

## The Parable of the Prodigal Son

<sup>11</sup> Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So, he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup> When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup> He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" <sup>20</sup> So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And get the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup> He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' <sup>31</sup> Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'

~Luke 15 Vs 11 – 32 NOA

The Parable that the Christ told about the Prodigal Son is a mythic story of immense importance that outlines the entire process of a human being's evolutionary journey from spirit to matter and back to spirit. It is an example of what Joseph Campbell called the Hero's journey - the mythic spiritual journey from darkness to the enlightened state.

The parable of the Prodigal Son outlines in simple form, the evolution of human consciousness and of Life in all of its different manifestations, states of consciousness and stages of development. While many stories and myths will give parts of the entire evolutionary path that a single life can take, this particular parable outlines the entire journey without all the details of the adventure. In its simplicity, the process cannot be mistaken nor can the reader be distracted by the numerous dramas and stories embedded in any individual life.

Deeply understanding the spiritual and evolutionary meaning of the story demands of the listener the capacity to hear it in a mystical, abstract, symbolic and metaphorical way, as suggested in the first chapter. To not do so means to reduce its grandeur to the level of psychological understanding, through a historical, cultural lens only and in so doing, missing its spiritual dimensions, that of course, include the physical, psychological and historical nature of the story as well. Understanding any story through the lens of the limited dualistic function of the egoic intellect is to bring its meaning into the mundane, fundamental realm of the ego and does not help illuminate the path of the hero or heroine, seeking guideposts along their journey home to God. In this story, Jesus names God, Father, in alignment with the tradition within which he was born and lived. We understand God to also mean Spirit or Consciousness itself, the very ground and source of our being.

We ourselves are symbolic manifest representations of the unmanifest, in other words, children of God. The way in which we come to recognize ourselves as such is to embark on the grand adventure of physical life - the quest or pilgrimage or heroic journey of the human soul. Another way of saying this is that we ourselves are unknowingly drops of the ocean of Consciousness and our quest is to come to know ourselves as this

Consciousness. Or as the Christ himself said, "I am the way, and the truth and the light," Meaning that he understood his life to be the path - as is our life the path - to recognizing ourselves as the way, the truth and the light. We do not get back to the "Father" except through the experience of our physical life. Understanding the signposts along the way through stories like this one facilitate and speed up the process. As such this kind of mythic story is an invaluable teaching.

The journey has thousands of steps but three major parts. We start off as a part of Consciousness without awareness of ourselves as this. In Zen Buddhism they might say, "Does a fish know it swims in water?" as a way of pointing to the unknowing, just "being" part of the whole. The next part is that one drop of the ocean leaves this Consciousness by virtue of being boundaried by physicality or involuting into life - like cup of water out of the ocean. Out of its natural spirit environment, the human, like a fish out of water, is afraid and distracted by the needs of the body and starts finding a way to survive in this foreign land and medium. It adapts and identifies itself with this adaptation but is never fully at home and is always longing to return to the medium from which it came and of which it is a part.

Finally, there is a gradual dis-identification from this function of adaptation, with the growing awareness of Self as indeed the same in essence as Consciousness itself and a return to it's natural home. On returning to this realm, the human, like the fish out of water, recognizes and knows what water or Consciousness is, and recognizes that it is indeed this itself. As T.S. Elliot said, "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."

The parable of the Prodigal son is clearly about the journey of any soul (son or daughter of God) moving from unity with Consciousness - at home in this realm this Consciousness - the Father's house. Leaving this home represents a separation in awareness from Consciousness. The second stage is of this young soul being distracted by the new land or domain of existence and "forgetting" its original state. Thirdly and finally, there is a growing dissatisfaction and desire to return to Consciousness with full awareness of oneself as that Consciousness. The Prodigal Son is one version of this tri-part story, replicated in all great myths through time.

William Wordsworth captures the first two stages of so beautifully in his poem, Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood. In one verse he says,

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,  
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy;  
The Youth, who daily farther from the east

Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,  
And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended;  
At length the Man perceives it die away,  
And fade into the light of common day.

