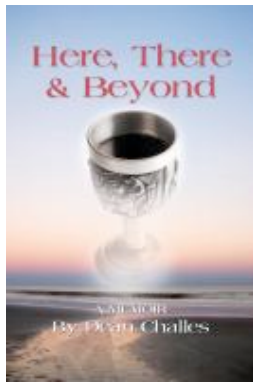


Here, There & Beyond



A MEMOIR
By Dean Challes



Here, There & Beyond is an enthralling account of the author's decision to break out of the box from his secure life and taking a life changing quantum leap towards living his life in alignment with an inner calling. He takes a physical journey riveted with relationships, serendipities, live saving miracles, and surprising adventures while going on an inner emotional, psychological, and spiritual one as well - the two journeys turn into one organic trip.

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HERE, THERE & BEYOND

*The remarkable story of a life-changing leap
and epic travel journey of mythic significance
and self-discovery riveting with adventures,
serendipities, miracles & loves*

A MEMOIR

By Dean Challes

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First Edition

*In Loving Memory –
Steven Sophia Vickie*

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INTRODUCTION

I've heard "You must write a book" more times than I can recall over the years. The prompting would invariably follow the recounting of one or another of the numerous experiences contained in "Here There & Beyond."

My typical response would be that it was just one experience out of a never ending series of them over my twenty month travel odyssey. I would usually follow with the statement that "my ego doesn't need to write a book," or "it's all up here in my head where it needs to be." In brasher moments I would suggest it needed to be a movie not a book.

I've increasingly realized over time how significantly the life-changing quantum leap I made from a secure and successful life in one of the world's most desired cities significantly impacted me afterwards both personally and in my life pursuits. More recently, before my latest travel abroad, the advisement I received to write about my experience shifted from those who wanted to vicariously hear more about my travel exploits to those who counseled that it was important to do it so others might benefit from the inner process that encouraged me to make the dramatic life change. This slowly began to register with me.

While visiting Alexandria, Egypt for the first time this past year I visited the new replacement of the historic Great Library of Alexandria. I was awed by the facility's design as I approached and filled with inspiration as I stood in the center of the main reading hall. It was as if standing in the center of a crystal cathedral and a sacred moment for me.

Then and there an inner call sounded to sit down, then and there, to begin writing the manuscript. I returned to the library every day to write longhand in notebooks. A break in writing was taken when I returned to Cairo and resumed and completed when I

arrived to my retreat on the Greek Aegean island of Samos over the late spring and early summer weeks.

If I had been compelled to write this book at an earlier period it would have solely focused on the captivating and intriguing events I experienced during the travels: adventures, serendipities, miracles and loves, all of which make for quite a story in their own right. These are what made for interesting tales, but that it is only half the story.

The inner mental, emotional, and spiritual changes that evolved within were the more significant other half that needed to be acknowledged to make the story whole. Thus, self-discovery and self-growth insights as they took hold in me are weaved into the storyline. They are witness to the symbiotic relationship our inner have with the outer: “As it is within, so it is without” as the adage goes.

It has only been after my study of western Buddhist spiritual teachings in later years that I can appreciate and put into context and a spiritual framework the instinctive inner realizations that occurred during this two year period. Through this filter I can clearly see the seeding and early germinating of my spiritual growth was in alignment with the teachings of Eastern and Biblical prophets of past millennia.

The story lends itself to three distinctive phases. Part 1 – “Here,” relates to the period of discovering and acting on the inner call that compelled me to make the leap into the uncharted territory that followed. The “Here” also refers to the fact I still resided in San Francisco during the “break-out” period.

Part 2 – “There,” takes place during the first year abroad, when I’m literally on training wheels with respect to a fresh life style and a new reality. To be sure, it all was spellbinding and adventuresome, but was only preparatory to entering into the third phase.

Part 3 – “Beyond,” is the theme of the last year where the experiences that took place on my second pass through the continent went beyond the events of the extraordinary preceding

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phase and beyond what I could possibly have imagined. It was a time when I was “in the flow,” or in the zone as some would put it. Seemingly every action, activity, and thought of mine unfolded in a manner that suggested “my path was becoming one with the path I was on.”

The places, events, and people appear as they chronologically occurred. The places are the actual ones passed through, and all the individuals are referred to by their real first names. I leave most ambient details of the wondrous places visited to the travel guides as this is not about how very special they are, but how very special my experiences there were.

