

personal favorite claims the scientist accidentally changed himself into a half-man, half-goat creature and fled to the nearby wilds where he resides today.

Books about inexplicable occurrences and improbable anomalies have a long pedigree: among the most famous are the myriad citations collected in four books by Charles Fort, published from 1919 to 1932. Nearly 100 years later, Godfrey, who has published over a dozen books on this topic, and can therefore reasonably be cited as an authority, has written another book about Things Which Shouldn't Be So—but which, apparently, are.

Can we trust the evidence of our senses? Ms. Godfrey is somewhat noncommittal, but seems to think that, in most instances, we can and we should. Aren't the stories we tell one another akin to the warning cries that animals exchange among themselves to signal predators in their midst? Ms. Godfrey speculates that they may at least be “subtly disguised handbooks for survival in a ‘goblin universe’” and concludes with the wise admonition that “*legend* is not synonymous with *untruth*.”

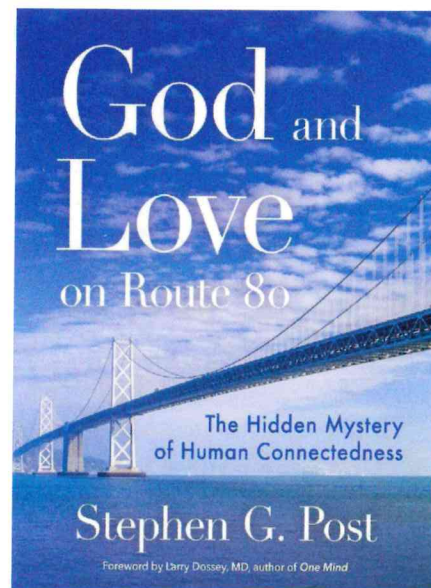
Francis DiMenno

Francis DiMenno is a humorist, historian, and longtime music critic who blogs at <https://dimenno.wordpress.com/>.

### God and Love on Route 80: The Hidden Mystery of Human Connectedness

Stephen G. Post  
Coral Gables, Fla., Mango Publishing Group, 2019.  
301 pp., paper, \$18.95.

Stephen G. Post is the best-selling author of *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*. He has taught at the University of Chicago Medical School, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, and the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University. His latest book, *God and Love on Route 80*, attempts to show how compassion improves the



lives of others and explains how this can apply to everyone on the planet.

*God and Love on Route 80* describes episodes in Post's trip from New Hampshire to Oregon after his graduation from prep school. The book has interludes between each episode with pictures of and quotes from spiritual teachers. It gives the reader a feel for the people he met on his journey, the towns he was in, and how he embarked upon his spiritual path regardless of obstacles.

In the prelude, the author recalls himself as a boy in New Hampshire. He never heard the voice of God, although he didn't dismiss the possibility. When he was young, he had a repeating dream in which he saw the light-blue image of an angel's face and heard it say, “If you save him, you too shall live.” The boy knew that some dreams could express divine intent. He was able to understand this calling years later at the Pacific end of Interstate Route 80, nearly 3000 miles away in Oregon. His trip there enabled him to experience synchronicity and the way it works.

The car that Post started out with broke down, so he hitched rides and met a variety of interesting people. For income, he played guitar in restaurants to earn tips. He went into a Buddhist temple for the first time and started chanting with others. He liked chant-

ing because it gave him a sense that the boundaries between himself and others had disappeared. In his travels, Post had a conversation with the author Ken Kesey while he was writing his book, *Sometimes a Great Notion*. In a bookstore, Post heard the poet Robert Bly read sections of his book *Light around the Body*.

The author purchased a Buddhist *gohonzon* scroll, a sacred object that helps the person who possesses it to solve problems. It assisted Post in keeping someone from jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. The experience gave meaning to the words he had heard in his dream: “If you save him, you too shall live.” After his journey, Post completed his college education and went on to teach medicine and become the president of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love. In 2016 the institute's website was taken down and replaced with the black flag of ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. To counteract this, Post came up with the idea of the Route 80 Youth Essay Contest. It was for young people to write about how others encouraged them to hate and how they turned that into something positive. They shared their abilities to support the principles of religious freedom, tolerance, and love for all of humanity.

Post was invited to the United Nations Population Fund to help reflect on spirituality and a sustainable future. He spoke about the essay contest and how the ISIS hacking had inspired it. The UN had the contest winners present their essays, and the event was broadcast to 80 million young people worldwide.

I found this book enjoyable and easy to read. It shows how the writer had the courage to be adventurous and turn opposition around in order to bring God and love into the lives of others on a global level.

Marie Otte

Marie Otte is a writer, meditation teacher, and astrologer. Her work has appeared in *Quest*, *DreamNetWork.net*, and *Satvidya*. She holds a bachelor's degree in music education from Northern Illinois University.