Because the great venturing forth on this heroic journey starts with our conception, it does not mean that it ends with our death. The entire process of spiritual evolution culminating in the realization and revelation that we are the very Consciousness from which we originated, can be completed while in the body and is the quest of every spiritual discipline. The Christ clearly is teaching that the attainment of knowledge of Self as consciousness is the goal of this life through the practices and disciplines of the spiritual tradition to which one belongs.

Understanding the parable as metaphor, we can hear that the “younger son,” asks for the portion of the property that will be his and tells his parent that he wants to leave home.

Property originally meant “nature” or quality, individuality or special character and later this came to mean something owned. In the parable it would seem to mean that a young soul, wants the qualities that will make it special and unique and separate from the father, not just *be* the consciousness that is the same as the parent. He asks for these properties and is gladly granted them. They are in fact inherent. However, the story describes a relationship of asking and receiving, of differentiation and separation, of togetherness and then moving apart. The story starts with the first separation in consciousness of Father and Son - Spirit and Soul - a relational quality is possible with this separation. The first dynamic made possible by this separation is communication and relationship between these aspects of Self that now seem different and discrete - Father and Son. Now there is the possibility of asking and receiving - the blueprint of relationship and means to awareness. The very word quest comes from the same root as the word question. Life is a continual questioning and receiving answers - it is about learning about who and what we are.

The parable is at the same time deeply personal and completely universal. The younger son (soul) does not yet have individuality, a sense of uniqueness, separate from Consciousness itself, but desires it. This is a paradox spoken of in Islamic mysticism, “I was a hidden treasure, and I wished to be known, so I created a creation (mankind), then made Myself known to them, and they recognized Me.”

The prodigal son’s wish is granted. He receives in leaving, the innate properties and potentiality of uniqueness that comes in the 3.2 billion bases of human DNA at conception. Deoxyribonucleic acid carries most of the genetic instructions used in the growth, development, functioning and reproduction of all known living organisms, making each and every one unique in some way. And so, the prodigal son is granted human life that creates difference, uniqueness and specialness, while at the same time being essentially Consciousness itself. He has all the inherent gifts of the spirit as well as the potentialities and properties required for physical life.

It is truly a heroic decision to embark on this journey of life in physical matter. It is courageous to leave, so to speak, the realm of Spirit and ‘descend’ or involute into form, or as the story says, embark on the journey of leaving home for a distant country.

It is the story of spirit expressing itself in matter which is the densest realm of being. The vibration of energy has slowed enough to actually manifest into visibility and solidity, which facilitates the great learning of the process and dynamics of existence. The one drop, or soul, separates in perception from the whole by virtue

of its conception or involvement with physicality. Many metaphors have been used to try to capture the process of manifestation or creation and many terms have been used. Incarnation, involution, creation, manifestation – all refer to the mysterious capacity of Spirit to show itself to itself by becoming visible, realizing itself in many different, unique ways - all the same but all different.

This same process happened at the time of the flaring forth, or big bang when God showed itself in the ever-expanding expression in over 200 billion galaxies, in every life form that has ever been or will ever be, and is replicated in the life of each and every human. It is as if each and every life is a flaring forth of spirit into matter. And so it has miraculously happened to each and every one of us.

Before the time of scientific knowledge, steeped in the culture of patriarchy, the Christ told a story that correctly outlines the processes of evolution in story form. The knowing is within us all and the external scientific evidence corroborates our knowing in a way that expands and expedites our own evolution at this time on the planet. The integration of the mystical knowing and the scientific knowledge represents an integration of a split that has existed and is now coming back together into a more expanded awareness and takes humanity to a new level of awareness of itself as Consciousness.

The next line of the parable says that in this distant land (life in form), the prodigal son “squandered his property on dissolute living.” And hence the title of the story - the Prodigal Son. Prodigal means to waste or squander. The young soul “wastes” its properties, spiritual and genetic. And so, what does this mean?

A young incarnated soul has no awareness of itself as having the inherent properties of the spirit - does not know of its prodigious capacity of omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, does not know of itself as infinitely wise and loving. It will take a whole lifetime to realize its properties and utilize them.