I acknowledge in a heartfelt way all those individuals who entered my life and crossed my path during this odyssey. These include my loves, friends, and all the brief acquaintances I came across who are integral to this story and irreplaceable links in this magical chain of experiences. This story has infused every day of my life since with childlike wonder and gratitude.

Dean Challes

PART 1

HERE

“Know Thyself”

- Temple of Apollo at Delphi

“If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”

- Henry David Thoreau

CHAPTER ONE

Decision Time

“You can’t do that,” exclaimed Mark.

I had just informed Mark that I was resigning from my long secure position with the major public works infrastructure project I had been engaged in the previous eight years.

“If I don’t do it, who’s going to do it for me?” I responded, making reference to the open-ended world travel plan I had decided to embark upon.

“I wish I could do that,” he chimed on second thought.

“Well, you can. It’s just a matter of your priorities and choices.”

This decision to drop out and tune in, as the saying goes, was the culmination of an inner journey spanning the recent years of my adult life. It had gained depth and intensity the last several months. An internal drumbeat bellowed that I should follow my inner calling and that meant walking away at the ripe age of thirty five from a wonderful bachelor life and professional career in San Francisco.

I lived on top of Knob Hill, enjoyed a wide circle of friends, and led an envious life style in one of the world’s most desirable cities. I had thought San Francisco was the only place to live and a day away was one day less in paradise. I also was so into income generation that I considered a day I didn’t earn a dollar was a dollar lost.

My adult life to this point had been one of uninterrupted responsibility starting with a degree with honors at the University of California at Berkeley, followed by four years of decorated military service as a US Naval destroyer officer. A career immediately ensued on my return to San Francisco with an eight year engagement in the program management effort with one of the largest infrastructure projects ever undertaken in the U.S. I had the prospects of a sustainable and financially secure. I had it all, so to speak.

Running alongside my outer life was an inner personal curiosity and quest with the not so mundane matters of metaphysics, parapsychology, and spirituality. This was motivated by a strong inquisitiveness about the meaning of life and the grandeur of the universe - the unfathomable mystery of it all. This consumed my personal reading material and study when I managed a break from an active social and sports driven life style.

In the period leading to taking the quantum leap an increasing inner stirring was questioning the extent to which my outer life was not adequately responsive to my growing inner awareness and needs. The outer was predominantly consumed by an enviable work career and social life. It was a good and rewarding experience from a professional standpoint, but I instinctively knew there was more to living a full life than the self-satisfaction of a great work career and stimulating social life residing in San Francisco.

I questioned whether going to the same office, working with the same people, and having the same deterministic path for an indeterminable time into the future was all there should be about life. No matter the material and ego enhancing rewards, there had to be more to a full life than this. All that the American dream presumed to be - marriage, home, children, and a middle class life - although quite sufficient for most seemed for me to lead to a limited experience of life, if not a dead end.

The trappings of a steady career and a conventional life style required being beholden, if not a slave, to a full time job to keep the ship afloat as far as the eye could see, like it or not. An evolving inner awareness suggested such a path was becoming incompatible with my inner yearnings. I couldn't fathom being in a dark tunnel with no light at the end of it.

It is common thinking in society to be defined by one's job title and work, and I had been no different in ascribing to this. I proudly identified myself by what I did and what title I held. My thinking and self-identity were dominated by this superficial tag of who I was. But, there was a gnawing within me that this was not the real me. I was one thing to the world and another thing within myself. It wasn't a

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coming-out-of-the-closet type of thing; it was more of a disconnect feeling between the growing awareness of an inner essence not in alignment with its expression in the outer world.

I had not been able to connect the dots reconciling all of this at first, and I didn't have a road map with definitive sign posts to go from here to there. There was a vast world out there thriving with different cultures, peoples, languages, traditions, and realities that in totality encompassed the fullness of life. This was the starting point for me, and I yearned to be able to immerse myself in it, discovering and exploring it as the outer expression of an inner longing to live a full life. But the catalytic agent that would totally convince and compel me to take the leap was not yet formulated in my mind.

My previous exposure with the world beyond America's borders was while on naval duty on a ship based in Japan operating in and out of various countries in the Far East. But that was like swimming with hands tied behind the back; it was under the auspices of the highly restrictive and controlling military environment. The different cultures and peoples, however, did have a powerful pull on me even while looking in from the outside.