### The Art and Science of Initiation

Edited by Jedidiah French and Angel Millar  
Shepperton, Surrey, U.K.: Lewis Masonic, 2019.  
285 pp., paper, \$18.

What is initiation? Its fundamental meaning of “to begin” sounds straightforward, but its effects in magical or religious practices are often hotly contested. There is an on-going argument, for instance, as to whether initiation simply confirms what candidates have already attained through their own efforts, or whether it ushers them into an entirely new state. Perhaps it can be both, with varying emphasis. If there is no element of shock or surprise, such as in the modern-day ordainment of a priest, where everyone knows every step of the ritual in advance, it is more of a confirmation, although the ordinand may well still experience a change of state during the service.

If it is an initiation pertaining to a magical or mystery tradition, then a shock is almost always included, which can propel the candidate into a new form of consciousness. This can take the form of extreme conditions, which will still work their effect even if known about beforehand. The budding shaman may be sealed into a “vision pit” for several days, for instance, and aspiring knights of chivalry often passed a night-long vigil in total darkness before admission into the order. Other shocks may come unexpectedly: cold-water baths, nakedness, insults, solitude, and abandonment are all the stuff of traditional initiation rituals, as well as of modern esoteric and ceremonial initiations. The ritual usually ends in a redemptive way, such as emerging into bright light and being given a warm welcome from one's fellow initiates.

As well as shock tactics, simple tasks which must be performed perfectly under scrutiny can also trigger a new state of consciousness. Perhaps the initiation requires you to light a candle in front of your fellows—a seemingly simple act, but one that

demands every atom of composure that you can muster as you walk the length of a long hall, between rows of observers, towards the altar at the far end. Then you must pick up the match, strike it without fumbling, light the wick, and hope—maybe even pray!—that it will stay alight. Perhaps the rules of your initiation even depend on the success of this act. If you can do this, you will almost certainly have achieved a state of heightened awareness, notwithstanding any pain or pleasure along the way.

Initiation is a perennially fascinating subject, with no two views on it being the same, as this book proves. The collection of essays is a kaleidoscope of different takes on initiation, mostly within Masonic and magical traditions. It opens with the excellent definition: “Initiation appears to be a set of practices, and/or processes of realization, through which certain human beings across time have endeavored to achieve deeper knowledge and higher wisdom.”

The book is deliberately compiled as a selection of both scholarly and speculative studies, allowing the authors full rein in topic and viewpoint. This takes us from a survey of cultural initiation practices (Richard Smoley) to Aleister Crowley's magic (Richard Kaczynski), with different forays into Swedish Freemasonry (Susannah Akerman) and the mysteries of Samothrace (Greg Kaminsky) along the way. There is value here in bringing together different areas of research, and different kinds of insight. However, it is a bumpy ride if one attempts to travel the whole terrain at once. I found the inconsistency of viewpoint awkward—some articles are addressed primarily to Masons, some to lovers of magic, some to scholars. It is a difficult book to read consecutively, and certainly I found it easier to pick out a few essays at a time.

But it gives food for thought. Smoley's essay boldly puts forward the notion that we are missing out on initiation rites in present-day society: “Many adult men today are not men;

they are boys. Many adult women are not women; they are girls. In our society it is possible to go through all the stages of life, even successfully, without maturing emotionally, much less spiritually.”

Without disputing Smoley's main point, I would add that for many women, the process of giving birth can be a profound initiatory experience. For me, many years ago, the initiation of childbirth propelled me to accept another spiritual initiation which I was offered a few months later. I had “come of age” and was ready to step up. And the possibility of childbirth as an initiatory act might explain why societies have traditionally held more male initiation rites than female ones.

Another favorite essay for me is Herbie Brenman's personal and engaging account of being initiated into the Society of the Inner Light, founded by the British occultist Dion Fortune. Brenman writes with both humor and solemnity. Sometimes we learn more from story-telling than from weighty sermons.

And there is C.R. Dunning's “Contemplation and Ritual Initiation,” affirming the principle of awareness as the active transformatory ingredient in both ritual and initiation. “Our present concern is not about bringing something new into Masonic experience but rather about intentionally and comprehensively *practising* contemplation to make the most of Masonic initiation.”

Quite. Dunning's analysis points out the value of silence, of study, of reflection; in other words, not the dramatic blindfoldings and dunkings of initiation, but the consciousness that we have at our disposal to transform our inner state of being. By being present in the action, and being aware of whatever is around us, we act out our own initiation.

Cherry Gilchrist

Cherry Gilchrist's latest book is *The Circle of Nine: An Archetypal Journey to Awaken the Divine Feminine Within*.