All the attention of an infant and child is captured by the experience of being in physical form with all of its dangers. Our physical form has, encoded into the DNA, the very function of how to stay in physical form and not just slip back into the spirit realm - this function of survival is what captures the attention of the young soul in form.

Consider the experience of a little baby being born. From being encapsulated in a perfectly regulated environment in its original and undifferentiated archaic and blissful state of consciousness, its first experience will distract its attention from this state. Attention will be focused on the experience of hormones coursing through its little body, pressure, intensity, pushing, expelling, separation, cold, pain, hunger, cramps, touch sensations, light sensations, and sound sensations. The young little soul is bombarded by the terrifying experience of the world and its own utter helplessness in this world. Its first experience is pain, discomfort and fear. There is no capacity, only the potential, to recognize or realize itself as God in Form – an incarnation of divinity. From the moment of birth attention is distracted away from our natural and essential state of being and the soul is captured by the experiences of the world and how to survive in this new realm of existence.

The body itself is hardwired to feel pain and its accompanying emotion, fear. Of necessity, the body must be able to register pain and fear. If it did not it would not survive in this foreign medium. Pain warns us that there is something threatening our integrity and existence in a body, as does fear.

The infant vacillates between sleep and archaic consciousness in which it is one with its Source, and distraction from this state to focus on the needs of the body. Gradually attention is more and more compellingly caught by the needs of the growing child.

When the basic needs for survival, comfort, shelter, food, drink, touch are not met, the infant experiences pain, discomfort and fear and immediately does something to draw attention to the need in a totally

unaware way. It instinctively, for instance, cries. If it is in a fortunate circumstance, the mother or caretaker, will immediately tend to the need and it can return to a state of rest and inattention, happy and at peace in the state of consciousness from which it emerged.

If the child is not in a fortunate circumstance, the pain and fear can be constant and the attention and experience one of ongoing misery and suffering.

If you are lucky, you get your basic needs met at least adequately and so life becomes an experience of both pleasure and pain.

Gradually however, no matter how fortunate the circumstances of an infant's life, its attention is being captured more and more by the physical world. Attention must be given to the developing tasks of learning to not only survive in the world but also thrive. The child must move in its development to a state of self-sufficiency and learn to meet its own needs. It is moving further and further away from being one with God Consciousness and experiencing itself as ever more separate, individual and unique, which is exactly what it was originally seeking in the parable. In so doing the natural state of its own consciousness is being squandered, so to speak. The child's focus is on getting its needs met, being separate and individual, competent in the world of matter, and in its perception and only in its perception, it is becoming more and more separate – because of course, we cannot ever be separated from the Source, because we are in essence the source. Just as the limb of a tree can never be separated from the tree and still live. Focus is increasingly on difference, not sameness.

When a small child's needs are not being met it experiences either pain, discomfort and fear. The body itself is a physical receptor of information from the environment, information that is needed to know how to survive in this foreign land. The body is also the means for spirit to express itself. However, this is not where attention or awareness is focused in childhood. It is focused on the information received from the environment and the impact on the physical body.

In order to get its needs met and stop the pain and fear, the child starts learning adaptive behaviors. When, for instance, the baby is feeling the discomfort of hunger, thirst or cold, it is adaptive for it to cry - in fact this is hard wired instinctually into the body. When the need is met, the fear and pain and the need goes away and the baby is calm.

After the basic needs for survival and safety are met the child has enough free attention to focus on higher order universal needs - to belong, to be valued and loved, to get attention and affirmation, to be seen and be heard, for self-efficacy and mastery and so on. All these needs are really predicated on the foundational need for survival - eg. if you do not belong, are not loved and valued, do not get attention and affirmations you will be alone and die - no human being can live in isolation as a child.

