On *Tulku*

Part 1 of 2

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The following has been prepared for the Convention Sunday of August 9, 1970.

This morning I propose to talk upon the subject which is variously known as *tulku* or *avesa*. No doubt, these terms will be quite unfamiliar to many, perhaps most of you, though not to all. A word of explanation, therefore, is appropriate.

_*Tulku*_ is the Tibetan term and _avesa_ the Sanskrit term referring to a yogic power that is of particular importance. This power is referred to in Patanjali’s *Yoga Aphorisms* as the power of transferring one’s principle of consciousness to another entity, especially a human entity, and being able to function within that entity either for the purposes of communication, or, in some cases, when the entity has lost its natural inhabitant, using the vehicle that has been deserted as a permanent residence, or, again, in a special form where there is a combination of two entities, one preparing the vehicle and the other introducing or adding to it certain of his principles.

This power or function has three uses that are of particular of importance to us. One, the form that is most likely to come before your attention at some time is the function of communication. By means of *tulku* it is possible, for one who has attained the appropriate Adept power, to communicate through another individual who has the appropriate relationship to him and the appropriate psychology, to use such a vehicle for communication even though the original communicator is at a distance in a physical body in this world; or, second, even an entity who is not dwelling in this world, in the sense of the gross physical, but perhaps on a level which we may call the subtle physical, can also so communicate.

A second use that has been recognized and is reported in the literature is for the extension of life in the physical world. This can happen when a given yogin in his own natural body has reached close to the terminus of his life. It is said that such know before hand when the hour of death is due and they may be so fortunate as to have near, or have found somewhere, an entity who has departed from his body so that the body is deserted and yet has not deteriorated so far that it cannot be used. In such a case, he may depart from his own vehicle before the hour of death and occupy the new vehicle which, presumptively being younger, may be used for an extension of his life. And it is reported that there are cases where this has been done repeatedly. It would seem to be a different means of extension of organized life here, with the organized consciousness that goes with it, other than that given in the article on “The ‘Elixir of Life’.”

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The third use of this process is in connection with special incarnations, namely of entities who are so far evolved that they no longer are justified in trying to raise an organism from infancy up to the point where it becomes useful for function, and, instead, combine with someone else, presumptively a chela, certainly someone who is in close magnetic rapport, so that that one furnishes the vehicle with certain principles while other principles from the greater entity replace the corresponding principles in the lesser entity. This makes possible a special incarnation, and it is said such incarnations have been employed by the Great Buddha, known as the Blessed One, from the time of his death in his body known as Gautama.

We’ll enter into this subject at some length, but first I wish to quote to you an experience of a very startling manifestation of tulku.

The episode is related by H. P. Blavatsky, who declares that she witnessed such an Incarnation of a Living Buddha, in the company of an ex-Lutheran minister, whom she calls Mr. K—. The minister is introduced in this manner:

K—was a positivist, and rather prided himself on this anti-philosophical neologism. But his positivism was doomed to receive a death-blow.

But one sight seen by him was as good as if he had witnessed the reincarnation of Buddha itself. Having heard of this ‘miracle’ from some old Russian missionary in whom he thought he could have more faith than in Abbé Huc, it had been for years his desire to expose the ‘great heathen’ jugglery, as he expressed it.

About four days journey from Islamabad, at an insignificant mud village, whose only redeeming feature was its magnificent lake, we stopped for a few days’ rest. It was there that we were apprised, by our Shaman that a large party of Lamaic ‘Saints’, on pilgrimage to various shrines, had taken up there abode in an old cave-temple and established a temporary Vihâra therein. The holy Bhikshus were capable of producing the greatest miracles. Mr. K—, fired with the prospect of exposing this humbug of the ages, proceeded at once to pay them a visit, and from that moment the most friendly relations were established between the two camps.

The Vihâra was in a secluded and most romantic spot, secured against all intrusion. Despite the effusive attentions, presents and protestations of Mr. K—, the Chief (an acetic of great sanctity), declined to exhibit the phenomenon of the ‘incarnation’ until a certain talisman in the possession of the writer was exhibited. Upon seeing this, however, preparations were at once made, and an infant of three or four months was procured from its mother, a poor woman of the neighborhood. An oath was first of all exacted of Mr. K—, that he would not divulge what he might see or hear, for the space of seven years . . .

