

Excerpt

The

Feathered Serpent Speaks

A Message of Love, Transformation &

Happiness... A Memoir

Jeanette O'Donnal

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FOREWORD

The Feathered or 'Winged' Serpent is known throughout the world by over 8,000 names originating from every indigenous culture on Earth. The single defining attribute of this "deity" was its ability to give to human beings the "knowledge of gods" so they too could "ascend into the heavens" and "live forever."

"According to legend, if human beings ever gained the knowledge of the Feathered Serpent, they would be unstoppable. First however, they would have to remove the dross from their lives.

"The question I pose in this book is: As humans, do we not have the power to expand our consciousness of love and become who we truly are—and if that is so, what are we waiting for?"

INTRODUCTION

We use words to label and help us comprehend the world around us. At the same time, many of the words we use are destroying lenses, they make us misperceive and hence misjudge the object we look at because of our incurable propensity to prejudge all the great questions by stamping our prejudices upon the language.

—Sir James Fitzjames Stephen,
19th century English Jurist

As a child growing up in Guatemala, land of the Maya, I delighted in the enchanting countryside that fed my imagination and nurtured my curiosity. I loved to visit ancient Mayan sites, climb the pyramids and examine the many prehistoric artifacts secreted in strange places. I wondered about the meaning of the Mayan symbols carved on these relics.

Nature was also a feast for my imagination. On bright sunny days, the puffy cumulus clouds would keep me busy for hours as I watched them move across the sky, shape-shifting into different forms. I marveled at the many colorful sights that encouraged me to sharpen my awareness. What was I seeing? Was it reality or some type of “symbolic representation of ideas”?

As I continued to pursue my fascination with symbols and images, I soon developed a passion to discover their deeper meanings. In my elementary school textbooks I was captivated by artists’ renditions of Mayan gods. These drawings were detailed images that spoke to me in a secret language. The symbols led me into the cryptic world of knowledge hidden from common view but clearly visible to the inner eye.

My determination to discover this deeper wisdom pushed me through turbulent waters of ignorance yet ultimately delivered me to the land of infinite treasures. Often I compare my life’s journey to that of Jonah’s in the Old Testament. I was swallowed by the whale of the

external world in order to be delivered to my inner self, where eventually I discovered a deeper more profound type of reality.

Never would I have dreamed that my childhood fascination with ancient Mayan symbols would end up taking me on a personal alchemical journey. Nor would I have considered that my sensitivity to the charged meaning of these symbols would bring me to a place of such extraordinary happiness where innate abilities would start to reveal themselves as if they had always been. Indeed, they *had* always been, since the talent I had tapped into is one that we all possess yet often remains hidden.

As soon as I discovered these gifts, the amazing world that really does exist somewhere out there as well as inside each of us started to show me its treasures. I soon realized that this carefully secreted world is one that anyone can enter if they are willing to do what it takes to open the portal and walk through.

I feel that often we miss out on many worlds of incredible beauty simply because we don't know where to find them or we don't know how to train our senses to experience their magic. It is this inner reality and the story of my personal epic journey that brought me to the paradise that I wish to share with you in this book.

My Paradise

Rarely does one have an opportunity to live in Paradise. I was enchanted by the lushness of Guatemala's rain forests, the beauty of the countryside, hustle and bustle of urban life, and everywhere, the spirit of the Mayas. I grew up in a loving home with parents who allowed me the freedom to roam wherever I chose.

With childhood innocence I embraced the customs of this gentle people and hungered to learn more about the amazing abilities of their Mayan gods. Most of all, I was fascinated by the transfiguration of *Kukulcan*, the “Plumed Serpent,” or “Feathered Serpent.”¹

After finishing elementary school I returned to the United States to receive my higher education and even though I still traveled back to Guatemala every year, the magic was no longer there. I simply took it for granted that this was the price of growing up.

Since I wasn't altogether comfortable with this feeling of loss and it seemed to be profoundly connected to my level of happiness, I decided to see if I could learn what was at the source of these feelings.

I found it interesting to discover that it was my prejudices, like destructive lenses, that were blocking my vision. These lenses placed shadows on the beauty of my former happiness. It took intentional action on my part to awaken from my stupor. I had to push myself out of a highly stressful lifestyle to rediscover my inner magical child.

Through the process of changing that lifestyle I found that **love, autonomy and freedom** are the essential elements for retrieving one's personal happiness. Love is the key that unlocks the door to freedom, and freedom nurtures, supports and generates unlimited happiness.

