

## Self-Study Options

*Love Life 101* explores the importance of understanding the “bigger picture” context for life decisions we make on a daily basis. To help develop this understanding, *Love Life 101* draws on near-death experience research and the mystic perspective. These resources illuminate our purpose in life and highlight skills, practices and attitudes that help all aspects of life.

When these types of resources are unavailable in primary and secondary education, several self-study options can be tried. They include a combination of reading and experiential materials that work well together.

A few suggestions are worth considering. First, start with the information provided in *Taking the Mystery out of the Mystic*.

Second, take your self-study exercise a step at a time. A personal experience of mind will help explain the concern.

I was more than forty years old before I first heard of a condition known as synesthesia. People who have synesthesia have sensory perceptions that are wired differently than the rest of us. For example, hearing a certain sound may cause them to see a color that the rest of us don't see. The color is as real to the person with synesthesia as the sound that prompted it. I was fascinated by the concept because it underscores the extent to which the physical reality that we perceive as solid and real is dependent on our perception. Even more fascinating, however, is the fact that once I learned about synesthesia, examples of this rare condition seemed to pop up everywhere. There were a lot of articles that discussed it. I also discovered by coincidence that an acquaintance of mine had it. A few weeks later, I met other people who had it and liked to playfully argue whether the letter “L” was purple, as one person experienced it, or “green, as another person experienced it. The condition was not the secret it had seemed to be.

A similar situation will occur as you delve into subjects like the mystic perspective and near-death experiences. You may meet people who have had first-hand experiences. You will better understand some of your own experiences. You will also find that the number of books and other self-help resources on the market is overwhelming. Even the list provided here is too much for a beginner to take on all at once. If you grab for too much in the first instance, you can come up empty handed.

It is best to pick one or two things to focus on at a time and see what is learned from them. Everything in your life is part of your education. Once you apply what you know to do with what you have in hand, the next steps will become more apparent. This will lead you to move on to subjects that build on what you have already learned. The goal is to dig one deep well in the right place rather than several shallow wells.

Third, keep in mind the saying, “when the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” During the course of your self-study, opportunities may arise to work with someone locally who is in a position to be a mentor in one or more spiritual aspects of your life.

Finally, nothing here is intended to persuade anyone to convert from one religion to another. It is OK to do so if you feel the call and find the change to be helpful, but it is not usually necessary, especially at the beginning. The mystic perspective arises out of virtually every religion. The near-death experience is also universal in its important respects. The skills, practices and attitudes suggested below can be worked on within the context of most if not all religions because they are already found in the mystics from those religions.

That being said, sometimes looking at the truth from the perspective of a different religious tradition can help us better understand the truth in our native religious tradition. For example, the Christ concept in Christianity is found in other religions under different names. Familiarity with the Christ concept from the perspective of other religions can give a deeper understanding of what was manifested in Jesus and its universality. Similarly, forgiveness, which is a concept that is important to the major religious traditions, is commonly misunderstood as overlooking bad conduct as a favor bestowed on the wrongdoer. Instead, true forgiveness releases us from the self-inflicted harmful effects of our own judgments, resentments and prejudices. Good insights on how to forgive and why it is necessary can be found in *A Course in Miracles*, the Buddhist concept of releasing attachments and secular self-help resources such as the Sedona Method and The Release Technique. All describe the same function.

Here are some recommended resources:

- **Overview of what is really going on in our lives – the result of using the hidden world perspective to put the revealed world in context.**
  - *Love Life 101: What Near-Death Experiences and the Mystics Teach Us about Love, Romance and the School of Life*<sup>i</sup>.
- **Mystic perspective resources**
  - **Not associated with a particular religion**
    - *A Course in Miracles*<sup>ii</sup> - a self-contained curriculum designed for self-study. It contains a textbook, workbook for daily exercises and a Manual for Teachers. All that is required is an open mind when reading the material and a willingness to apply the lessons and objectively evaluate the results. More information about *A Course in Miracles* can be found on the Foundation for Inner Peace website.<sup>iii</sup>
      - Related:
        - *The Disappearance of the Universe*<sup>iv</sup>
        - *Your Immortal Reality*<sup>v</sup>
        - *Love Has Forgotten No One*<sup>vi</sup>

