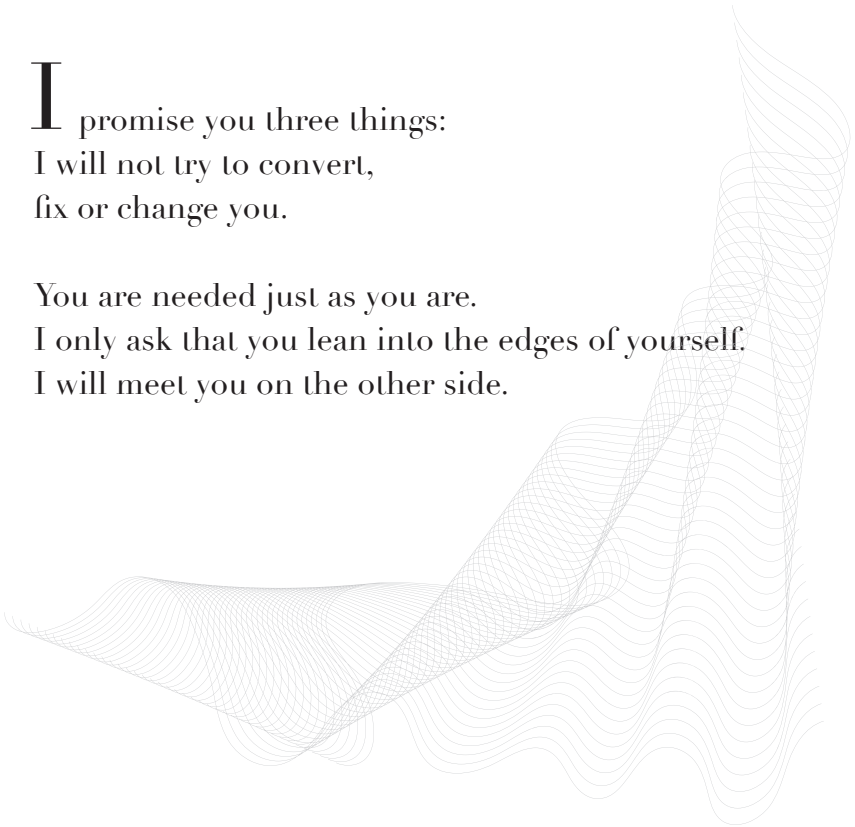




I promise you three things:
I will not try to convert,
fix or change you.

You are needed just as you are.
I only ask that you lean into the edges of yourself.
I will meet you on the other side.



A NEW STORY

This book is a new, more inclusive story of who we can become. Not the true story, the only story, or even the best story. It is a new story because it is still unborn and, if you choose, you will carry and birth it together with others.

You.

The misfit.

The one who is finished with business as usual.

You are not a rebel. Rebels react. You are not from the resistance because you are a part of the problem. You are not defined by your past, but you embrace it. You know how desperately we need new stories about who we are, why we are here, and what we should do... what we *can* do... to ensure that our planet will be habitable in years to come. You

are aligned with a core story that *every* single person and *each* point of view matters. But you also sense that holding (only) this story is no longer valid—our stories need to synch.

Like a guitar chord, each story is a note that can be played simultaneously, to create new harmonies. Ideas, feelings and experiences can be woven into larger stories about how we can come together, learn from each other, heal, and love. You know that collaboration is possible, even among enemies.

You sense that it is no longer acceptable to just agree to disagree, or to assume that because our stories are different, they are incompatible. All of *these* stories are also outdated because they do not take into consideration how complex we have become and how we need stories that can bridge and fuse the growing fragmentation in society.

I want to make stories that dare not to know their endings, that help us understand our interdependence and to rethink our outlooks on life. I want to take part in creating stories where paradoxes are accepted, mystery is celebrated, and soulful living is integrated, with everyday practicalities. Stories that do not sacrifice human needs on the alter of cultural and social values.

In these stories, we are the protagonists and the supporting cast, the writers and the fictional characters. These stories are not random, and they do not resolve neatly. They combine playful chaos with harmony, the rhythms of life with the inherent balance of the universe, systemic thinking with radical acceptance.

*Our lives are the ink with which
these stories will be told.*

Our stories are always part of a bigger story, which is itself part of an even larger, always evolving story. No matter how truthful your story is, it is partial. This is also true of the stories I will tell in this book, and of your reaction to them. In my own life, I have sometimes felt resistance to change when someone offered me a perspective that was different from my own. The hardest thing to do is to admit to ourselves that we are wrong or limited when the perspectives that we hold so dearly no longer align with the ever-dynamic nature of reality.

You see, humans have the innate capacity to adapt to new environments, ideas, and values. But we also have an inherent fear of change. Once in a while, this tension facilitates a massive shift in how we live and perceive the world. For example, the 17th century gave us the Age of Enlightenment, a radical shift that made *reason* the dominant form of thinking and introduced such concepts as liberty, science, and tolerance. The first part of the 20th century brought humanism and then relativism. The second part of the 20th century saw an explosion of knowledge and access to technology we couldn't have dreamed of before.² I believe we are ready for another big shift—a call to adapt— by integrating all that came before with what we know today, for the sake of a sustainable future.

