

**SUSTAINED BY FAITH  
PERSONAL AWAKENING IN GOD**

**Dear Reader,**

**This wonderful book will make the very depths of your soul cry, while also giving you hope—showing you that there truly is light at the end of the tunnel of despair and pain. It is impossible to read Mary Ann Johnston’s autobiography without being transformed, without seeing your life as a path with purpose.**

**The author is a deeply spiritual person, who bravely lived through very tough times. This book is different from other stories of people finding solace in religious convictions, as Mary Ann’s faith does not come only from her Christian upbringing and beliefs. It arises mainly from her inner awareness of God’s presence and is continuously strengthened by blissful spiritual experiences and loving communion with Jesus and divine beings in both Christian and Hindu traditions.**

**Through her faith in God—knowing that God is always with her, helping her—the author is able to deal with difficulties in a constructive way and thus grow in soul stature.**

**Along the way, she finds her calling: to use her life experiences and faith to help others. This book is yet another milestone in fulfilling Mary Ann’s life purpose of helping others.**

**Susana Stoica, PhD.**

**Author of *Reluctant Healer* and  
*Healing with the Loving Heart***

## Chapter Thirteen

### LET YOUR RELIGION BE LOVE

*What divine drink wouldst thou have, my God, from this overflowing cup of my life?*

*Is it Thy delight to see Thy creation through my eyes and to stand at the portals of my ears silently to listen to Thine own eternal harmony?*

*Thy world is weaving words in my mind and Thy joy is adding music to them. Thou givest Thyself to me in love and then feelest Thine own entire sweetness in me.*

—Gitanjali, verse 65, by Tagore

Eventually, I went back to work part-time, and initially, it so drained me physically that, when I went home in the evenings, I often did only what had to be done and then rested in meditation. Still, this did not weaken my determination to heal, for I would push myself into more and more physical activity, and very slowly I gained strength until, finally, I was able to work full-time.

**At home, while I was caught up in things needing doing and people to see for healing and counseling, as well as at work, I was able to meditate in what I called a “waking” meditation. At those times, I felt as if I were two people, one performing activities, and the other fully aware of God in peace beyond thought, or in quiet communication with Jesus. I still do this today.**

**When I could, I visited Song of the Morning for personal quiet retreats on weekends, once I realized you didn’t have to sign up for a class.**

**Jesus had good reasons to encourage my visits to Song of the Morning, for I needed a place where I would be free to grow spiritually without restraint and learn from, compare and see the significance of other masters and spiritual paths.**

**I was breaking away from identifying myself exclusively with my religious upbringing, which had proven beneficial as a foundation for my spiritual development but now seemed to stand in the way of it and my healing work. It was as if I had taken one step and now was taking additional steps, each rung higher and higher, as in Jacob’s ladder leading to heaven.**

**When I started going to Song of the Morning Retreat in 1998, I didn’t always feel that I fit in. Something was not quite right, yet I felt compelled to be there. I missed the structure of the liturgical services to which I had become accustomed, and Sweet Jesus’ words were rarely read. Sunday services were based more on the spiritual director’s reminiscences of his own spiritual path than on Yogananda’s teachings.**

**It was never a specific person or what was spoken at the services that kept me coming back. I truly did not think I could fit the mold there, or anyone’s mold. I felt done with**

dogma. Sometimes I thought I needed to fit in, and other times I felt like I was floating on a sea of bliss, content within my Self.

After reliving those moments, Jesus, ever-present, instilled in my heart, *“Patience, Dear One. The structure at Song of the Morning is hidden for now and, when it is found, it will be like welcoming home a lost child.*

*“When you think you haven’t found the perfect fit, it’s because you are looking outside of yourself and not within. Where you fit is not a place.*

*“Seek ye first the kingdom of God within. You do not find God while concentrating on stagnant dogma.*

*“Ah, Brave Heart, even so, everyone can learn and grow from reasonable communal worship. Learning never ends and comes from every experience you have ever had.”*

With Jesus’ words, I envisioned Song of the Morning on a future sunshiny day as a bustling center of light and love . . . a place to find oneself in the very core of one’s soul . . . a place to worship, as an individual or a community. A pleasant, warm feeling came over me.

“Sweet Jesus, many confide in me that they are confused by all the religions, teachers and techniques out there and don’t know where they fit and which way to go. Most of the time, in my healing work and mentoring, I simply listen to them and they seem to find their own answers. Other times, I address their concerns with words that flow out of my mouth.”

*“You see, answers are within! Listen to your inner wisdom.”*

“Why do we vacillate so much when we know the answers?”

*“Simply human nature; a way of learning through*

*relearning.*”

“I’ve been thinking . . . that it seems . . . when we imitate the practices of others, some of us remain caught up in repetition, routine, techniques and rituals long after we are made aware that we should move on.

“It is very difficult to change one’s beliefs or practices, even if new ones are called for. And it’s hard to give up old friends, even though new ones may be just around the corner. It’s as if there is an attachment to the worthiness of the past. Since I left my church, I experience a sadness when I think on it, which lingers to this day, like grieving for a lost family.

“In the quest for God, the spiritual path, or journey, we choose has to be uniquely our own and guided, at least in part, from within. Yet, most people continue on as they have in the past, fearful of change and fearful of relying on intuition for natural, spiritual progressions that befit them as individuals.

“Like a baby bird sitting on the edge of its nest afraid to take that first flight, many are afraid of where they might land.”

Jesus lets me continue on as if He is pretending to be learning something new, while fully attentive, smiling. Or maybe He is putting the words in my heart.