- *A Search for God*<sup>vii</sup> and other books based on the Edgar Cayce Readings<sup>viii</sup> – *A Search for God* is a two-volume text developed by a study group over an eleven year period in which they recorded, studied and applied lessons obtained through psychic readings given for the group by Edgar Cayce. The material is suitable for self-study, but there are also study groups, accessible through the Association for Research and Enlightenment that focus on the material.<sup>ix</sup>
  - *Conversations with God*<sup>x</sup> - A series of three books written by Neale Donald Walsh beginning in a dialogue format in which he asked questions and recorded the answers. The material rises or falls on its own merits rather than any specialness of Walsh. More information, including access to local study groups, can be found at The Conversations with God Foundation website.<sup>xi</sup>
  - *Teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky*<sup>xii</sup> – A self-contained system of spiritual self-awakening and transcendence initially developed by G.I. Gurdjieff and further developed by one of his students, P.D. Ouspensky.
- **Buddhist Mystic Perspective:**
  - There is a plethora of good books and other resources designed to help people in the West of different religious backgrounds become familiar with the Buddhist Mystic perspective. One does not have to change religion or become a Buddhist in order to benefit from the teachings. It is based more on logic and experience from application than faith. The basic group of teachings stands on its own merits.
  - Just starting: Consider investigating books by the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh to find one that focusses on any topic that catches your interest.
- **Christian Mystic Perspective:**
  - *The Christ in You*,<sup>xiii</sup> *The Door of Everything*<sup>xiv</sup> and *Brotherhood*<sup>xv</sup>
  - Other resources include materials written by or about Saint Francis of Assisi, Thomas Merton, Saint Therese of Lisieux, Evelyn Underhill, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Henri le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), Meister Eckhart, Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross.<sup>xvi</sup>
- **Hindu Mystic Perspective:**
  - *Autobiography of a Yogi*<sup>xvii</sup>
  - Other resources include materials written by or about Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Sathya Sai Baba and Ram Dass.
- **Islamic Mystic Perspective:**
  - *Essential Sufism*<sup>xviii</sup>
  - *Love Is a Fire and I Am Wood: The Sufi's Mystical Journey Home*<sup>xix</sup>
  - *The Sufis*<sup>xx</sup>

- Materials written by Sufi mystics such as Rumi, al-Ghazzali, Rabia, Irina Tweedie and Kahlil Gibran
  - **Jewish Mystic Perspective:**
    - Teachings of Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, including *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth*<sup>xxi</sup>, *Toward a Meaningful Life*<sup>xxii</sup>, and *Be Within, Stay Above*<sup>xxiii</sup>.
    - *God is a Verb*<sup>xxiv</sup>
- **Meditation/ Working with Thoughts**
  - **Mindfulness**<sup>xxv</sup>
  - **Transcendental Meditation**<sup>xxvi</sup>
  - *Before You Think Another Thought: An Illustrated Guide to Understanding How Your Thoughts and Beliefs Create Your Life.*<sup>xxvii</sup>
  - *Mind Is the Builder, Your Life is the Result.*<sup>xxviii</sup>
  - **Comment on Law of Attraction:** Monitoring and reining in our thoughts are important to any sense of happiness and meaning. They affect how we perceive the things we encounter in life, how we respond to those things and the types of experiences that we attract. Like attracts like. If we are constructive in thought, word and deed, we will attract like-minded people and experiences. Conversely, misery loves company and indulging in negativity tends to perpetuate our experience of negativity.

This is the universal law of attraction. There are many books that teach the law of attraction as a way to conjure a future. They say that if we want a big house, an attractive spouse and a lot of material wealth, we can do it by thinking in a way that attracts this abundance to us.

These books should be taken with some caution. The law of attraction is real, but accumulation of wealth is not the most important thing in our lives. As explained in *Love Life 101*, we all have a purpose in life and the most important task is to get in touch with our true self (as distinguished from our ego) and let it lead the way. That path may or may not involve affluence, but it will involve meaning and personal growth. If we attempt to manipulate the Law of Attraction to serve the goals of the ego, to the detriment of the true self, we may attain the affluence, but there will likely be emptiness and many lessons learned the hard way.

