

Piece We Need

Inner Strength

to face serious challenges

by Joel Metzger



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With our hostess Ari

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An exploration of inner strength
in 12 pieces

Accompanying website: PieceWeNeed.org

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Beginning

This book is written by a person, a regular old person. Me, to be exact. Regular, yes, but I have an intense history that shows a piece that is important to everyone.

Our planet is approaching times of serious challenge. Weather disruption and global warming are major upcoming threats. According to scientists, changes are inevitable.

However, we do not need forecasts. Even without these ecological problems, the future of every individual will include times of intense catastrophe, harsh challenges, and major endings. Every one of us, like it or not, admit it or not, ignore it or not, is going to die. Death will come to every living person. Period.

One quality is called on, inner strength, and everyone has this. It is not random, where some people are strong and some are not. Instead, we all have seeds for strength. We can discover safety that is secure and lasting, even when we face extreme challenge. Now is the time to learn.

Piece We Need is a series of 12 "Pieces" (chapters). Each highlights a different aspect of inner strength. These are based on videos found at the website, PieceWeNeed.org.

Each piece also includes insights from my friend Ari and me.

I begin with the biggest challenge I ever faced...

The Thread of Life

Imagine yourself in an unknown, unlit place. You are restless, but unable to move with control; alone, but unaware of what surrounds you. You have no desire to know where you are. Your concern is of immediate sensations. More than the pain you feel is the intense discomfort you suffer. You try to move to relieve the discomfort and need to move again. And again.

You are like an infant, just born, but with a body full-grown. You are beginning life -- no past, no memories, no knowledge. Every sensation is all-encompassing. There is your body, and that's all. There is your arms, and that's all. There is your distress, and that is all. You do not know the day; you have no concept of time. You are not in blissful ignorance -- far from it, all awareness is of the physical. In the physical exists only physical pain. The mind which could know of any other thing is lifeless.

Anyone else would see you are in a hospital bed, bandaged and barely conscious. Tossing. Groaning. A nurse walks in the room. The nurse leaves. Time stretches on. For you, there are no thoughts and little awareness outside of total concern for body. You have no purpose, nor do you wish for purpose. There is only immediate distress.

Yet part of you is safe...

This book is an exploration of that part which remains safe, always.

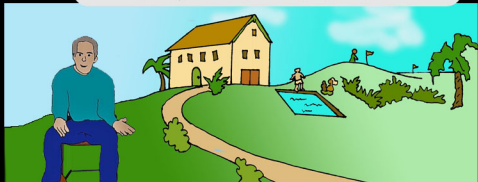
My Story

Piece #1

Let's begin my story ...

It was a day like any other... my life going well... an average day... living in a fine luxury home with my wife and sweet 4-year-old daughter.

We had a swimming pool out back, golf course behind. I had a great job. Things were going very well.



One night I was driving home, and only a few blocks from my house. A car sped towards me, the driver drunk, on the wrong side of the road.

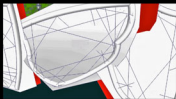
I was driving the speed limit of 35 mph. The other car was going 85 and jumped the median.

Perhaps I slammed on the brake.

Perhaps I did not have time.



It was a **head-on collision!**



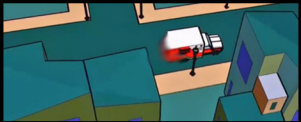
The other car tore the roof off my car and dragged it a block. The other driver was killed instantly, along with his passenger.

I was pulled from my car -- with a broken jaw, lacerations, and severe head trauma.

I was sitting right here!



Photo courtesy of Miami Herald



An existence without conscious thought was the best my family was told to hope for, "The rest of his life in a nursing home ... irreversible brain damage ... never speak again ... no functional activity." My mother was told, "Pray for a miracle."

The brain injury would most likely be fatal, coupled with the high fever and brain fluid infection. There was little hope. My wife was given the remains of my wedding ring -- bent metal, glass, and blood.



For two months I lay unconscious, while my wife lived in the waiting room. People brought her meals and comforted her. Friends gathered around my bed and sang songs to wake me.

The small party was an unusual sight for the ICU.



The miracle came. My coma lightened and I drifted in and out of restless dreams. My earliest memories are not the recollections of a joyous blessing. Instead, I remember pain.

I could not sit in my wheelchair. I had to be tied into it so I would not roll out onto the floor. Frustrated and furious, I banged my feet against the floor. Let me out! Let me lie down. I beg you.



A spelling board was brought to point out letters. My first word: "THIRSTY." That spelling board was my only communication. Once I asked a visiting friend to pass the urinal. He interpreted the letters as, "You are in a hell?" I laughed so hard that my request was almost too late.

My condition improved.



I had to re-learn how to walk.



How to talk



How to think

Every session of physical therapy I felt something come over me.
"I have to get better!"



Me in 1984

Then came a second tragedy, as devastating as the car accident. Two months later my wife left me.

To her, I was a different person. I was a new person, and barely recovered. Now, more than ever, I needed help.



But it was the start of a new life. A severe head trauma impacts the victim severely! My wife saw the changes long before I did.



But the crying was not endless. Mine is the opportunity that everyone wishes for: "If only I could do it all over again, knowing what I know now!"