That exposure most probably planted a seed in my subconscious to emerge into these fascinating worlds from the inside rather than from the outside looking in. The seed, however, was long dormant and buried within me; like a plant seed embedded in dry desert earth for years until the breath of life brought on by moistening rain drops release it to sprout, bloom, and fulfill its destiny.

Inflection Point

What I would consider the inflection point occurred while perusing a bookstore during one lunch hour in downtown San Francisco. My hand was drawn to a book on an upper shelf in the rear of the store. I slid the book out to look at the cover. It read, "Memories, Dreams, Reflections," by C. G. Jung, the noted psychologist. Something clicked

in me and without understanding why I grabbed the book and brought it home.

In short order I was captured by the book and its treatise on dreams and the unconscious; in effect, the examination of the individual's relation to their unconscious. In Jung's view the unconscious is the great guide and friend of the conscious, and that it is an integral, important, and personal expression of the whole individual. This resonated with me and stoked my instinctive belief that the integration process is necessary in being a whole person and living a full life. Jung's method for getting there was the Holy Grail I had been seeking; alignment of my inner essence with its expression in the outer.

I began to record and self-analyze my dreams following the principles and unique insights presented by Jung while deliberately working my way through the book. His insights and analyses would guide me to a measure of self-understanding.

At the height of my engrossment in Jung's book my eyes came across a newspaper announcement of an upcoming weekend seminar on Jungian dream analysis by the San Francisco branch of the International Jungian Institute. I had never before come across an announcement posted by the Institute in daily reading of the newspaper, and took this as a clear sign of Jung's synchronicity that I had just read about. I registered for the program in due haste.

The seminar was literally mind opening and greatly boosted my confidence in identifying the underlying themes of my dreams. It also brought home to me recognition and acknowledgment of the masculine and feminine aspects of each individual – the anima and animus, as Jung put it. In my case, I had been exclusively driven by the animus all my life – chauvinistic to a point. Now, I was ready to balance this out and to identify and live out the feminine aspect of my psyche.

That intensive weekend became more confirming to me that my life should be more fully lived. Laboriously spending two-thirds of my waking hours committed to work at the same place with the same people and repetitive issues, notwithstanding how professionally

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satisfying and lucrative, was not what my life should be beholden and limited to. A series of dreams that I recorded before, during, and after the seminar along with sketches I made from guided imagery periods at the seminar suggested that stirrings of a dramatic change was cooking beneath the surface.

In large part this was substantiated in dreams projecting me as an office-of-the-deck on an aircraft carrier commanding course changes to the helm redirecting the ship on a more effective operational path. A sketch I produced during the seminar portrayed a naval ship as a spiritual entity at the bottom of the ocean. This was not a foreign concept with me as I had long considered the destroyer ship I was on having a unique spirit of its own, as I thought all ships had. These two instances along with other subtle indications and fresh revelations suggested a change in my life from all that had been an outer priority for me.

A summoning from within was shouting out that I open myself open up and pay homage to what was emerging. I was becoming conscious of a dormant inner urging to engage with and immerse in the world at large, wherever it led. In effect, to begin to lead from my heart instead of my mind and intellect; from an existing linear rationale mind set to something more open and expansive of spirit. Qualities that had served me well the first half of my life now were only half the equation that my life should be about; from this time forward the other half of the equation needed to be acknowledged and acted upon.

The Dream

The sign that sealed my conviction on breaking away and taking the leap was presented in a dream that occurred during the Saturday night of the weekend seminar. In the dream I am running over hilly desert terrain in a competitive way with a couple of other men, each of us carrying weighted loads on our backs. We are approaching a station ahead where we would be able to stop and refresh. When the dwelling

is approached it is guarded by angry dogs that I alone manage to befriend, thereby gaining sole entrance into the small adobe hut.

Inside the small space an elderly woman resides. She is large, colorfully adorned with native colors indigenous of her Central American ethnicity. It appears her existence consists merely of reclining in a rocking chair guarding a back door leading outside. I approached and stood before her. Although there is no exchange of words between us she nods and signals for me to go through the door.

I looked upon this as archetypical of a universally wise old woman giving me permission to go through a previously closed door. It was early recognition of the heretofore weak feminine anima aspect of me, while at the same time suggesting the weakening of my chauvinistic attitude.