“At another time, Jesus, you shared with me what Gandhi said, ‘In reality, there are as many religions as individuals.’ Gandhi knew we all have different paths, and he also knew that we all have a common goal: God-realization, enlightenment.

“Because each person has a unique relationship with God and a sacred right to make their own choices, there should be no comparisons here—no judging of another’s path—between individuals or between nations.

**“Yet people, left to their own devices, don’t always know what will help them find God, and even when they do know, they may benefit from being with others who have similar spiritual needs. So on one’s spiritual path, one may find guidance and support by associating with a religious institution or guru. Some of them encourage spiritual growth at a pace that is beneficial for the individual who actively seeks God. A person only needs to search to find the best fit. What is right for one may not be right for another.**

**Often I go from speaking of Jesus to speaking of God or the Holy Spirit, as if all three were one, for I believe Jesus and the Holy Spirit each reflect divine attributes of the one, all-inclusive, living God. Each are omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent.**

**Some people relate to Jesus more easily than God, for Jesus was man. And the Holy Spirit lays claim on us, comforts us, and fills us with Truth and Christ Consciousness. God encompasses everything: from the infinitesimal particles of creation and the space between; to the little, creepy, crawly things, and all of us; right on up to all the stars in the sky, seen and unseen, and infinite love.**

**“The Retreat fills my need to be alone—introverted. I can be separate from its splintered structure. Even the spiritual director doesn’t seem to be aware of me. It’s as if I can be as invisible as I want to be.”**

**Jesus breaks in upon my discourse and says, *“Keeping to your self is not introversion! Introversion is hiding your light under a bushel basket . . . it is not a spiritual state.***

***“You are experiencing spirituality on many levels, not just inward. You are not shrinking from the world. You are realizing and assimilating new truths on many levels.”***

**I have to stop for a moment. Jesus’ words fill me with**

such sweet bliss.

In sharing these experiences of my life, there comes to me an awareness of the beauty and worthwhileness of the whole journey.

And now, I settle myself to take up where I left off in expressing my thoughts—for I feel He wants that—and again words just come.

“Religion has played its part in controlling the way people relate to God and each other, sometimes through fanatic, rigidly-held beliefs.”

At this point, Jesus interrupts me again, “*Fanaticism obstructs growth. Having the same God is what binds all religions together. There is only one God. Diversity does not serve God. Diversity is dualism.*

“*More and more, there are many who realize that the world’s religions are, through their opposition with each other, defeating the roles of their masters and of God to save and nourish mankind. These individuals are falling away from organized religions and are on their own.*”

Feeling Jesus has something more to say, I wait in anticipation. And when it comes, His ethereal form flows within an aura of silent, colorful flame, and His fragrance intensifies.

“*The foundation of the religious self is the realization that your inner and outer self are one with God and creation. Grace is added unto you through your love.*”

“In the Bible, I read that pure religion is to visit the afflicted and to keep oneself unstained from the world.<sup>41</sup> There is hardly any other usage of the word “religion” in the Bible. It would seem that pure religion is love in action.”

“*Open the door of your heart sanctuary; religion comes from the heart. Let your religion be Love. God is Love.*”

**My heart overflowed as He spoke of love. All sense of being in a physical body was lifted as if it were a mere layer of veil. Time passed.**

**Suddenly, I found myself envisioning an unstained “Garden of Eden”. For some reason, I knew it for what it was and saw, with vibrant clarity, the flora and fauna and colors of the garden—lit up with a profuse radiance—the river flowing through, the animals, the sky, the brilliant flowers. And as I write, this very moment, I am smelling their sweet fragrances. They fill me. I can only carry it within. And there is such freedom and peace.**

**Next, a glimpse of “Heaven” came before me, another unstained garden . . . of paradise promised. It was flowing with all colors and no colors, all movement and no movement. There was no physicality, nor fixed shapes or forms. The peace was beyond imagining, and it is only through the mind of my soul that I can do any justice in the telling of this, for my physical body was not present there.**

**Suddenly, time seemed to back up to leave a space between the “Garden of Eden” and “Heaven”, and present earth was shown to me from afar. I saw shades of light and dark. I was made aware that, in our disregard for Mother Earth, we are setting aside the spirituality of nature and its sacred role in our lives.**

**The vision continued on to show me the devastating result of further neglect. Then in the silence of my soul, I was made to realize that, in the light that radiates from all good actions, there is hope. Thoughts flashed through my mind and left a burning reminder within me of the crucial importance of our relationship with nature, and I was made aware that through love we increase the light on our planet.**

**Becoming aware of Jesus’ presence, the visions ended as these thoughts entered my heart, *“One who walks in the***

*awareness of God sheds light on the world, for they are in communion with the sacredness of the world and all it contains.”*

**“Ah, Sweet Jesus . . . how can I express that nature is a sacred extension of our all-inclusive Creator? How can I help people experience . . . realize . . . that, if we touch a leaf, we have touched God? It seems we need constant reminders.**

**“I know that, through loving attunement with nature, we become aware of the ways in which our modern way of life, the heavy footprint of man, is distorting the web of life on earth. Yet, if we make a determined effort to protect and refresh Mother Earth and cast love’s light upon all she holds within her keep, we in turn are gifted with abundance and beauty.**

**“In the Findhorn Community in Scotland<sup>42</sup>, the productivity of their gardens is increased by lovingly communicating and working in harmony with Mother Nature and her nature spirits. We all need to do this.**

**“Unconditional, universal love that includes all beings and all of nature in its embrace is the path we must pursue if we are to realize our cherished goals: health, happiness, and peace on earth.”**

**Then it was over, the loving presence of Jesus vanished and, for a short time, I was left breathless, as if He had taken my breath with Him and then had released it back to me.**

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