On the appointed afternoon, the baby being brought to the Vihâra, was left in the vestibule or reception-room, as K— could go no further into the temporary sanctuary. The child was then placed on a bit of carpet in the middle of the floor, and everyone not belonging to the party being sent away,
two ‘mendicants’ were placed at the entrance to keep out intruders. Then all
the lamas seated themselves on the floor, with their backs against the granite
walls, so that each was separated from the child by a space, at least, of ten
feet. The chief, having had a square piece of leather spread for him by the
servant, seated himself at the farthest corner. Alone, Mr. K—— placed himself
close by the infant, and watched every movement with intense interest. The
only condition exacted of us was that we should preserve a strict silence, and
patiently await further developments. A bright sunlight streamed through the
open door. Gradually the ‘Superior’ fell into what seemed a state of profound
meditation, while the others, after a sotto voce short invocation, became
suddenly silent, and looked as if they had been completely petrified. It was
oppressively still, and the crowing of the child was the only sound to be
heard. After we had sat there a few moments, the movements of the infant’s
limbs suddenly ceased, and his body appeared to become rigid. K—— watched
intently every motion, and both of us, by a rapid glance, became satisfied that
all present were sitting motionless. The Superior, with his gaze fixed upon the
ground, did not even look at the infant; but, pale and motionless, he seemed
rather like a bronze statue of a Talapoin in meditation than a living being.
Suddenly, to our great consternation, we saw the child, not raise itself, but, as
it were, violently jerked into a sitting posture! A few more jerks, and then,
like an automaton set in motion by concealed wires, the four months’ baby
stood upon his feet! Fancy our consternation, and, in Mr. K——’s case, horror.
Not a hand had been outstretched, not a motion made, nor a word spoken; and
yet, here was a baby-in-arms standing erect and firm as a man.

The rest of the story we will quote from a copy of notes written on this
subject by Mr. K——, the same evening, and given to us, in case it should
not reach its place of destination, or the writer fail to see anything more.

After a minute or two of hesitation, writes K——, the baby turned his head
and looked at me with an expression of intelligence that was simply awful!
It sent a chill through me. I pinched my hands and bit my lips until the
blood almost came, to make sure that I did not dream. But this was only the
beginning. The miraculous creature, making, as I fancied, two steps toward
me, resumed his sitting posture, and, without removing his eyes from mine,
repeated, sentence by sentence, in what I supposed to be Tibetan language,
the very words, which I had been told in advance, are commonly spoken at
the incarnations of Buddha, beginning with ‘I am Buddha; I am the old
Lama; I am his spirit in a new body, ’ etc. I felt a real terror; my hair rose
upon my head, and my blood ran cold. For my life I could not have spoken
a word. There was no trickery here, no ventriloquism. The infant lips
moved, and the eyes seemed to search my very soul with an expression than
made me think it was the face of the Superior himself, his eyes, his very
look that I was gazing upon. It was as if his spirit had entered the little body,
and was looking at me through the transparent mask of the baby’s face. I
felt my brain growing dizzy. The infant reached toward me, and laid its little
hand upon mine. I started as if I had been touched by a hot coal; and, unable
to bear the scene any longer, covered my face with my hands. It was but for
an instant; but when I removed them, the little actor had become a crowing baby again, and a moment after, lying upon his back, set up a fretful cry. The Superior had resumed his normal condition, and conversation ensued.

It was only after a series of similar experiments, extending over ten days, that I realized the fact that I had seen the incredible, astounding phenomenon described by certain travellers, but always by me denounced as an imposture. Among a multitude of questions unanswered, despite my cross-examination, the Superior let drop one piece of information, which must be regarded as highly significant. ‘What would have happened,’ I inquired, through the Shaman, ‘if, while the infant was speaking, in a moment of insane fright, at the thought of its being the “Devil”, I had killed it?’ He replied that, if the blow had not been instantly fatal, the child alone would have been killed.’ ‘But,’ I continued, ‘suppose that it had been as swift as a lightening-flash?’ ‘In such case,’ was the answer, ‘you would have killed me also.’