It is the contention of this book that premodern wisdom

can coexist with modern ideals *and* postmodern freedom. Throughout the past 300 years, we have divided everything into many wonderfully discrete systems, but have not done enough to integrate them into working synergies, especially in the domain of spirituality and psychotherapy. This division should be seen not as an endgame but a stepping stone in the evolution of our collective spiritual work.

It is happening. With each passing year, momentum toward integration is building. We can, through what can only be understood as new emerging stories, heal the ancestral wounds in our communities for the benefit of people and life on this planet.

We need new types of synergies that can simultaneously grasp the incredible diversity we hold as a species, together with localized, *human scale*, collaborations. Far too many of us are isolated in this respect. Torn between our human potential (and need) to actualize as individuals and the lingering thirst for what can only be realized by commitment to a system that is bigger than the self.

If you are a seeker of this kind of integration, this book is for you. If you feel like a misfit in a confused world, this book is for you. If you seek more collaboration and belonging, this book is for you! It will speak to your longing for depth but also to the reason you cannot go back to your original spiritual home—no matter how profound, wise, or complete it may be.

| *Because you are from more than
just one world(view).* |

You seek a common ground among differences and the emergence of new ways of perception. You hold a vision for the future, but still do not know how to make it come alive *today* for yourself and for the people and planet you care about.

You live in the future.
Surrounded by the past.

There is a reason you feel this way: You see that the solutions currently on offer will not suffice: The ideas of today cannot address the needs of tomorrow. You are not alone. There are many like you. I meet them daily in my community, in my office, at gatherings I host, and when I teach. They are parents, ecologists, politicians, spiritual leaders, educators, researchers, students, and economists. Each might come to this from a different perspective, but like you, they have all felt a call to adapt.

And all of them agree that we must reorient our thinking about the issues at hand. This reorientation will need structure to thrive because insights happen in context. They need to be cultivated by organizations, culture, and social systems. And how can the insights of tomorrow be born in a collective psyche that produces structures that still run on high amounts of fear, exclusion, and dual thinking?

| *What is called for is an upgrade to our cultural
operating system.* |

This is true in fields as diverse as education, science, politics, and spirituality. And it is happening already in some profound ways around the world. Just not fast enough. Despite the fact that my interests range across all of these fields, I chose to focus this book on the role that spiritual misfits (that's you—you would not pick up this book if you were not one) will play in co-creating the future of western spirituality.

If you sense the tectonic shifts in the geopolitical atmosphere around the world; if you discern how social media and the internet at large are contributing to epidemics of loneliness and isolation; and if you do not know what to do, then you are ready to start the difficult work of dialoguing with the unknown. Because of your inherent flexibility and capacity to be at ease with multiple perspectives, you are in a unique position to facilitate the kind of conversations that will give rise to new, more expansive stories.

My offer is modest. It is not a grand theory, but rather a model for *grassroots* solutions that can shield your immediate circle of family, friends, and community from the impact of what is to come. The model I present might feel like a tiny dinghy facing rogue waves of unwieldy, unpredictable events, but it is more than that. It is a much-needed cultural counter to heightened individuality on the one hand and to ethnocentricity on the other. I see it as the next stage in post-secular spiritual engagement.

My model is open source, flexible, and simple to use, and is based on many years of personal and academic research,

including facilitating spiritual and therapeutic groups in Canada and in other countries. The model is like a story factory: you can weave in meta-narratives that speak to *your* community and embrace your personal ones. It is designed to mimic forces of nature that have sprung from the source itself (which I call God, but please call it whatever you want). It will allow you to integrate wisdom traditions, science, and postmodern choice in the interest of greater collaboration and belonging.

You do not need to read this book from cover to cover. Each chapter was written to stand alone. To help you make the most of the model, I have divided this book into two parts. **Part One** offers the rationale and context for the model. In it, you will find three sections, representing three contextual aspects of the misfit's mission: Spiritual, religious and social. These sections will speak differently to different people. **Part Two** describes in more detail how the model might be used in your community and give you a blueprint of a working model. In the end of Part two, you will find a chapter on the dangers of spiritual collaboration. I encourage you to not skip that chapter.

If you are less interested in the overview Part One provides, you can skip to Part Two to learn how to implement the model in your life and in your community and go back to Part One later, as needed, to dive into the context and theory.

I want you to think of this book as an invitation to inhabit a way of being that aligns with life's intelligence, however

you define that intelligence. It is a weaving that provides the capacity to see beyond your current social, cultural, and spiritual horizons. I believe that this is one of the central tasks of our time and that this is what is being asked of ‘misfits’.

We live in a truly uncommon age of integration. Vast amounts of knowledge are being organized and integrated in ground-breaking, systematic ways.³ All over the world, people are creating revolutionary models of spiritual, psychological, ecological, and cultural ways of operating, all trying to provide solutions to our current local and global crises. These are bridges to a worldview that many are sensing is coming—one where truth can be universal, relative, and developmental *all at once*. Each generation has an opportunity to participate in the creative, co-evolutionary unfolding of reality. Now it is our turn.