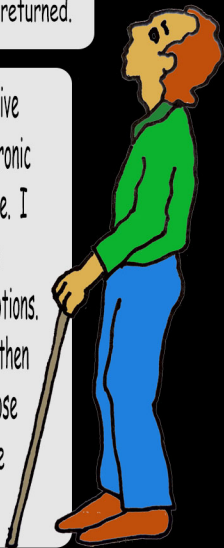
Now I can walk. This is new, a dance of triumph -- hard to learn, harder to relearn. I must consciously synchronize weight shift, gait size, foot placement, balance control, and arm swing. How many people can recall the delight that is every baby's? I remember the day I took my first three unaided steps.

Now, every step is a celebration.

The prognosis was wrong. Never speak?
No functional activity? More than ever
I talk and function.

They said I'd live in a nursing home the
rest of my life. Ha! No one who sees me
has any idea from where I have returned.

A favorite joke of mine: "You only live
once." Truthful is the sentiment, ironic
is the statement. I have lived twice. I
began my second life after the two
accidents: of my car and of my emotions.
I have come to the edge of death, then
to the brink of emotional ruin -- close
to experiencing reincarnation in the
same lifetime.



Along with your fragile condition, imagine the vital thread that will continue. You feel its unbroken cord sustaining you. That thread will follow you to the end, as always.

The thread defines safety: that which survives intact. Now, for all your days, for all you do, for however long you exist, you will know. You are held by life and you are safe.
You are safe.



Well, that was an article I wrote about my injury, written a long time ago.

And still challenges often come to me, whether major traumas or minor mishaps. Major accidents are not needed to see the valuable lessons.

Before we continue with my story, let's hear from my friend, Ari, about how inner strength has been important in her life.



Ari

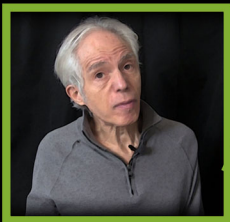
My last few weeks have been full of changes. I was engaged to be married. That ended. I was living with my fiance. That ended..



It's taken a lot of courage to be honest with myself about what I need. It was evident that the relationship and everything needed to change.

So, hard things are necessary sometimes!
I must be true to who I am. And we can do hard things.
We can tap into our reserve of inner strength.

And I know that by saying yes to the hard things and saying yes to myself, it is going to be just as freeing for everyone else who was a part of it.



Joel

Traumas and traumas! These intense changes struck long ago. I live with serious disability, a life-long challenge.

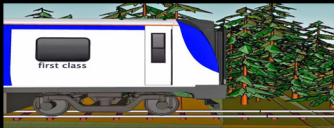
Yet, there is another side. These difficulties hold valuable lessons. Major change never comes without showing what's constant. Difficulty always throws a spotlight on comfort.

This upheaval led me to know an enduring foundation of strength and home.

Let's examine the many qualities of this home...

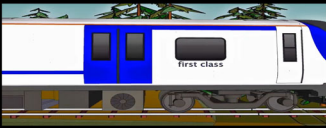


Crash!

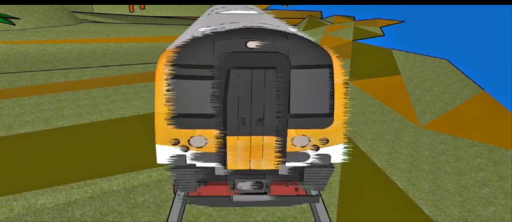


Imagine a train filled with passengers, speeding down the track, to a popular vacation destination.

It's surrounded by thick woods, speeding cross country, while passengers enjoy the wonderful trip.



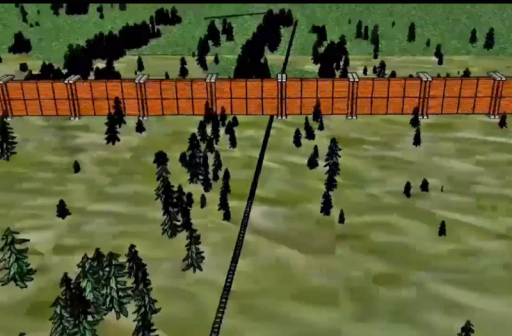
Many people, parents and children, are having a great time. Everybody is dining on a terrific meal, and looking forward to a wonderful stay at a fine resort.



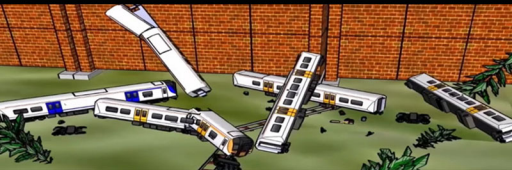
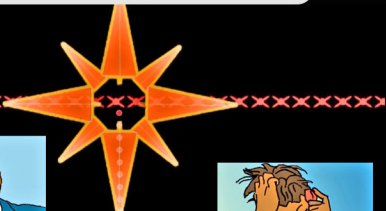
It's vacation time! Every person has waited for this week.



But there is a problem. Straight ahead, directly in front, across the tracks, is a big massive impassable brick wall.