I am well aware that to many of you, perhaps most, this would seem most incredible. It certainly is far from the range of our familiar knowledge, and I cannot bring from my own personal experience of this life anything to confirm the possibility of tulku in the case of a small child as in this instance only four months old; although, I can and will give supporting evidence later as to the possibility in the instance of an adult. There are certain things to note in this case: first of all, verbal concepts were expressed by means of the vocal equipment of a four months-old child which were no part of that child’s experience. It was clearly the case that a mature intelligence took possession of this equipment and used it by his own resources. Certain consequences follow from this: first of all, there is nothing in our conception of human psychology, as developed in the West, that would explain it; the nearest is certain conceptions offered by Dr. Carl G. Jung. He speaks of archetypes in the unconscious which can take over and direct one’s speech or writing, and he tells of the occasion when he wrote the Septem Sermones ad Mortuos that an archetype spoke through him which used bombastic language which was very repulsive to his own inclination, yet, nonetheless, that this kind of language was typical of the archetype and he had to proceed according to its pattern or form. Here was something other than his own personal intelligence directing the process. Was it another entity, an entity that had evolved and had a developed consciousness, or was it simply a configuration in the collective unconscious or possibly his own individual unconscious? These are questions not answered, so far as I know, by him and perhaps not answerable on the basis of our Western psychology alone. All we know is, on this basis, that something other than this personal consciousness with what knowledge it has acquired can speak through one.

To understand this involves a good deal. First of all, what we have demonstrated implies, among other things, that the hypotheses underlying behavioristic psychology are totally inadequate for its explanation. Behavioristic psychology assumes that training,
conditioning from outside, develops the possibilities of action and of consciousness in the entity. But here is a case, granting that it is true in reality, where a conditioning from outside had no part whatsoever in providing the knowledge that was spoken through the lips of the child; on the contrary, a developed intelligence, from inside, spoke through the organism, which had not been trained in speech at all. Accepting this as true carries the implication that the premise of behavioristic psychology is basically false. This premise is, essentially, the materialistic view that the states of consciousness and the states of knowledge and the modes of our behavior are determined by external conditioning. This is fundamental throughout much of our education. And if the premise here is false, it implies a serious indictment of our educational processes. I accept the thesis that a consciousness moving from within can determine the action of the organism; and, even though aids from without may be helpful, they are not finally determinant. Note that the child used verbal concepts which were no part of its consciousness; it had never learned them. They were the concepts of the Shaman who spoke through the child. In other words, it did not depend upon the use of a developed mentality in the child, or of a brain training—the brain being in the more or less fluid condition of infancy.

But while I cannot contribute any supporting evidence out of the experience of this lifetime with respect to this action upon the child, there is evidence from other portions of the literature; for, the story or tradition connected with the ever living Buddha in the case of the Dalai and the Tashi Lamas involves, it is said, the same process. Thus, when the Dalai Lama has attained old age and death is near, he departs from that body as it falls and occupies the body of a new-born infant. This, then, is searched for by the experienced lamas and when they have found it they can identify it by certain signs, and among them, it is said, is the repetition of this statement, “I am the Buddha.” There are other signs also that exist in the literature.

But there are other manifestations of *tulku* that are not as rare as this; and that is in the case where someone of a totally different intelligence speaks through an adult who occupies a relationship to that intelligence such as that of a *chela* to a *guru*. I will tell of my experience with this as it developed in former years. Once back in either 1934 or ’35, I’d had something of an argument with Sherifa on some point which I do not now remember. She was unable to maintain her position, and she later told me that she asked for some help and lay down on the sofa. I was meanwhile engaged in something else, probably reading, when, suddenly, a strong, masculine voice spoke through her lips and that was the beginning of a period of several years of communion with one who revealed the intelligence of a Sage. The voice had a very strong manifestation of the rolling of the ‘R’ such as is characteristic of many Scotsmen, although more so. This was later, by this entity’s own effort, reduced so that it would not be so conspicuous; but, it was evident that here was an intelligence different from that indigenous to Sherifa herself. We had throughout these years many conversations, often philosophical, sometimes dealing with the details of life of another time. This entity could move the body, could dine with us, and participate with enjoyment some of the food, such as ice-cream, and even smoked with me with evident enjoyment. He was there at the time of the Fundamental Realizations, and his words were often a guiding line which helped me to deal with these totally new experiences.
Now, it was evident that his body of understanding, of knowledge, of background was totally different from that of Sherifa. I am not aware, or do not remember, that he ever used verbal concepts which were not part of Sherifa’s vocabulary, but he used them to express ideas that were foreign to her consciousness. The intelligence was extremely evident and its difference from her intelligence was also extremely evident. She was feminine. He was manifestly masculine. So much so, that even though the person speaking, in the photographic sense of the word, was feminine, still I had the sense of a masculine presence and masculine type of mentality; so much so, that it often seemed to me that I was talking with, and walking with, a bearded Sage. This, I well know, can happen, and there are others here who can testify in support of this event. There are still existent a series of reports of conversations which were taken down by one of those who is here in this room at the present time.

