the nameless to the nameless," AFSC seeks to address the root causes of poverty, injustice, and war. We are called to confront, nonviolently, powerful institutions of oppression, violence and injustice.

The AFSC believes that people can change the world. Our job is to share skills, staff, and resources, and help communities organize. Once we get involved, we tend to stay: 45 years with farm work, managed by Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency.

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