When a child's need to be loved and valued is not met, a new emotional response is inevitable. To not be loved and valued even briefly in a small incident, is not consistent with our essential nature which is infinite love and intrinsic value. The experience of being negated is an inner death experience called shame. Our essential identity (of which we are not even aware) is called into question and it cuts us to the core - the first experience of knowing ourselves as something other than love and goodness - to experience ourselves as "bad" and "wrong." Not only bad and wrong but also the cause of our own badness and wrongness, our own stupidity and inadequacy. It seems completely convincing to the child as it experiences life, that this is true and plunges us into the state of consciousness that is known as the hell realm.

How this happens is universal - all the needs of a child are not and cannot be perfectly met and when this happens, the child immediately feels shame.

An immutable law of creation is duality. There can be no creation without opposites - an inside and an outside, an up and a down, girls and boys, safe and unsafe, good and bad, right and wrong. Discernment of difference is essential for survival. If you could not discern the difference between safe and unsafe, you would die. Even if a child is never abused or shamed by its parents, it will learn to feel shame by virtue of living in a realm of duality. For instance, you get stung by a bee when you are 5. Your need for safety has not been met. You feel pain and then fear of bees. You also feel shame because of the overlay of dualistic meaning hardwired into your brain. The bee is dangerous and so "bad," and you are "stupid, or wrong or bad for causing the bee to sting you. Anger and shame arise. Kill the bee and see yourself as wrong. Furthermore, the experience can generalize and becomes a complexity of belief and emotion. One possibility is fear of and hatred and devaluing of all bees, and then all bugs. Another is, acting in a frightened and dramatic way every time some flying creature comes near you because your pain and tears served to get your need for attention met. Learning to act the victim as a tactic in all kinds of situations to get the need for attention and empathy met. There can be many variations on the theme but inherent in the experience is the notion of victim and perpetrator and so the seeds of war and destruction are sown.

Every culture is made up of rules (morality) for how to get needs met to ensure safety and growth. When the child does not conform to the external expectations, demands and mores of the family, school, society, then it receives the message in one way or another that it is "bad." Instead of knowing your goodness to be in alignment with your god given properties of Love and Truth, you come to know your 'goodness' in relationship to your 'badness.' Consciousness becomes split in its attention and duality is born - you eat, so to speak of the tree of knowledge - of good and evil, right and wrong, safe and unsafe, valued or not valued, loved or not loved and so on. Our worst fear becomes to feel shame.

You quickly learn that you are good *when* you conform to the demands of what others want and you are "bad" *when* you do not. Very soon you learn any number of tactics to avoid feeling shame. At a very young age all your attention is externally referenced by what others think, feel, need and expect of you. Your attention is now well and truly captured by the external demands of the culture so that you can have the support and help required to survive this journey in form. It is a time of wasting and squandering your innate spiritual inheritance.

The tactics employed to get needs met fall into the dualism of conformity or rebellion, passivity or aggression, victim or perpetrator and this then constitutes the personality, persona or ego. In the example of the child being stung by a bee we can get a glimpse of how complicated the development of the ego self can be. The young soul is firmly identified with this function as itself and has "forgotten," or was never aware of its natural state of spiritual being-ness which is always and only love.

Let's take another example of how this happens in relationship to family. An eight-year old little boy is working with his father in the workshop and is told to bring his father a tool. He brings the wrong one and the father, in frustration, says, "What is wrong with you, how many times have I told you that this is a ....., not a wrench!" We can all feel the shame of believing ourselves stupid and wrong and of not having our need to be understood, valued and accepted met in an instance like this. This little boy might develop any number of tactics to avoid this feeling in the future and to try to get his need for acceptance and approval met. He might learn to try harder to please, learn and comply, withdraw and lose interest in doing things with his father, become a white-collar worker and never use tools again.... get pissed off and act out becoming oppositional and defiant and so on. It will be some variation of fight or flight to control the feeling.

And so personality or ego is formed through this ongoing process. It is the “false self,” the ego self, the pain body, with which the soul is now identified. This is a powerful illusion.