Now, this is a use of *tulku* for the communication of information. The original individual was not a dweller on the gross physical plane at this time. He said that he dwelt in a subtle world, a domain where most of the Adepts abide most of the time, taking gross physical bodies only occasionally. He said that the last gross physical body that he had was 10,000 years ago and was in the last island of the Atlantis, which tradition says was located in the Atlantic ocean. The poem directed to the “Atlantean Sage” in *Pathways Through to Space* was directed to my impression of this entity. It was a very valuable companionship, very helpful to me; and, perhaps *Pathways* would never have been written except for his suggestion that it should be written.

Now, this is only part of the story of *tulku*, only part of the reason for its use. There is a deeper, more fundamental application of it. You’ll notice, here we have communication that is occasional, usually for brief periods, in this case involving speech, but it also can involve writing composition. It appears that much of the writing of H. P. Blavatsky was by means of *tulku*. There is a quotation from one of her letters to her sister in which she speaks of this and gives something of the inside view. Quoting:

> Several times a day I feel that besides me there is someone else, quite separable from me, present in my body. I never lose the consciousness of my own personality; what I feel is as if I were keeping silent and the other one—the lodger who is in me—were speaking with my tongue. For instance, I know that I have never been in the places which are described by my ‘other me,’ but this other one—the second me—does not lie when he tells about places and things unknown to me, because he has actually seen them and knows them well.

> Do not be afraid that I am off my head. All that I can say is that someone positively *inspires me* . . . more than this: someone enters me. It is not I who talk and write: it is something within me, my higher and luminous Self, that thinks and writes for me. Do not ask me, my friend, what I experience, because I could not explain it to you clearly. I do not know myself! The one thing I know is that now, when I am about to reach old age, I have become a sort of storehouse of somebody else’s knowledge.³

³ Ibid., 303.
In Colonel Olcott’s *Old Diary Leaves*, there is much interesting information provided in connection with the writing of *Isis Unveiled*. Different ones took over in HPB.’s body and wrote sections of this volume; and that would explain differences of style in different parts and also the general lack of unity in the work as a whole. He learned to recognize the presence of these different entities. There’s an amusing story told concerning one incident. Upon one occasion there had been a female guest in the house who at a point of leaving went to HPB. and kissed her upon the cheek. Colonel Olcott then went with her to the door when she left, but coming back he was very much amused, for he recognized who the entity was that at that time had been writing through HPB’s body. This entity was a very ascetic sadhoo, and when Olcott returned, he in a rather tragic way said, “She kissed me!” And Olcott said it was too much; he had to sit down.\(^4\) There are hazards that can happen in connection with this, and I, too, know of such experience. Very well, this is enough for this part of *tulku*.

There is another more fundamental part that has a bearing upon incarnation of a very special sort. Very highly evolved entities connected with the earth evolution, such as the Great Buddha, or the Blessed One, have two important concerns to deal with the problems of incarnating in a child body and bringing it up, training it in the usual way. In such cases, another entity who stands in some close relationship with the greater entity may provide the instrument that is later occupied in a sense that’s quite technical and which we will develop later. To distinguish between two such entities that become in effect one entity, I have suggested the conception of a joint combination of a junior and senior partner—the junior partner being the one who provides the physical instrument and the senior partner being the one who provides the higher equipment in terms of knowledge and wisdom. The incarnations of the Dalai and Tashi Lamas are presumptively of this sort. But one of the most outstanding examples is the incarnation known as Shankara. The story here is typical, is one of the best attested, and we will go into it at some length.