In retrospect I know that it was principally because of my curiosity about the Mayas that I was able to manifest these changes. By understanding and listening to the ancient Mayan

¹ Stories are still told about Kukulcan among the modern Yucatec Maya. In one tale, Kukulcan is a boy who was born as a snake. As he grew older it became obvious that he was the plumed serpent and his sister cared for him in a cave. He grew to such a size that his sister was unable to continue feeding him, so he flew out of his cave and into the sea, causing an earthquake. To let his sister know that he is still alive, Kukulcan causes earth tremors every year in July. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kukulcan>

messages of the *Feathered Serpents*, I was invited into the world of the unknown. This is where I needed to go in order to return to my former world of happiness.

The significance of this adventure of discovery lies largely in my surprise finale. I really hadn't intended to travel to such a fascinating new world nor did I even plan to find myself on such a journey. The discovery of a treasure chest "at the end of my rainbow" was certainly the greatest surprise of all.

By sharing my story of how I lost and ultimately retrieved the magic and wonderment of my childhood bliss, I feel that perhaps I can help others who may find themselves confronted with the same sense of loss. As you will see, I chose the tools of an archeologist and donned the costume of a magician in order to launch my journey. My archeological "digs" [symbols that are common to all nations] exposed a loving message left behind by the immortal gods. They revealed the portal to happiness: personal change, a transformation or metamorphosis.

I invite you to enter with me into the magical world of the Mayas and take a peek at the bliss that you too can attain.

PART I

Backdrop Setting



1

Background to My Action

*You tell on yourself by the friends you seek,
By the very manner in which you speak,
By the way you employ your leisure time...
You tell what you are by the way you walk
By the things of which you delight to talk...
By the books you choose from the library shelf,
By these and more, you tell on yourself.*

—Author Unknown

In 1942 my father, who was hired by the United States Department of Agriculture, was sent to Guatemala to establish the first experimental rubber plantation in Mesoamerica. The assignment was short-lived however, since he was called back to his country for military duty in 1945. In August of that year, my parents moved to Arizona. My mother, who was now the wife of a U.S. Citizen, was in her ninth month of pregnancy with her first child and was taking her first trip to the United States.

Although conceived in Guatemala, I was born in the United States, the famous “land of the free,” on August 13, 1945, the night that World War II ended. The Japanese had finally surrendered and President Harry S. Truman declared that date as VJ-Day. Since it happened to be the day on which I was born, I almost came to bear the name “Victoria,” victory for the United States and a great celebration of freedom for many. Consequently, my path starts out with **freedom** as an important factor. Throughout my life it has been a synchronistic theme.

Now that the war was over, my father could return to Guatemala to continue the work he had begun. At the tender age of two weeks, as soon as my mother recuperated from giving birth, I traveled as her “little extra bundle” back to her home, the place where my parents had fallen in love. I could not have asked for a happier or more magical childhood than the one I experienced in this land of enchantment.

Later I returned to the United States, where I attended high school and college. After graduation I married a Canadian born Arizona cowboy and gave birth to five daughters and one son. Together we raised seven children in the same state where I was born. It was during these adult years that I first became aware that I had lost a major part of the happiness with its magical quality that had been such a memorable part of my childhood.

Freedom, enlightenment, and happiness form the foundation for this story. Since happiness is a state of mind and freedom is an attitude toward life, enlightenment deals with the manner and results-based success with which we blend the two. This knowledge was reason enough for me to set out to make some personal changes.

I was aware that there was something I definitely needed to do in order to recover the happiness I seemed to have lost. My first task was to pay careful attention to what I was doing. I realized that often we get more involved in the popular or superficial aspect of our life. “This is what is supposed to bring bliss.” We don’t even think about the beauty of our inner being. If we are not consciously aware of our true nature, we tend to lose part if not all of our freedom, happiness and enlightenment. It is this **unconscious involvement** in our day to day life that causes us to forget much of what may have made our life more beautiful in the past.

I was feeling an entrapment of sorts, so I asked myself: *Is all this stress the result of simply getting into the game of life? How could I possibly lose the most cherished of all gifts—the freedom to be happy?*

This loss of joy seems to be universal as people grow older. I discovered it is due to the involvement in harmless circumstances of our environment. There really is no way of noticing how a phantom-like thief moves into our life unless we remain alert to some basic concepts.

It took **contemplation**, a personal **awareness of inner wisdom** and **surrender of the identity of self** for me to understand what was going on in my life. It also required much research and serious study of world cultures and traditions to release **separateness** and accept **wholeness**.

During my period of discontent I knew that lurking in the shadows of my childhood memories was an unanswered question, a mystery about the ancient Mayas and their symbols. The Mayas were well known for their feats of transfiguration. It was these changes or magical abilities that held value for me. As a child I was fascinated by the symbols that represented transformation.