The tactics, also known as protective mechanisms or defenses, might protect the child in the short term, but in the long run they fail to ever meet the true needs of the soul. In fact, they will result in more shame and fear in the long run. In our example, the little boy, because of his tactics to protect himself from feeling shame, might become a people pleaser - someone who is forever trying to anticipate what someone wants from him, doing for them, fixing things for them, to the point of giving others the impression that he thinks *they* are incompetent. They will then feel shame and inadequate, be angry and end up not being pleased with him at all with resulting ruptures in relationship resulting in more shame... he will land up feeling worthless, inadequate, unlovable - the prophecy or curse of suffering has come to pass. This cycle of cause and effect constitutes the wheel of fate or karma. It is the result of the unaware feelings of shame and fear related to the child's original need for value and respect not being met. Until this is brought to awareness the pattern repeats endlessly.

It is important to note that the child is not AWARE of his feelings of fear and shame, the underlying unmet needs or that it's behavior is designed to desperately try to get needs met and avoid feelings of fear and shame. It experiences this but does not know what the dynamic is. Indeed, the child is helped to repress any awareness of feelings and needs which are experienced as frightening and threatening to the caretakers in the child's life and the child is shamed (socialized) into repressing the feelings and needs. The culture has an elaborate set of rules around the expression of feelings and needs. For example, boys don't cry and if they do they will be called names and be put down. You shouldn't be “needy,” for fear of being selfish. So just as the child is not aware of themselves as Consciousness itself, so too they are not aware of the dynamics outlined above. All movement in this stage of the journey is a devolution into deeper unawareness - unaware of who one truly is and unaware of why you behave and act the way you do. The dawning awareness, or coming to, has not yet occurred. The inner turning back to the source that will bring awareness has not yet happened. It will take years of hard work, labor and all the attendant labor pains to get aware of either our natural state or our conditioned state.

This entire process of socialization is how the soul develops an ego or the survival function and finds itself in the pig pen of life, in dissolute living that is as far from the Kingdom of the Father as one can get. The formula is simple and universal and directly tied to the physical development of a human being. It is inevitable, until there is, a longing, a dim remembering, a turning inwards back to the realm of spirit and love.

To summarize, when basic needs are met and the child experiences pleasure, happiness, contentment. When the basic needs are not met the child experiences, physical pain, emotional fear and shame. This emotional experience is interpreted by the brain to mean that they child is bad, wrong and to blame for the need not being met. Life is split into I am good when ... I am bad if ... leading to defensive tactics and behaviors designed to get the needs met. Unity in Consciousness no longer exists.

Let's take another example: A child is expected at a certain age to use the toilet instead of naturally eliminating when it feels the urge. She has to curb the natural function of her body and learn to wait. If she lives up to the expectation of learning to go potty, her basic and universal need for approval is met and the message will be that she is “a good girl.” She will feel pride in her accomplishment and start developing a complicated set of beliefs about being competent, capable and good. She will then develop further compliant behaviors to be competent, effective, and high achieving as a way of getting her needs met. The “successful” tactic of compliance, resulting in praise rather than punishment will generalize to other areas too. The ego structure of

a high achieving, competent, compliant, adaptive, perfectionistic, orderly, clean, self-righteous and prideful people-pleasing adult are sown from the sum total of these kinds of early experiences. Now we have an adult that is outwardly and exteriorly focused, and that feels good when her needs are met through these tactics. She seemingly will have high self-esteem. However, the underlying fear and shame of not getting those needs met is the shadow that informs the surface presentation. These behaviors do not come from the essential spiritual nature of the person.

If the child does not or cannot meet the demand of the culture, her need for approval, acceptance, affirmation and efficacy will not be met, leaving her feeling fear and also shame inherent in the message that it is “wrong and bad,” that there is something wrong with her.

For instance, a child that wets its pants in kindergarten will not have its need for approval met, even if no-one actually says or does anything. The child itself will make a comparison through its growing intellectual capacity and interpret itself to be “bad,” “wrong,” and to blame, or a complexity of beliefs about not being able to do things, not being lovable or like-able. It will learn any number of tactics to protect itself from these feelings and try to get its needs met may develop. The child might develop psycho-somatic complaints to try to avoid school, it might become devious and be able to hide and lie about behavior, use food as a means of soothing the anxiety... the list is endless.