Experts are mapping the route, calculating the course, analyzing the impact, and predicting total disaster.



This train is like our Earth...

But we have a choice ...

Many problems threaten us.

Every problem needs attention...

Poverty



Housing

Climate



Food

Environment



Energy

And
many
more!



We need to act with strength to solve them all.

We can watch the resource depletion and climate disruption
and see what happens...
or take action now.



But there is
still one
piece missing.

We need to feel that life
itself is a beautiful gift.

Love of life propels
us to meet challenges.



And this we absolutely need



*Even if chaos
never comes.*

Ari

My inner strength lives in my heart.
When I close my eyes and breathe deep,
I can feel it.

I find
inner strength
and the light
to be one
and the same.

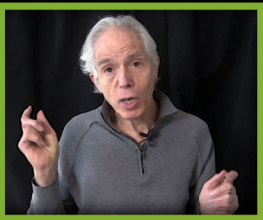


Right
inside
my
heart.

So it is there any time you need it.

Joel

This is a scary time in history. Many major threats come from many directions.



But whether major or minor, I always have a way to proceed without being defeated.

I seek to know well that part of me that always proceeds.

Challenges come to us every day, so we need to grow strength every day.

*Strength is mine ...
even when my world falls apart!*



Silent Solo

Our
dear
planet



has many
obvious problems!



Lots of people live here



And every
single person
needs to feel
strength!



But how??



I never
find strength
by searching
for it.

I feel strength
when I listen
carefully
to silence...

*Listen to
silence??*

Let me show you what I mean...



Imagine
you're having
a party...

You put up
decorations

You put out
refreshments

Set the mood by putting on some
great background music.

And people start coming.



Many people come!

Friends, and friends of friends



Everybody talking and joking

Meeting new people



Dancing and laughing



Eating and drinking





The party goes late, but finally quiets down.
Just a few friends remain.



You sit back, relax, chat with
a friend or two, and then...

You remember the music!
Quiet, subtle, constant background.
It's been playing the whole time.



Constant peace is within and always there.
Tap into it ... Feel it ... It can bring us home.
A reminder of strength within us.

Ari



I can feel it.
I can hear it.

When I silence myself from
distractions,
then I hear it loud and clear.

It's always there!

Problems can surround us,
coming from any direction.
They show up with
big signs and signals.



Joel

But
inner strength
comes from
a different direction,
quiet and constant.

It's my choice:
either notice what is loudest,
or give my attention
to the direction
that I want.



Piece #4

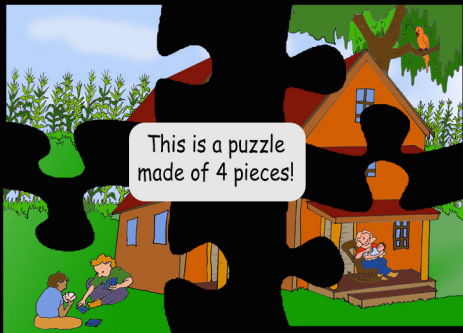
Jigsaw Puzzle

Inner strength is
difficult to describe.
Words just
don't work.



So, let's try this: I will describe four images.
You can put them together like a jigsaw puzzle,
and we'll discover the picture they make.

This is a puzzle
made of 4 pieces!





PuzzlePiece #1

Have you ever eaten a cob of fresh baby corn?

The cob is soft, and the taste...
Electric Sweetness!
It's a symbol of the spark of life.

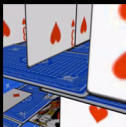


PuzzlePiece #2

What is the most beautiful thing you ever held?

Cuddling a newborn baby is touching a miracle.
Amazing beauty!
Birth is a symbol of beautiful purity.





PuzzlePiece #3

Does it ever seem life turns upside-down?

Maybe you get a big disappointment.
Your life falls apart like a house of cards.
That chaos symbolizes problems coming.



PuzzlePiece #4

Finding strength can be like that puzzle:
Where it seems impossible to find the parrot,



Until it moves!

Ahh! There's the parrot!

The parrot symbolizes solutions that appear!



So that
is our
Puzzle.

Four pieces -
Look inside in
order to see
the message



And what's the message?

I open the door to home -
Both problems and solutions

Embrace quiet strength
and find a home of safety.



Things! Places! People!
They are everywhere around me.
So, it's like turning a different direction.



The source of all,
the freshness of life itself,
the quiet strength inside!



Ari

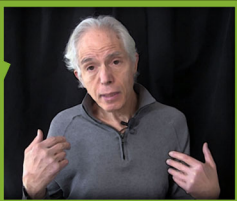


Jigsaw Puzzle reminds me of
Coming home to what is real.
Remembering the richness that's life!

We experience the world
around us in many different ways.
It makes up a tapestry
that is always with us.

Things might seem like they are
going great forever -- but then it changes.
Maybe something drastic happens!
But you always have the richness
of memories and experiences.

Joel



But where is inner strength?
Seasoning the taste of sweet flavors --

Glowing from the eyes of a newborn --

Obvious in the midst of chaos --

Hiding in the fountain that is my heart --



Whenever I turn
and look in that direction,
there it is!



Piece #5

Two Directions



Let's play a riddle!
How many directions are there?