- **Release techniques**
  - **The Sedona Method**<sup>xxix</sup>
  - **Release Technique**<sup>xxx</sup>
- **Finding Purpose in Life**<sup>xxxi</sup>

- **Weekly days of rest and Periodic spiritual retreats** – Six days of the week, we interact with the world, earning a living and taking care of the daily essentials of physical life. It is important to treat the seventh day differently, reserving time for reflection on spiritual life and inward reflection. It allows us to keep our lives from being pulled off track as the pressure of the work-a-day life appears to overshadow the more important spiritual considerations. Similarly, it is useful to set aside a longer period of time, such as a long weekend or a week, for a retreat to focus on spiritual matters and the patterns in life.

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<sup>i</sup> Daniel Flynn, *Love Life 101: What Near-Death Experiences and the Mystics Teach Us about Love, Romance and the School of Life* (CreateSpace 2010).

<sup>ii</sup> *A Course in Miracles* (Foundation For Inner Peace 2d Ed. 1992).

<sup>iii</sup> <http://acim.org/index.html>.

<sup>iv</sup> Gary R. Renard, *The Disappearance of the Universe: Straight Talk about Illusions, Past Lives, Religion, Sex, Politics, and the Miracles of Forgiveness* (Hay House 2002).

<sup>v</sup> Gary R. Renard, *Your Immortal Reality: How to Break the Cycle of Birth and Death* (Hay House 2006).

<sup>vi</sup> Gary R. Renard, *Love Has Forgotten No One: The Answer to Life* (Hay House 2013).

<sup>vii</sup> *A Search for God, Books 1 and 2* (A.R.E. 1942).

<sup>viii</sup> Edgar Cayce lived from 1877 to 1945. For 43 years of his life he helped people on a daily basis by entering a self-induced trance and providing information requested of him. On awakening, he could not recall the information given, but the readings were transcribed verbatim and maintained in a database of “readings.” Most of the requests mainly related to medical problems. Based on the success of these readings, he has been referred to as the father of holistic medicine.

Eventually, the scope of the readings expanded to include metaphysical topics such as meditation, dreams, reincarnation, and prophecy. These were called “life readings” and the wisdom reflected in these readings has striking similarities to the wisdom of the NDE life reviews, the Jewish Kabbalah and the mystic branches of many of the world’s other religious traditions.

Cayce left a legacy of over 14,000 transcribed readings, approximately 2,500 of which involve life reviews. These readings have been catalogued and studied continuously since Cayce’s death, which has resulted in a lot of books that are very helpful for understanding the mystic perspective. They include: Thomas Sugrue, *There is a River: The Story of Edgar Cayce* (ARE 1942); Jess Stearn, *Edgar Cayce The Sleeping Prophet: The Life, The Prophecies, and Readings of America’s Most Famous Mystic* (Bantam 1967); Jeffrey Furst, *Edgar Cayce’s Story of Jesus* (Berkley 1968); Mary Ann Woodward, *Edgar Cayce’s Story of Karma* (Berkley 1971); Harvey A. Green, *Life and Death: The Pilgrimage of the Soul* (ARE 1998); Jon Robertson and the Editors of the A.R.E., *The Golden Thread of Oneness* (ARE 1997); Robert W. Krajenke, *Edgar Cayce’s Story of the Old Testament: From the Birth of Souls to the Death of Moses* (ARE 1973); Robert W. Krajenke, *Edgar Cayce’s Story of the Old Testament: From Joshua to the Golden Age of Solomon* (ARE 1973); Robert W. Krajenke, *Edgar Cayce’s Story of the Old Testament: From the Solomon’s Glories to the Birth of Jesus* (ARE 1973); Herbert B. Puryear, Ph.D., *Sex and the Spiritual Path: Uniting the Spirit and the Body* (St Martin’s 1980); Gina Cerminara, *Many Mansions: The Edgar Cayce Story on Reincarnation* (Signet New Age 1950); Mark Thurston, Ph.D., *Soul-Purpose: Discovering and Fulfilling Your Destiny* (St. Martin’s 1997).