Again, the seeds for developing ego structure are sown in these early experiences - and all the behaviors are cleverly designed to attempt to get those needs met. The culture may call some of it adaptive and some of it maladaptive, but in every case, it is rooted in the unaware feelings and needs of children.

The soul becomes more and more attached to, invested in, and identified with this function of developing ego and mistakenly sees itself as this functional structure. It has no free attention, does not know itself as consciousness, does not remember it embarked on this journey, does not know itself and finds itself in the pig pen of life - living a defensive life, dissolute and strangely dissatisfied. All the defensive ways of living in the world are desperate and tragic ways of attempting to get needs, of which one is not even aware, met. All tactics are attempts to avoid the feelings of fear and shame of which the adult is also not even aware. The tactics are successful in hiding, repressing and denying the fear and shame. Few people who arrive in adulthood are aware that their suffering is the unmet needs of themselves as children that led to fear and shame that lead to defenses of compliance or rebellion, passivity or aggression, acting either the victim or the perpetrator, caught in the duality of the splits in their own psyches, like the cloven hoof of the pig. The pig in the bible is often equated with the devil because of this. And so, Jesus is saying that all splits in the psyche of which one is unaware will land one in the pig pen - i.e. the hell of unaware demons rooted in the instinct to survive.

All the defenses are dissolute and immoral even if they are in accordance with the agreed upon morality of the society within which individuals find themselves. Whatever behaviors come from unaware fear and shame is by definition not loving, and therefore not in accordance with one's truest properties and spiritual inheritance. Whether you are a high functioning good person, or a alcoholic wasting money on prostitution, you are in the pig pen of life. Often the one who is high functioning according to the culture is further from being able to recognize the pig pen in which they are - because it is a nice, clean, orderly pig pen. Nonetheless this is the furthest away that one could be from using one's god given properties and true inheritance. This is a place of great hunger, and nothingness - not one of the tactics one has learnt can satisfy the spiritual hunger - it a place of desolation and famine and the food of the world that pigs eat does not satisfy. No amount of power, prestige, material wealth or substance can ever feed the soul.

The frightening words used in describing these conditions and states are often mistaken as something outside of the realm of physical existence, but they are just descriptive and symbolic words for the states we are all in at different stages of our development. They are not meant as moral or prescriptive or threatening - merely descriptive of the conditions we all know and have experienced. The feeling of shame is indeed a hell realm. The devil is the thought process that divides the world into dualities of good and bad; temptation and sin are those tactics we engage in to try to avoid the feelings of fear and shame and get our needs met. We will deny, repress, lie, avoid, attempt to be good right and perfect, try to please, comply and be obedient, help, fix, caretake, enable and be humanitarians, achieve highly, accumulate evidence of success in a materialistic orgy of greed, drink, eat, have sex, shop and take drugs - all of it to avoid the feelings and try to get the need to be loved and valued met. We will aggress, fight, blame, project, hate, destroy and violate, we will judge, criticize, rape, plunder and extort - all in a desperate attempt to get our needs met and feel good about ourselves. It is all done without awareness in an unaware state of hell and suffering and all of it will result in more suffering until there is the dawning of a new awareness.

The parable tells us that the next thing that happens is that the prodigal son "comes to himself." He remembers something, wakes up, comes out of the fog of illusion in which he has been living. He remembers his Spiritual home where there is "bread," - the true nourishment of Life, Love, Truth and he resolves to return to this realm. He determines to leave the kingdom of the ego and return to the realm of the soul. He is filled with shame and guilt (the legacy of socialization in the ego) and realizes his need to repent of his sin (defenses and personality he developed as a protective tactic against shame).