Exiting the back door I resume running, alone and refreshed. I arrive at an isolated lagoon off of the ocean. The water is calm, azure, and crystal clear. The sand is fine and sugar white, and a spray of palm trees are sparsely spotted in the area. The scene is incredibly peaceful, tranquil, and surrealistic. The lagoon itself is situated alongside a blown out extinct volcano.

I feel exhilarated and consciously feel at home and at one with the environment. I am in some sort of paradise. My attention is directed up the sides of the extinct volcanic crater where I observe a black tar like substance spilling over the top rim. The black fluid is flowing out of the innards of the earth and down the side. The dream ends at this point.

Interpreting this vivid dream took on profound significance. I took it as permission to enter into a new dimension and world. Confirmation that this was originating from deep within me was poignantly exemplified by the black fluid surging out from the depths, analogous with the opening up and flowing out of my subconscious.

The seminar leader validated my analysis in her response to the paper I wrote at her request that we describe our experiences during the weekend. In fact, she was so impressed and enthusiastic in her praise of my paper that she recommended I follow up and become a member and student with the Institute.

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My fate, however, was written for me and I needed to act on it. I recognized the confirmation I needed to follow my destiny. It required altering the course of my life and attendant priorities and values. It was a life changing opportunity to align my outer life with the awakening of its deeper inner purpose; leaving a life of comfort to seek a spiritual union with the world. I had permission to pass through my closed mental door and go through the wide open gate of my heart. I also had great faith in the process to go ahead with it.

For some people who experience taking life changing leaps of varying degree there is a gradual and lengthy break with their past: work, living situation, relationships. In my case I woke up and in short order knew what to do. I was ready to move on faith by breaking out and moving on, leaving a life of comfort to seeking a life of fullness.

This was not to be a temporary repose or sabbatical with a return to life and a job as usual; not quitting or running from a complaint or the end of something grudging. Nor was it to be an adventure seeking diversionary excursion, temporarily escaping from the routine only to return to it again, such as a tourist holiday or a student's year off, or carrying on as a counter culture drop out, or as the play life of the idle rich. Neither was it based on a decision to leave for adventure, for thrills; to escape the boredom of a privileged life.

On the contrary, it was to be a life change with no going back to what was. I didn't consider it a case of burning all bridges, but a positive step in building new bridges, to step in a better direction, albeit, in uncharted territory.

Resignation

This led to the tendering of my resignation. It came as astonishment to my colleagues, friends, and dear mother. But, there was no turning back from it. I had the confirmation that I needed that at this stage in my life this is what I needed to do. It was tempered

with the realization that no outer purpose lasts forever but is subject to time and being replaced by some other purpose.

The temptation to reconsider this dramatic event arose from the manager of my great apartment atop Knob Hill. “Dean,” Artis proclaimed when I informed her of my plans and intention to vacate the apartment, “you’re the first to know that the building owners are announcing the conversion of the apartments into condos next month and offering them at well below market value to current tenants. You would be wise to buy yours. It would be a great investment even if you leave for a while.”

I could have exercised that option in a heartbeat by putting together the minimum down payment. The option was to either go for an investment in brick and mortar that would pay off handsomely or to an investment in my heart and soul and wind up with little monetarily.

“Artis, I know it would be a good financial move to make, but I don’t know where my life is going to lead me from here or whether I’ll even come back here. I feel a need to remain totally unencumbered from this point on, so I’m going to pass on this.” The words poured out without forethought. Of course, the San Francisco real estate market sky rocketed in subsequent years, and as time would unfold I was eventually left with little financial resource, but otherwise enriched beyond imagination.

Nevertheless, my priority in life was in making a quantum change. Heretofore, I was obsessive about producing income and holding title. Now, I was placing myself in a position to living truthfully and in fullness with my inner yearning.

I was far from being financially independent, relying in large part on ten weeks of accrued vacation pay received in the last paycheck. Could it last three months, six months, or a year or two? Time would tell.

Common sense and conventional voices were all against my making such a move. On the contrary, it was uncommon sense. There are seasons in one’s life when genuine sacrifice of the most secure and valued things are essential for further growth. If the sacrifice is not

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made willingly and consciously with full consciousness of the loss, then it will be a sacrifice to growth gone wrong. I was very much aware of the sacrifice and moving confidently in alignment with my inner map.