<sup>ix</sup> [http://www.edgarcayce.org/are/study-spiritual\\_Growth\\_groups.aspx?id=2835](http://www.edgarcayce.org/are/study-spiritual_Growth_groups.aspx?id=2835).

<sup>x</sup> Neale Donald Walsh, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue, Book 1* (G. P. Putnam's Sons 1996); Neale Donald Walsh, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue (Book 2)* (Hampton Roads

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1997); Neale Donald Walsh, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue (Book #3)* (Hampton Roads 1998).

<sup>xi</sup> <http://www.cwg.org/>.

<sup>xii</sup> G.I. Gurdieff, *All and Everything* (Harcourt, Brace 1950); P.D. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum* (White Crow Books 2010); P.D. Ouspensky, *The Fourth Dimension* (Kessinger Publishing 2005); P.D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich 1949).

<sup>xiii</sup> Anonymous, *Christ in You* (Devorss 2010)

<sup>xiv</sup> Ruby Nelson, *The Door of Everything* (Devorss 1963).

<sup>xv</sup> *Brotherhood: An Impersonal Message* (Devorss 1976).

<sup>xvi</sup> For a description of Christian mystics, see Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: The Spiritual Heart of the Christian Tradition* (Simon & Schuster 1998)

<sup>xvii</sup> Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Self-Realization Fellowship 1946).

<sup>xviii</sup> James Fadiman and Robert Frager, editors, *Essential Sufism* (Castle 1997).

<sup>xix</sup> Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, *Love Is a Fire and I Am Wood: The Sufi's Mystical Journey Home – Audiobook* (Sounds True 1998).

<sup>xx</sup> Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (Octagon Press 1964)

<sup>xxi</sup> Tzvi Freeman, compiler, *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: Meditations and Everyday Wisdom from the Teachings of the Rebbe, Menachem Schneerson* (Adams Media Corporation 1996); Tzvi Freeman, *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth, Book II: Meditations on the Wisdom of the Rebbe Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson* (Class One Press 2007).

<sup>xxii</sup> Simon Jacobson, *Toward a Meaningful Life, New Edition: The Wisdom of the Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson* (William Morrow 2004).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Tzvi Freeman, *Be Within, Stay Above: More meditations from the wisdom of the Rebbe* (Class One Press 2000).

<sup>xxiv</sup> Rabbi David Cooper, *God Is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism* (Riverhead 1998).

<sup>xxv</sup> Based in the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness is both the practice of monitoring one's thoughts and a type of meditation. There is considerable research on its efficacy in making life better. There are also many resources available in books and local teachers that would be easily located through internet or other research.

<sup>xxvi</sup> This type of meditation was developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Resources are plentiful and can be found at the official Transcendental Meditation website, <http://www.tm.org/>, and elsewhere. Maharishi Mahesh even founded the Maharishi University of Management in Iowa that includes study relating to Transcendental Meditation. [http://www.mum.edu/RelId/33637/ISvars/default/MUM\\_Home.htm](http://www.mum.edu/RelId/33637/ISvars/default/MUM_Home.htm).

<sup>xxvii</sup> Bruce I. Doyle III, *Before You Think Another Thought: An Illustrated Guide to Understanding How Your Thoughts and Beliefs Create Your Life* (Hampton Roads 1997).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Dick Daily, *Mind Is the Builder Your Life Is the Result: Powerful Concepts from the Edgar Cayce Philosophy* (ARE 2004).

<sup>xxix</sup> <http://www.sedona.com>. Hale Dworskin and Lester Levenson, *Happiness is Free . . . and It's Easier than You Think!* (Sedona Training Associates 2001).

<sup>xxx</sup> <http://www.release technique.com/>. Lester Levenson, *The Ultimate Truth About Love & Happiness: A Handbook to Life* (Lawrence Crane Enterprises 2003).

<sup>xxxi</sup> Mark Thurston, Ph.D., *Soul-Purpose: Discovering and Fulfilling Your Destiny* (St. Martin's 1997).