The parable tells us all that we need to know of the process of repentance. Wake up, see your sin (defenses), realize that this identification with shame is not worthy of who you are and act relationally in a loving way with yourself and others. It is the recognition that this realm of operation is the exact opposite of the heaven realm of love, and never meets the real longing, desire and need for connection and love, creativity, and service. The unaware ego does not operate in accordance with the laws of love, heaven or god - it is merely a function of survival and stage of development required to come to know your true nature. It facilitates the knowing in full awareness of who you are by living in the shadow of love - fear and shame. The contrast itself brings a full realization of what it is you left behind. As a child my mother would always say, "you will be sorry when I am dead and gone." I think she meant, "You will only realize the blessings of me as a mother, when you no longer have me providing." I smile now recognizing how the experience of duality brings awareness. It is the figure against which the ground of being can be recognized and vice versa.

In the parable, the son has an attitude of self-responsibility, ownership and humility which are the antidotes to shame. Only by having the humility to see the inner dynamics of ego, owning it and accepting it are we able to return to a state of grace and the realm of heaven. It is through having lived a defensive and dissolute life, that he comes to the humility of recognizing that all the choices he has made in life do not meet his real needs. He comes to the awareness of his true identity.

Every turning inwards into the mystical life, instead of being continually distracted by the pains and pleasures, pride and shame, praise and blame, loss and gains, fame or disrepute of the world of duality, is recognized immediately by Spirit and both reach for the other - soul and spirit until they are united in love and joy. The drop returns to the ocean, the son is re-united with the father. The returning to the Father's house, is the inner journey into the depths of your own being to discover what is not in your awareness. It is waking up and knowing that you must go back - not the way you came, which was an external journey, but now seeing

deeply all the lessons this journey provided and navigating the interior landscape, bringing it to awareness with open arms, embrace, welcome and love. In so doing your whole sense of identity - gained through the ego function, is brought into alignment with Love itself. Father and Son re-united in love, not separated by fear and shame. Life in form gave a structure, a vessel within which the drop could realize itself. The ego structure falls away and there is a merging in consciousness, but without loss of uniqueness. A miraculous thing has happened. God has come to know itself - is in relationship with itself. At-one-ment with awareness has been achieved. Father and son fall into one another's arms - one but separate.

All heaven rejoices at the return of a soul that has attained awareness of itself as Consciousness itself, come back to claim it's true inheritance, and live out its true spiritual properties. The ego understands humility as a negation of any godly properties. This kind of humility is a groveling, victim stance and has nothing to do with true humility. The soul understands it takes humility to see the ways in which you have negated your godly properties and lived in the darkness of believing yourself worthless and all the behaviors attendant to that belief and experience which separated you from the truth - by definition a state of sin. Repentance is about turning your back on shame and fear and living in love and light - your Truth.

The story tells of the movement from duality to unity - the evolution of each and every human life and how to get to this reunified state after the separation of the great adventure and journey of life in form.

And finally, we hear about the older son who did not leave home and is distressed at witnessing the re-unification. He clearly has no awareness that what is being celebrated, is what he himself has been steeped in all along - living in the realm of love with awareness. He is unable to recognize this because for him the journey of understanding and realizing his truest nature has not even begun. He is like a fish that swims in water but does not know what it is. He has not yet left the spirit realm and discovered himself as himSelf.

### *Shock Collar - by Catherine Wilson ©*

It was around my neck  
from a very young age.  
Do what you're told,  
or ZAP!  
Buzzing, electrified limitations  
hummed their warnings  
not to go out of the boundaries  
someone else put around me.

Don't go in the road.  
Be polite.

Do well in school.  
Don't touch yourself "there."  
Don't upset anyone.  
Shhh.

Good girls don't wear makeup  
or pierce their ears.  
Don't let anyone else touch you "there."  
Marry a good provider.  
Get an education "to fall back on."  
You're not good enough.  
Others come first.  
It's ok for them, but not for you.

The collar gets tighter,  
and the battery seems to live forever.  
Sometimes I want to wake up so bad  
from this dream of barriers  
that I jump the line  
in spite of near lethal shocks,  
and I run free for a short, blissful time.  
But then I go back  
because the warning buzz gets louder again  
and I pace along the path I've worn down  
as close to the perimeter as I can get.

I'm cutting deep into myself  
as I try to get this collar off  
before the light that tenaciously  
holds on inside me  
goes out.