That's easy ... left and right!



Too easy?



Oh wait! There's more...



Over here



Right



Back there

Over there



Left



Out here & there





Oh yeah!! Also...

All compass points:
North and South



East and West



Over there

And up high



And all in-between

Out yonder there



And over there



Down low...

Every which way!



So how many directions??



Lots and lots?



An infinite number?



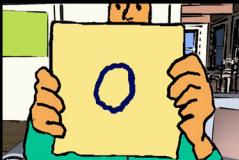
No! There are two.



Just two.



This chart will show what I mean.



This circle is me

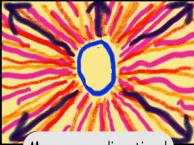
(well, a simple me)



There's this way,
That way,



And all the others...



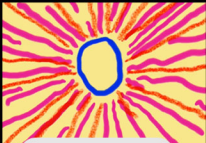
Many, many directions!



And also, one more
towards the center.



In that center are my
discoveries and my strength!



So there are
many directions,



and also one more!



All roads lead us home
to our true nature.

Ari

Many paths connect to
our inner strength.

Life is not fixed
with one path only.



Follow the road to ourselves

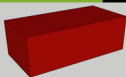
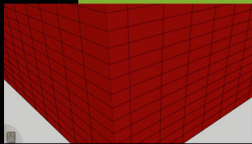
here, where we feel our hearts!

There's so much to see,
both good and bad.

Joel

But I am a container
filled with discoveries.

For I'm like a brick house,
every brick strong and solid.



In our hearts we can find
our strength.

When I feel strength,
I am complete.



Totally Unexpected

The Bellfield Lunar Anomaly



I am Frank Bellfield. Professional Astronomer.



I made a remarkable observation.

Moving lights on the lunar surface!



I examined the coordinates.

However, my ocular capabilities were disappointingly insufficient!





I considered the situation.



A more powerful telescope was needed.

I resolved to understand this anomaly!



I toiled many long days!



I obtained the finest components.

I precisely adjusted all apparatus.

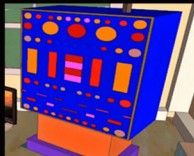




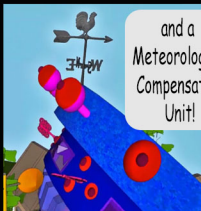
I have invented
and built the first...

High Synchronous
Image Waveform
Detector!

The first
of its kind!



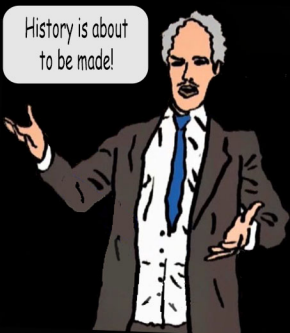
With an Electronic Perspective
Orientation Extrapolator



and a
Meteorological
Compensation
Unit!



I will discover the source
of this pulsating light!



History is about
to be made!



I will be known as
the next Galileo!



A 21st Century Copernicus!
Father of a new science!





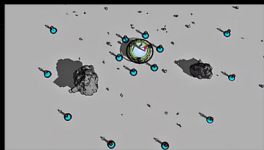
Examining
the quadrant
of concern...

Engaging
image
rectifier...



Executing
perspective
compensation...







Huh??

What?

This can't be!!

This is unscientific!!

A man dancing
on the moon??



I can never reveal
these findings!



What a joke!

What a cruel joke!!





Poor Frank!

He doesn't know he is
part of a metaphor.



When I feel
in me
the current of
aliveness...



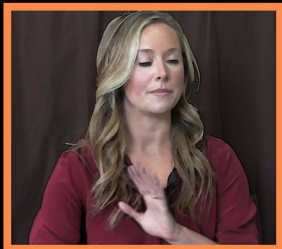
then life becomes
a miraculous dance!



Totally Unexpected, yes!

Ari

Isn't
that
like
life
itself?

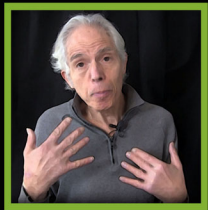


You go around the corner
and see something you did not expect.

It blows your mind
& finds a place
in your heart.

Staying open:
how we find things
that rock our world!

The Moon
Grey rock Lifeless vacuum



Joel

Gleefully
Full of color
Totally unexpected

Look close:
a surprise!
a man dancing!

Looking through my attention
& seeing the miracle:
my own strength!

A miraculous dance
is inside of me,
always a surprise!



Piece #7

HIDDEN HOME



Life: a mixture of goods and bads



Everything has its place on the good/bad scale

Is there a center? A core? A homebase?

Let me try saying it with a metaphor...

It's like having two homes!

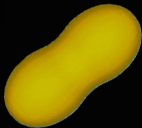
One I live in (walls, doors, roof, and all that)

And the other lives in me (ever since I was born)



I was born
pure & simple .

Like a seed, just a
peanut of a guy!



Something new:
I'm alive!

Feeling my body
So many senses

Seeing shapes and colors everywhere



Then something new comes ...