It is said that at the time of the Brahmanical persecution of the followers of Buddha, the Great Buddha said, “They have sinned, but I am the cause of their sin, therefore I shall come to them.” Bear in mind, the compassion of the Buddha extended not only to those who where wronged, but also to those who committed the wrong; for after all, those who commit wrong pay a price of *karma* which may be quite severe. It is said, then, that about fifty years after what we ordinarily would call the death of the Buddha, or what is commonly called in the literature his final taking of *Nirvana*, he appeared again—and there is a mystery in this appearance—that he took the body of a Brahman child and then spent thirty-two or thirty-three years in a very active life promulgating the doctrine in written form and in spoken form and meeting contestants in the Brahmanical world in dialectic discussion for that whole period. It was indeed said to have been a very intense life.

The story is that this child, this Brahman child, had mastered the Sanskrit alphabet at the age of one year; that he had assimilated everything that the pundits could teach him by the age of seven. Now, that means everything of external knowledge which was the

possession of the academicians of the time. He returned to his mother, at this age of seven, and felt the call to the guru. He asked his mother to give him permission to go to his guru; but she, feeling that he was too young, that he was too defenseless to go forth into the world, did not give the permission. But he had some powers. He would not go without her permission, but he was not above playing a trick. So, one day when bathing in a nearby stream, he produced the maya of a crocodile grabbing his foot, and he called to his mother and said, “The crocodile will not let go until you give me permission to go to my guru.” So she gave the permission. Before leaving he told her that if she ever had need he would return and render such help as he could. Then, it is said, he struck across the fields in a beeline to where that guru was located away at some distance.

Now, the esoteric teaching is that this guru was none other than Patanjali himself. He arrived when Patanjali was in a state of samadhi deep enough to be unconscious of his external environment and that there also was a great rainstorm; this Shankara stopped. And when the guru to be came out of his samadhi, he realized what had happened and knew that his great chela had come to him, for there had been a prediction that the greatest chela he would have would manifest himself through the use of an unusual power.

Shankara remained, this child you remember only seven years old, remained with his guru for four years; in that time acquired, so the accounts report, four basic Realizations and then was on his own at the tender age of eleven. He went forth, so it is said, and gave his first sermon at Benares and began to acquire disciples. It is said later, that he was writing on his masterpiece on the banks of the Ganges in some accounts at the age of twelve, in others at the age of sixteen. This was his great philosophic work, the Commentaries on the Brahmasutras. Well, from that there followed a very busy life filled with writing. And much of this writing has come down to us in translated form, so we are more certain of what he thought than we are in the case of either the Buddha or Christ because they spoke only and it had to remembered by those who wrote it down, and we never feel quite sure that the memory was always precise. It is said that he went up and down India meeting those who had interpretations of the Vedic truth which were in some way inaccurate and disputed with them by dialectic that this, there interpretation, was not correct but rather this that he was giving, and in most cases he convinced them. In some cases, however, he made enemies. He founded mathams, or monasteries, some of which have continued down to the present day and in fact one of the heads of this matham met the writer, Mr. Brunton, as he reported in his Search in Secret India. The word Shankara was taken as a title by the heads of this monastery and it is said that this one individual was the sixtieth in the line.

There is a famous story in connection with the life of Shankara which I am told should not be left out; and so we will tell it. At the time that Shankara had finished the writing of his Commentaries on the Brahmasutras, it is said that a Vaisya, in the appearance of an ancient Brahman, appeared to him and raised a thousand objections to the theses of interpretation which he had developed. These objections, Shankara answered to the satisfaction of the Brahman and then he was granted sixteen more years of activity—the original plan having been for only sixteen—thus bringing up his whole period of activity to thirty-two years.

Now, there was a Brahman artist whom Shankara wished to have draw the certain artwork in connection with his manuscript, and also Shankara wished this Brahman as
one of his disciples. He’d answered many questions in discussions with the Brahman, but when he requested this discipleship, the wife of the Brahman, who is said to have been Sarasvati in disguise, said that she would not release her husband unless Shankara answered a question of hers. Now, heretofore Shankara had been able to answer every question that had been put to him, and he felt himself under the obligation of giving an answer to any question that might arise. She asked him a question that was the only type of question he was totally unable to answer; bear in mind, he was only a teenager, and secondly a confirmed ascetic for life. The question is, “What is love?”—meaning the term in the ordinary biological sense. Shankara was stuck and instantly recognized who it was that occupied the body of this seemingly ordinary woman. He recognized her as Sarasvati, for she alone could have been that clever. He said he could not give an answer then, but that in one month’s time he could.