The words that spoke most to me during the farewell good wishes were those scripted on a card accompanying a good bye present from my administrative assistant, Sue. The card suggested:

*“Travel expectantly
Every place you visit is like a surprise package to be opened
Untie the strings with an expectation of high adventure
Travel with curiosity
It is not how far you go, but how deeply you go that mines the gold of experience.”*

The message that would always resonate with me is that it is how deeply you mine rather than how far you go that precipitates the gold.

Cross Country

I closed the door to my apartment for the last time and traveled to the family home where I spent three weeks with my widowed mother. Making final preparations there revealed what a neophyte I was to open ended travel. Repeated iterations were made on what to take along and how to baggage it.

Mobility needed to be considered along with adequate wear for all seasons. I had been pretty much a clothes horse in the San Francisco scene and now wrestled over style versus functionality. Not helping was the fact I didn't have a clue where I was going, how long I would be gone, what my travel style or mode would be like, and every other uncertainty beyond a planned one way flight to London.

Jennifer, my domestic partner for two years in San Francisco, had moved back to her native London the year before. She had been an

international flight attendant while we were together and decided to move back to London. I suspect her purpose for returning to her native country was my holding back on any hint of marriage.

I adored her. She was gorgeous with an absolutely pleasant, disarming, and innocent disposition that my friends were all taken in with, most of all me. Perhaps, the underlying reason why I didn't pop the proposal was in being held back by the evolving inner process going on that had yet to play out. But, I also think that being driven by a rational intellect as I was so very disposed to at that time completely overshadowed any due diligence I might have given in listening to and making a heart centered decision.

Jenny and I were still in communication with each other and were both looking forward to reuniting. I planned to travel to London from New York in June and to take it from there.

New York is my birth place and home for the first nine years. We lived in Brooklyn, although my crib years were in Astoria. My Greek immigrant father continued his life trek westward by relocating us to California to enter business with an old country relative. My mother's side of the family all lived in the New York area, and I wanted to visit with my cousins, aunts, uncles, and a college friend before skipping over the pond.

On the way to New York I stopped in Madison, Wisconsin for a week to visit with my sister and her family, and then took an Amtrak train to NY. Hitting the rails for the first time along with getting accustomed to toting a large and heavy duffle bag gave me an early taste of life on the road. It was discomfoting and inefficient hauling the heavy load around and I thought at some point I would have to parse it into a more practical package.

The first stop in the Big Apple was to Eddie's Upper East Side apartment, a fraternity brother from Cal. Ed was both quick and eager to convince his girlfriend residing a few blocks away that it would be a grand gesture on his part to leave the apartment exclusively to me. He, obviously, would then have to sleep in hers. Being the effective negotiating lawyer that he was she relented, and I would tease him

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years later that I was responsible for the cementing of the relationship with his future wife.

Another friend from my Navy days also lived in the City and indicated he could arrange for my air trip to London through his company's travel office at a considerable discount to the going fare. I thought a few seconds on a departure date and gave it to him.

Great anticipation now began to set in, but not without a taint of apprehension to flying off the North American continent for a future of unfamiliar sights, dramatic life style change, and a completely uncertain future.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Musings from High Up

The plane lifted off from Brussels leaving behind enough memories and stories to consume a lifetime. Flying high above the clouds afforded the opportunity to lean back and allow a free flow of thoughts and feelings. I had an eerily detached feeling, one of peace with myself and the world. I refrained from sinking too much into reverie but, rather, to focusing inward for a reality check in preparation for facing a new life ahead.

I gave a passing thought of what sparked this odyssey. Common sense was not on my side, breaking away and making such a bold move from an envious life. The rallying cry was, perhaps, best expressed by Thoreau, “....*if one advanced confidently in the direction of his dreams and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success in unexpected common hours.*” I was not looking for paradise, nor did I find it; I found something more precious - a way of living happily and growing wisely.

I mused on whether a form of culture shock would be experienced on my return. My values, attitudes, priorities, and lifestyle have changed in the time I’ve been away. I now related more to being a citizen of the world than a nationalist. I would like to avoid negatively reacting if I find my native culture now somewhat alienating.

I would try to freely move and live in the world around me, but not be of it. I believe I have largely eschewed the values from the conventional American way: a healthy sense of egocentric individualism, competitiveness, aggressiveness, and unbridled materialism and consumption.