Touching! *I can hold things and taste them!*

I became aware of things
I learned words for things
I thought about things

Hot things
Soft things
Things I can play with

Things I like
Things I don't like
Things I want

Things
Things
Things

Then something new comes ...

Doing! *I can change those things!*

I went from a world of Things --> to a world of Activity!

Exploring!
Expanding!
Improving!

Climbing

Reaching

Finding!

Searching

Gathering

Deciding

Choosing

Doing
Doing
Doing

So here it is: *my life!!*

Some parts of it are good.
Some parts not so good.

Some parts horrible
Some parts wonderful

And overall,
My life overall...

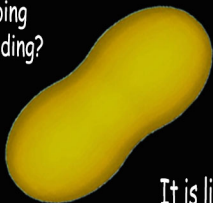
Eeww!
What a mess!



Then I learned something
and my life changed ...

Remember that little seed
I started with?
Before all the
Feeling
and Doing
and Building?

That seed is still here.
That seed is always here!



It is like that music:
quiet,
soft,
background,
easy to forget.

It is like a breath,
a silent easy breath,
all-important,
life-sustaining
and humble.

Like a breath

And like a breath...

*That seed
is my start.
Every breath
is a step.*

*in out in
out in out in
out in
out in out*

*It is the strength
to continue
where I want to go.*

*It is the home
I return to.*

So those are my two homes...



One I live in. It's my
shelter and protection
whenever the weather's bad.



And also there's another.
It is inside of me,
the strong
foundation for
everything in my life.





Ari

All around is
good bad

Inside is peace.
I can come home...

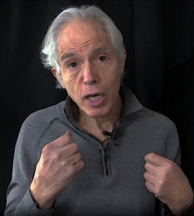
anytime!

A temperature check:
What makes sense?
Is this the right thing?

This is how I coped with
with the big changes --

because these were some of
the hardest times in my life!

Joel



Life starts with
the simple basics,
and grows to ...

inner strength.

I know where I am going.

I can keep to the same path.

I stand on a solid foundation.

What a great discovery!



Piece #8

Plain Sight

When I was young, we would go to Bruce's house after school to play games.



My favorite was "Plain Sight"!



We'd go into Bruce's room and pick out one item to hide, like Bruce's big red marble.



Everyone left the room, while one person choose a secret hiding place!

Then we all came back in and searched everywhere to find that marble!



Plain Sight had one rule that makes it very challenging.
The item must be easily seen.
The marble was hiding somewhere *in plain sight!*



It was somewhere in plain sight, anywhere in the room,
so every color and every item had to be examined.
I was always surprised how difficult it was to find!



We would look
everywhere!



High and Low
Left and Right



And then,
when somebody
finally found it...



There was a big celebration!

Now we have grown up but this has not changed.
I still need to see what is in plain sight.



There is so much to see --
everywhere you go!



So much stuff.
And everything says "Buy! Buy! Buy!"

I often wonder,
"What is in plain sight?"



What's real?
What's honest?
What am I missing?
What do I really have in this life?

Does anything ring true?
Stays with me, and lasts, and lasts?





Ari

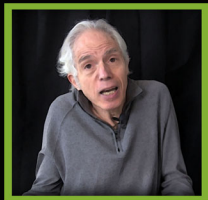
So much is happening all around!

Being present means
really seeing it all.
Not missing a beat!

Staying open
to both
challenges and losses.

The more we can be open,
the more we can love life.

Then you can't miss it:
Beauty all around!



Joel

There is lots to see.
Everywhere I look!

This video talks about
seeing what is closest.

It's like a blind spot!

When my heart is open,
I discover beauty.

Inner strength is about
being with what's right here.





Remember Always



Once a very poor man stood by the road, looking for work.

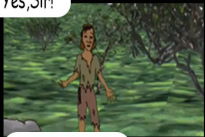


The king rode by.

"Are you honest?"



"Yes, Sir!"



"A hard worker?"

"Yes, absolutely!!"

"Then come work for me!"

So the man moved into the castle,



and he rose in rank.

He eventually became the king's favorite!



"We better watch this guy carefully!"

But the king's ministers became jealous.



Then they saw him climb to the top of the tower behind the castle.

Then the next night he did it again!

Then the next night again!



"He is hiding something!"

"We better tell the king!"

So they went directly to the king to report their discovery!





"This man is dishonest!
We know the truth!!"



"He is stealing your riches
and hiding them in the tower."



"He's a thief!"

The king was very upset
and summoned the man!



Show what you're hiding!"



"Oh nothing,
nothing,
nothing."



"Open that trunk!!"



"Why are you saving old rags?!"



"These are my clothes from long ago.
I wore them the day you found me.

They remind me how my life has changed ...
all because of your generosity."

"I am thankful
now and always!"



"You are my favorite."



Ari

Gratitude!

It is a gift we get in life.



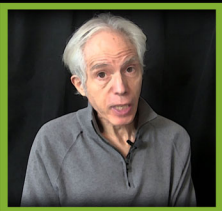
Gratitude is in the same reservoir as
inner strength.

We can tap into both
anytime.

Because all we truly have is
inside us.

We do not have to find it.
We ARE it.

Joel



Humility

points to the heart

allows ourselves to be small while we grow big.