Just like my joy, with the passing of time my inquisitiveness about the Mayas got buried under the rubble of daily life. I had always felt the Mayan symbols were telling me there was more to know and to live. What was that “more”? Deep down I knew I would not be happy nor would I feel fulfilled until I discovered the answer to that question. Eventually I discovered that the ancient Mayan symbols were the *only* direct connection to preserving the world I was losing. Ultimately it was the pursuit of their meaning that was responsible for my alchemical transformation.

Kukulcan, the *Feathered Serpent* god of the Mayas was revered for his ability to transcend. Other nations had their own form of the *Plumed Wise One*. My history lessons told of this transcendence, a transformation that also included physical immortality of these god-like beings. Eventually I discovered that my curiosity about the Mayan gods' immortality and my loss of happiness share a significant element. Both involve **autonomy** and **freedom** from any type of enslavement. The concept that unites these two is **sovereignty**.

When I first launched my independent lifestyle in the United States after leaving my childhood home among the Mayas, I was excited and filled with the same childhood enthusiasm that had created the magic for me in Guatemala. It felt like a great adventure; I always enjoyed exploration. Yet almost before I knew what was happening, something started to squeeze the joy from my life.

The diminishment of our happiness seems to be part of the process of growing up or "getting on with our lives." After awhile we don't even notice how our familiar routines consume our life and steal our state of alertness as well as our cheerfulness. Slowly our joy diminishes along with our autonomy and freedom. It is as if a veil of forgetfulness falls over our consciousness, causing us to fall asleep.

As I grew older, stress, fear and anxiety seemed to be robbing me of pleasure. I felt as though life was turning into an unpleasant encumbrance. I noticed how important it had become to conform to my environment, to be more compliant to the conventional ways of conduct. I was losing my childhood curiosity. In my daily interactions with people through my business as a barber/beautician, I realized how common the feelings of boredom, fear and disdain really are in our Anglo-American society. These attitudes and feelings diminish happiness.

In order for me to recover my former adventuresome spirit and zest for life, I **knew** I had to take three **actions**: 1) I had to **allow** myself to move forward, 2) I needed to **remove** the dross from my life, and 3) I had to find a way to **reform** my attitudes. Possibly you are beginning to see how my story connects with the ancients, who taught about **transformation**.

I believe that each of us has a responsibility to **transform** into a being of wisdom. We must become a wise **sovereign**. When I finally realized what was going on in my life and where I was headed, I started to make changes. Easier said than done. It didn't take long for me to discover that I had acquired a number of habits that seemed almost impossible to break.

This awareness did not deter my mission. I attribute my ability to make those changes to my willingness to exercise my free will and a dogged determination to pursue my query about the mystery of the Mayas' advanced development. I'd always believed they had left a hidden message through their symbols. I felt these symbols would assist me in mending a broken system that had worked so well in the past. The new system I had adopted was the one that was robbing me of my happiness.

To my surprise, I was able to acquire the knowledge that brought me to a practice of **turning inward for answers**. This practice further developed my ability to decode symbolic messages. As I continued to sharpen my skills for developing a silent language, answers started to come to me as images.

First I returned to the images of my childhood paradise. They started to reappear in greater detail, bringing the same feeling of joy as in the past, because I recognized that the joy was also within me. I had become too entangled in traditional ways and too ignorant to know I needed to go inward. I had reached the point of unconsciousness where I didn't even know that anything debilitating was avoidable. My reasoning was obsolete.

Often we become so debilitated we need some type of map or plan to keep us focused. This was surely what I needed; it worked very well for me. Since this design delivered some magnificent gifts, I want to share my formula with you.

To remember this formula easily, I divided it into three stages:

1. **Seven Distractions of Life:** The things that often begin to “run” our life.
2. **Seven Tool of Discipline:** Useful ideas to help bring greater awareness.
3. **Seven Gifts:** The remarkable things you will enjoy as a result of wisdom.

Seven Distractions of Life

I discovered that my loss of happiness and personal freedom was due to the seven most binding elements in our lives. I came to call them the “**Seven Distractions of Life.**” Many times if we allow them to run our life they will steal our free will and happiness.

The Seven Distractions are: 1) persuasive cultures, 2) spellbinding histories, 3) ensnaring attitudes, 4) charming traditions, 5) dependence on time, 6) alluring entanglements, and 7) captivating religious convictions.

I gave these fundamentals the acronym of **CHATTER**, for easy reference. [See Chapter 7] My understanding of these elements helped me to see where I was stuck in a stupor. The formula served as a point of reference for making my changes.