I’m not that individualistic and egoistic anymore, but one with the people I’m with, one with what I do, and one with the present. I’m not into competition as before, driven to compete and rise above others, but desire to share, partner, and team up. I am not aggressive in pursuit of self-serving interests at the expense of others as before, but think

I'm now more sincere, warm, non-intimidating, and lovingkind. I am not interested as before in consuming production and, therefore, having to work for the privilege of consuming all that stuff I really don't need or want.

I repeat to myself that only through surrender and acceptance will I be able to contentedly align myself with living and moving in my home country, notwithstanding occasional backsliding. This, in itself, could be a formidable challenge.

It was during these past twenty months when I was far outside my native element that I experienced myself the most; that I see and feel who I really am the most. And one who knows their self can step outside their self and watch their own reactions like an observer. I will need to be mindful of this and not let it slip away.

Living simply and possessing only what I need is my new joy of living. I have arrived at this reality from within, not conditioned in me from without. I am beginning to see who I am and intend to do that which I feel an inner desire to do or that I love, regardless of what anyone thinks. Above all, I want to preserve the sense of life I attained on the road. It has taken root deep within and become one with me.

My attitude from this point forward will be to work to live, not live to work. I've discovered there is much more to life than being a slave to work, no matter how rewarding, prestigious, or ego enhancing. I will take extended periods of quality time engaging in soul enhancement activities, travels, studies, or just pursuing that which speak loudly and persistently from within. I will be able to live with the uncertainty of it all, even enjoy it. I have become comfortable with uncertainty. It opens up infinite possibilities.

I ruminate on what my life would have been like had I stayed put and not acted. The bank account would certainly have been a lot healthier and a promising career advanced. But I unequivocally feel no amount of money could replace what I have experienced. More importantly, I have broken through the egg shell that fenced in my life, opening the door to unlimited roads to travel down in the future that

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never would have been previously considered. The full life that I envisioned living is now obtainable and sustainable.

Now, this odyssey that began with no agenda, plan, objective, or schedule and that proceeded simply by putting one foot in front of the other into the world at large with a loving heart and open consciousness has run its course. It has unfolded well beyond my wildest imagination. Beyond imagining that such adventures, serendipities, miracles, and loves could be experienced; beyond imagining how the inner self-discovery progress could have been shaped by events and evolved as it has; beyond imagining how my attitudes, values, and priorities could have been altered so much.

As the plane descends and the speakers announce the approach to JFK I am left with one final wrap up thought: the gates of my consciousness have been swung open. There is no closing off or narrowing of the gateway from this point, only a responsibility to live in accordance with that awareness and the lifetime commitment to increase the opening.

My Jesus Moment

The plane landed in the late evening at JFK. I had not communicated ahead to anyone that I was arriving back. I had earlier thought to call my mother's sister, Aunt Clara, who lives in Queens. My earliest years growing up in Brooklyn was with her family and mine living in adjacent buildings. She was for all intent my second mother.

"Hello, Aunt Clara, It's Dean! I'm back in America, at JFK," I informed her from a public phone at the terminal.

"Dean!" she shouted following a disbelieving pause.

"Can I come over?" I interjected before she could regain her voice.

I hailed a cab to the nearest subway station, per her instructions, then another cab ride after the train ride to her upper flat in a two family house. I arrived without a hitch and knocked. She was

Dean Challes

expectantly waiting and I heard her steps immediately descend the stairwell to the door.

“Is that you, Dean?” she shouted from the bottom landing.

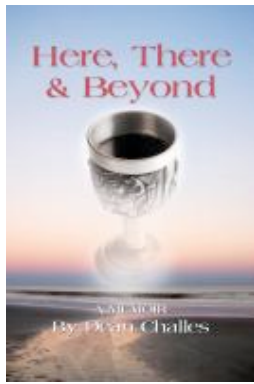
“Yes, Aunt Clara.”

Opening the door she looked and gapped with mouth wide open, unable to say a word for some seconds.

“Dean, you look like Jesus Christ!” she finally cried.

I might have looked like Christ, but that was as far as it went. There is a lifetime ahead of working on the Christ within.

I ended one journey on the road and ready for the next journey with the rest of my life.....it will NEVER be the same!



Here, There & Beyond is an enthralling account of the author's decision to break out of the box from his secure life and taking a life changing quantum leap towards living his life in alignment with an inner calling. He takes a physical journey riveted with relationships, serendipities, live saving miracles, and surprising adventures while going on an inner emotional, psychological, and spiritual one as well - the two journeys turn into one organic trip.

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