When I allow myself to be small,
then my heart grows free and big.

When I truly see myself,
then I can stand up strong.



Piece #10

Driveway

"Driveway"

A little short road
off the main road
that goes right home.

So that word
has a special
meaning to me.



A driveway is doing
something and knowing
where it will take me.

So the word "driveway"
makes a good metaphor:

A simple activity that's sure
to give me the feeling I want!



Like I go in the
bathroom and
turn on the water,
get it just right,

sit down,
take off my shoes,
take off my socks,
get all ready,



And I know I'm going to take a nice long shower!



Or like I go to
the kitchen and
grab a can of
my favorite drink,

go to the living room,
sit in my
favorite comfy
chair,



and I know I'm going to relax and watch some tv!



Why is that important?
Because when I turn off the main street of my life,

and move close to my home, the feeling of self,



...then I find myself on a driveway.
I begin to enjoy the simple feeling of being alive!



Ari

Driveway!

Simple paths to come home

from wherever you are!

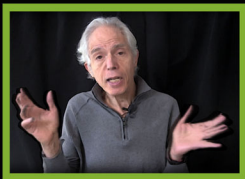
A driveway is within us all
that takes us to inner strength.

Here we feel
appreciation
and love for life.

We can find the simple route from
our place now to the inner strength
that we have ...

and never doubt we have it!





Joel

I can travel miles to visit someone,
but the whole trip is a waste if I stop too soon.

So I need a driveway

going where I want to go!

Strength is what I want, simple strength.

So I know the driveway

must also be simple.



Piece #11

Really Swimming

Description versus the real thing

Once I traveled to a strange town where nobody had ever seen the ocean!



All they saw
were photographs
of the ocean.

Lots and lots of
photographs.



They stared at their
photographs.

They shared them.

They traded them.



And that led to some big problems...

They even argued
Who had the best photograph!



"My ocean photo is
bigger than yours!"



"Mine has
better waves!"



"Mine has
better colors!"

I tried to explain,
"There's an actual place
called the ocean."



I travelled to it and saw
how big and blue it is!"

"No! It is not just blue! Anybody with a good photo..."



cerulean blue!"



knows it is a beautiful and deep



"Yes, but the ocean I saw is GIGANTIC!"



"Well mine is big. It goes from here..."

...to here!"



"Yes, but I jumped in and swam! It was Terrific!!"



"Well, look at my photo! Wouldn't it be great to swim in this ocean??!"

"Why do you insist
your ocean photo
is better than mine?"



So, how do you
describe the ocean
to someone who sees
only photographs??

Things and Labels. Very different! I must never confuse them.

Feelings inside me
are
close and clear.



My ocean photo
is made
REAL!



Ari



We tend to keep Feelings at a safe Distance BUT....

So, so much

to see

around us

to feel

inside us

And we end up just MISSING OUT!!

You cannot appreciate the richness of inner strength without really:

Connecting to it ,
Understanding it,
Living it,
Feeling it!

We can talk about inner strength all day but that is not being one with it. That's not FEELING it!

Joel

My strength shows up
close to my heart.



Words I hear or read
can only help a little bit.

Real strength
gets right in there!

My Feelings!

Often I think about emotions, keep them at arm's length.
Instead of being gutsy and feeling what they say.

Inspiration!

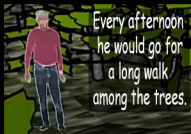
Recognize what is really happening! Don't push away.
I need to fall in love with reality. Be close always.

Often I say:
Take a risk. Be real. Nothing can go wrong!





There once was a man who lived in the woods.



So he knew
these woods
very well..

But one day was
very different.

He almost
never returned.

It was late afternoon
when he left and
closed the door
behind him.



As he always did.



He crossed the
clearing and took
the paths he knew.

As he always did.

But he suddenly realized he didn't know where he was.
And that was very unusual.

He backtracked!

Tried
different
directions!



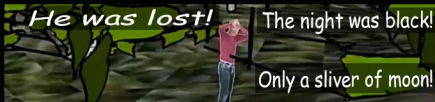
Searched for
the trees
he knew!

But nothing
helped!

He was lost!

The night was black!

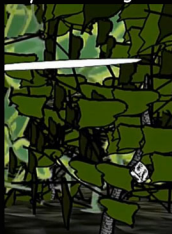
Only a sliver of moon!



Mysterious lights!

Strange sounds!

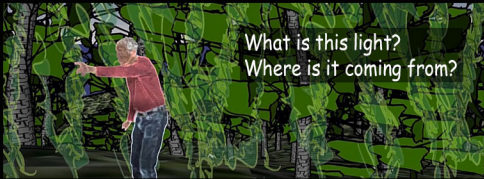
Moving shadows!



He was about to panic ... but suddenly ... he saw a light!



The light was far, far away ... no, it was close, very close.



What is this light?
Where is it coming from?

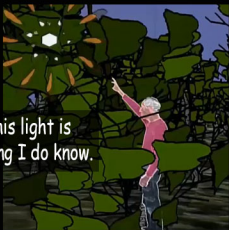
His first thought was to run.



So he took off in
the other direction!

But it followed him!