So he left with his disciples and was traveling across the country when he found—here the stories diverge, but in one it says a Raja who was lying on the ground having become ill while on a hunt; in another case, it states that he was lying on his funeral pyre, that the flames had started; and in either case, he saw that the body was vacated and still in condition so that it could be occupied. He put himself into a catatonic trance and left his body with his disciples, entered the body of the Raja, who came to life immediately much to the surprise and delight of the followers. He then returned with his followers to his palace, that is the palace of the Raja. Here he very soon demonstrated a superior wisdom and a different interest in life; whereas the former Raja had been more or less of a sportsman, the Raja this time appeared to be a man very much interested in finer elements of culture. Furthermore he showed practical wisdom in the decisions involving the affairs of state that were not shown in the Raja before. And also the Raja having had two wives, they too recognized that here was a different and much more satisfactory entity. The ministers were wise enough to realize what had happened and so they sent forth men to find somebody who was lying in a state of catatonic trance for the purpose of destroying the body, thereby hoping to capture this entity in the body of the Raja so that the presence could be permanent.

This suggests something of the story in connection with the Christ when Herod issued orders for the destruction of all male infants two years old or younger and the Christ was saved by reason of his parents having been warned to take him and go into Egypt. One suspects some symbolic meaning here.

At any rate, Shankara had meanwhile forgotten who he was, and that brings up a very interesting point; for bear in mind, this dual entity, by reason of the fact that in part it was the Great Buddha himself, had nonetheless forgotten who he was in the new body. It implies that the obscuring force of an animal body is very great and can afford excellent reason why one who has reached to a certain stage of evolution should dread to have to take incarnation in an animal body. It is a strong obscuration of consciousness. And it is an unpleasant thing because it is animal in its essential nature.

But, apart from that, to continue with the story; meanwhile, the disciples had become worried and they somehow did not know where the palace of this particular Raja was. So they went out in parties as minstrels to the neighboring Rajas, and as minstrels they were admitted to entertain the Court and in song they told the story of what had happened. Those who came to the place where Shankara was, in the Raja’s body, sang
their story and that awakened Shankara’s memory. He then, it is said, dropped this body a second time, and that time it remained dead, returned to his own body in the nick of time when it was already on a funeral pyre, came to life and then returned to the Brahman whom he wanted as a disciple and answered the question of Sarasvati to her satisfaction. And also as a result of this experience, in which we may assume reasonably well, the ministers of the Court did not contribute the material, but rather the wives of the Raja. It also led to the writing of a treatise on the subject of love which, it is said, is a classic to this day. Sarasvati, then, left the form of the woman and returned to her natural state, so the story says, and the Brahman became a follower of Shankara.

Now, there is a certain aftermath to this story. Somehow the event became known. Years later, he was in northern India, as I remember it, and was asked to perform a certain ceremony that would lead to the opening of a certain door in a temple, and that only one who was an ascetic and possessed certain peculiar powers could perform this office. But there was one who knew of this event, which I have just described, and he objected on the ground that only a life-long ascetic could open that door; but Shankara answered, “This body has always been ascetic.” So, he was permitted to open the door.

Now, there are some interesting implications here. How in the world can a born ascetic, one committed to an ascetic life, become sufficiently acquainted with the life of the householder to write a treatise on the subject of love, and yet have remained an ascetic all the time? I would guess that Shankara would have made a very good lawyer and would have been a formidable presence in a court. The asceticism was required of the body, of what is known technically as the Sthulopadhi, the asceticism did not imply that there could not be the acquisition of knowledge by the inner entity of any sort whatsoever. The asceticism is for technical reasons in the performance of magic or other functions that require that kind of preparation.

But this enough on the story of Shankara, and the time now has rolled around to a little over an hour and I’m not through with the subject. So, we will close this for the present time and we’ll meet this afternoon at three o’clock where I will continue with some of the basic theory upon which a tulku combination becomes possible; and then also add certain material connected with what we might call a fundamental tulku involving most of humanity at the time of the incarnation of the Manasaputra; and, finally, some thoughts out of my own experience that I have not yet found in the literature.