Since my quest began primarily as an investigation about the immortal Mayas who promised to return, I will add my discovery and understanding about physical immortality to my story. Everything, even happiness, is a personal choice with a responsibility. Death is also a choice that is made somewhere in time. You will soon see how all of this ties

together because we are sovereign, divine and unlimited beings with the freedom to cast our own destiny.

Seven Tools of Discipline

To make my changes I needed suitable tools to get myself back on track. The tools I designed, which I call my “**Seven Tools of Discipline,**” supplied what I needed.²

Free will is a very important part of any change. **Allow** yourself to flow. **Feel** the freedom of your happiness and let it enter into every fiber of your being.

Seven Gifts

In Chapter 9, I will tell you more about my “**Seven Gifts.**” You will receive your own gifts according to the path you take. Again, freedom is critical. I learned about freedom from the Mayas; **sovereignty** is valued as a vital part of happiness.

These gifts, essential elements to human happiness, open the door to our unlimited potential.

The dream-like reality I had fallen into, the CHATTER, had prevented me from achieving clarity. Once I removed the veil of ignorance, symbolic icons began to speak their message. Isis, the Egyptian goddess of immortality and transcendence, who forever carries in her hand the *Aunk*, a familiar symbol of eternal life, vividly exposed her message to me. When I saw Isis in my mind’s eye I deciphered the symbolism contained in her image. Other icons and symbols also appeared with great vividness. I will refer to these throughout my story.

² See Chapter 8

Three Actions

I needed to embrace **three actions** to clearly set myself on a path:

1. **Allow**
2. **Remove**
3. **Reform**

Now that I had the map I had to take action. In order to return to a state of happiness without the stress of encumbrances, I had to acquire an exceptional understanding of these **three actions**. I also needed to know how to use my map. This meant that I had to understand the things I must do. I was reminded of a quote I had once read:

The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.
All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred.
A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor
all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance,
which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.

—William Hutchinson Murray, Scottish Mountaineer

Once I performed these **three actions**, I started to experience a more **expanded consciousness**. They brought me back to that feeling of wonder that I'd felt as a child.

With this new awareness I could see where I needed to make my changes. I often thought of the ancient artifacts that I had retrieved as a child and the images on the pages of my lessons. These ancient Mayan symbols and icons were also revealing much of what I needed to know. I was learning all kinds of new things; this was exciting!

Allow

It's no secret that each of us has a unique expression. It is this uniqueness that makes the interesting mix in the world we live in; however, let us not feel **separateness** but

wholeness in this mix. All the seeming contradictions and encumbrances are necessary for growth; we come to discover our true self through the problems we overcome.

Each of us with our own free will expresses ourselves as who we feel we are. Many times this is where the surprise comes in because most of us really do not know who we truly are. First we must **allow ourselves** to express our own uniqueness without passing sentence upon ourselves. Then we must **allow** others to express their uniqueness. This causes each of us to expand our consciousness. **Allowing without** judgment is the trick.

Have you noticed the recent increase in the number of people who have pets? This is because animals **allow** without judging. Without paying much attention to the freely expressed love we receive from our pets, we spoil them to extreme because we do not readily find the same nonjudgmental acceptance among humans. In today's world we desperately need this nonjudgmental attitude toward our brothers and sisters.

Allowing is common among the Mayans. Others who have visited Guatemala will tell you the same. The Mayas are warm and loving.

Remove

Once I recognized my situation of distress and went about wisely **removing** the obsolete items, I regained my enthusiasm for life. Even though I acquired a set of values, often I got stuck in an enslaving circumstance when I didn't make appropriate adjustments. Some of these values may have been useful to me at one time, but they soon became obstacles which caused stress.

The native Mayas of Guatemala live a simple life. When I also learned to value this simplicity, I **removed** my encumbrances and gained more wisdom. This enabled me to live a happier, more harmonious life.

Reform

In the course of changing my priorities and values I found myself naturally transforming. In spite of the fact that this development seemed difficult at times to accomplish, I managed to get on with the program. These changes brought refreshment to my life. By resetting my priorities I brought a new experience into play.

The ancient Mayan legends that captivated me in my childhood were not as mythical as some people might think; their symbols spoke to me of **reformation** and **transformation**. These coded symbols helped me to understand the importance of changing into a person who was wiser and more aware.

Although sometimes I found these **three actions** difficult to perform, afterward they delivered such joy, it was well worth the effort. The process of reformation and transformation remind me of giving birth. The little “bundles of joy” are well worth the effort, although “labor” may be the wrong term to use when describing birth, since it is a natural process. Nevertheless, delivery through such a narrow passage can be an ordeal.

These **three actions** will start you off on a voyage with a “magic wand” in your hand instead of “a bite of poisoned apple” in your mouth that can put you to sleep.