So he stopped.



I don't know what this light is
But there is one thing I do know.

I know that this light is definitely
not of the woods!

I am lost so I am going to walk towards it.
So he turned and walked *towards* the light!

The light led him!



It moved ... and he followed.

It moved ... and he followed.





Sometimes it vanished ...
and then appeared again!

They went
through the trees,
over rocks,
across streams.



He had to keep reminding himself...
This light is not of the woods.
I have nowhere else to go.
I have to trust it.

Finally, it took him to the clearing.



There's my cabin, right ahead!



So he came in, sat by the fire, and rested.



We are light beings!
Light around us.
Light within us.



Anyone can get lost
in the woods ...
at any time!

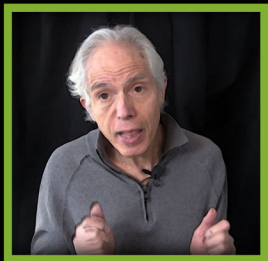
What should I do?
Where should I go?
Which way to turn?
Who to turn to?

Feeling lost is always confusing,
yet we can always connect with
inner knowing.

Trusting the light is learning
the next steps,

finding the way home.

It is always available!



In many ways
I am like that man,
sometimes lost in
dark and strange
woods.

Joel

But a quality of inner strength is
opening to guidance and accepting help.
It comes from a direction
that I am not used to.

A feeling guides me!
Sometimes faint.
Sometimes obvious.
All I know is that this light is not of the woods.
I must trust it.
I follow it.
It takes me to my Self!
I pinpoint the core of inner strength.

Home, safe.



Next Steps

In our exploration of inner strength, we identified some important qualities: insight, passion, focus, commitment, humility, gratitude, consistency, appreciation. There are just a few of them. I include all of them in the term, Rightful Living.

When I want to find inner strength, I turn to the strongest source I know: the power of life itself. Life is always moving and doing its thing, steady and constant -- whether I pay attention or not. Life itself is a constant presence, never touched by judgement or interpretation, and whether ignored or dismissed. When I remember that life carries me, it feels like I am returning home.

Of course, this rightful living has nothing to do with willfulness, might, or aggression. Strength does not come by crushing opponents and leaving a wake of destruction. Aggression is often a compensation and cover up of weakness.

For me, strength is accompanied by a simple comfort with myself. Such a comfort reminds me of my stability and strength. It tells me that there is no need to change. It says: I am a complete person! Complete, just as I am, in this moment. I have my passion and my foundation. I walk with a feeling that I can always come back to. I carry the source of all I want.

Next Steps, continued

Most people agree that we have the strength we need to face challenge. It is great that so many people feel that way! The time is here for every individual to discover a solid feeling of inner strength. Let's all position ourselves to harness that strength when it is called upon. Our next steps are to grab ahold of the strength we know we have.



The text in Piece #1 is taken from *The Thread of Life*, my article about this injury and traumas. Here is the full article....

The Thread of Life by Joel Metzger

Imagine yourself in an unknown, unlit place. You are restless, but unable to move with control; alone, but unaware of what surrounds you. You have no desire to know where you are, your concern is of immediate senses. More than the pain you feel is the intense discomfort you suffer. You try to move to relieve the distress and need to move again. And again.

You are an infant, just born, but with a body full-grown. You are beginning life -- no past, no memories, no knowledge. Every sensation is all-encompassing: there is your body, and that's all. There are your arms, and that's all. There is your discomfort, and that is all. You do not know the day; you have no concept of time. You are not in blissful ignorance -- far from it, all awareness is of the physical. In the physical exists only physical pain. The mind which could know of any other thing is lifeless.

Anyone else would see you are in a hospital bed, bandaged and barely conscious. Tossing. Groaning. A nurse walks in the room. The nurse leaves. Time stretches on. For you, there are no thoughts and little awareness outside of total concern for body. You have no purpose, nor do you wish for purpose. There is only immediate distress.

Yet part of you is safe...

This is where I have been. I know only what others have told me: a late summer night, driving alone down my street, going home, my car passing over a bridge. I was going thirty-five, the other car ninety. I must have seen it coming, they have said, as I crossed over the bridge.

Perhaps I slammed on the brake, perhaps I had no time. The other car jumped the median, flew across the bridge, and collided with me head-on, tearing off my roof, and dragging it a block. The other driver was killed instantly, along with his passenger. I was pulled from my car -- broken jaw, lacerations, and severe head trauma.

An existence without conscious thought was the best my family was told to hope for, "The rest of his life in a nursing home ... irreversible brain damage ... never speak again ... no functional activity." My mother was told, "Pray for a miracle." One friend fainted on seeing me lying amidst the medical instruments, tubing, and support systems. The brain injury would most likely be fatal, coupled with the high fever and brain fluid infection. There was little hope. My wife was given the remains of my wedding ring -- bent metal, glass, and blood.

For two months I lay unconscious, while my wife lived in the waiting room. People brought her meals and comforted her. Friends gathered around my bed and sang songs to wake me. The small party was an unusual sight for the ICU.

So people tell me, but I recall nothing. Once my home was in another city, I know, and my career was different. There are even vague memories of that past lifetime: my wife and daughter, my job, our house and backyard pool.

Again, imagine: you are alone, far alone and solitary. There is sadness here, with no thought; pure emotion, with no concerns. Here is heartbreak without the story, a single frame from a movie. Every second gauges your distance from every person and every care. Far from you is the mass which is your body. All has been taken, you are left with nothing, and you are impotent to act. You have no thoughts, and cannot know of the lack. The cry from a sad song is heard with no music or lyrics. You are left with only your life's skeleton. The flesh that had filled your moments is gone and you are in a vacuum, unable to think even one comforting thought. Each thing that has given you joy, and all you cared for, has gone, but the caring has not.

Imagine: you are sightless, falling from an airplane. You do not recognize the contents of the large pack on your back. It is heavy and massive; you are far too frightened to wonder.

You are a lone diver, deep in the sea. You are in the black, with no glimmer of light. The ocean's floor stretches without end, and water fills all space in all directions. Your depth underwater is not known. Life hangs on a tether stretching to the surface, the thin line carrying air.

You are lowered further into the unknown darkness, leaving the cares and the people who have accompanied you every minute of your life. You cannot cry. Your heart sinks as if weight pressed your chest. Slowly you are dropped to the ocean floor, and there you are deserted.

This is the bedrock, where each person will come, as the movement of life winds down. Here the action turns slower until its motion is imperceptible and all else is taken away. Once you were happy that people befriended you. Now you have no company. The people are over there -- far away. You stand alone as if abandoned. But it is not they who leave. It is you. You go where no one can follow. You are alone.

Yet a baseline remains that can never be taken, the common ground of all moments and events. A part of you is safe...

+++

I slowly recovered. The miracle came. After two months my coma lightened and I drifted in and out of restless dreams. I was flown to another city for rehabilitation and there my earliest memories begin. They are not the recollections of a joyous blessing. I remember pain. In my memory, I was pushed and dragged. In reality, I was nursed and cared for.

I could not sit in my wheelchair. I had to be tied into it so I would not roll out onto the floor. I hated that -- unable to speak, accustomed only to bed, forced to sit. Nurses left me to go about their business. Frustrated and furious, I banged my feet against the floor. Let me out! Let me lie down. I beg you.

I could not drink. I had no swallow reflex, so doctor's orders: no liquids. A spelling board was brought to me, to point out letters. My first word: "THIRSTY." That spelling board was my only communication. Once I asked a visiting friend to pass the urinal. He interpreted the letters as, "You are in a hell?" I laughed so hard that my request was almost too late.

My condition improved. I learned to speak and would soon be walking and learning a new career. Finally I was to go home to live with my family. The seven months in rehabilitation had seemed forever.

Then came a second tragedy, as devastating as the car accident: two months later, my wife left me. To her I was a different person. I was awake by this time. Wide awake and conscious, and I remember it. For weeks I wept. I was a new person, alone and barely recovered. More than ever I needed help.

But the crying was not endless. Mine is the opportunity that everyone wishes for: "If only I could do it over again knowing what I know now!"

Now I can walk. This is new, a dance of triumph -- hard to learn, harder to relearn. I must consciously synchronize weight shift, gait size, foot placement, balance control, and arm swing. How many people recall the delight that is every baby's? I remember the day I took my first three unaided steps. Now, every step is a celebration.

The prognosis was wrong. Never speak? No functional activity? More than ever I talk and function. They said I'd live in a nursing home the rest of my life. Ha! One friend said, about the prognosis that I would be like a vegetable, "You're doing better than any broccoli I've seen." No one who sees me has any idea from where I have returned.

A favorite joke of mine: "You only live once." Truthful is the sentiment, ironic is the statement. I have lived twice. I began my second life after the two accidents: of my car and of my emotions. I have come to the edge of death, then to the brink of emotional ruin -- closer than almost anyone to experiencing reincarnation in the same lifetime.

In my life, suddenly, the rug was pulled from beneath me and life was stripped of thought and action. There remained only the necessary: myself alive. I was without a body I could command, a personality I could call my own, and a memory I could retain.

And all the while, a cord held me. I watched life rebuild someone, myself almost dead, into a real living person, my new self fully whole. I fell to the bottom, where I lay flat, and saw time stretch out in the distance, and said, "No one can go lower. From here one can only climb uphill." As I ascended, I knew this lifeline. Now I have returned.

+++

Once again, imagine yourself: a newcomer to this life, isolated and vulnerable to surroundings. You are exposed, open to harm, yet part of you is safe...

Along with your fragile condition imagine the vital thread that will continue. You feel its unbroken cord sustaining you. You stand on a foundation of stone, the life in your body, but now without the physical and mental capabilities that were yours. Still you feel the power that will persist. As you fell, you recognized the massive pack on your back to be a parachute. It broke your fall, letting you down gently. In place of your identity, you now lie on ground common to all. A bed of rock supports you, warm and smooth. You are able to stand and walk.

Here you go, right to the edge of existence. That thread will follow you to the end, as always. The thread defines safety: that which survives intact. Now, for all your days, for all you do, for however long you exist, you will know. You are held by life and you are safe. You are safe.

