

So Close, I Can Feel
God's Breath

Dr. Beverly Rose



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CONTENTS

PREFACEix

PART I: What on Earth Is a Thin Place?

Chapter 1: Life on the Edge3

Chapter 2: Discovering the Unseen9

PART II: What Makes a Place Thin? The Five Ws

Chapter 3: Who Am I? Born of Divine Breath19

Chapter 4: When Am I? Eternity in Time29

Chapter 5: Who Is God? The Unknowable Made Knowable41

Chapter 6: Who Is Jesus? God Unveiled57

Chapter 7: What Am I? Dust Falling, Spirit Rising77

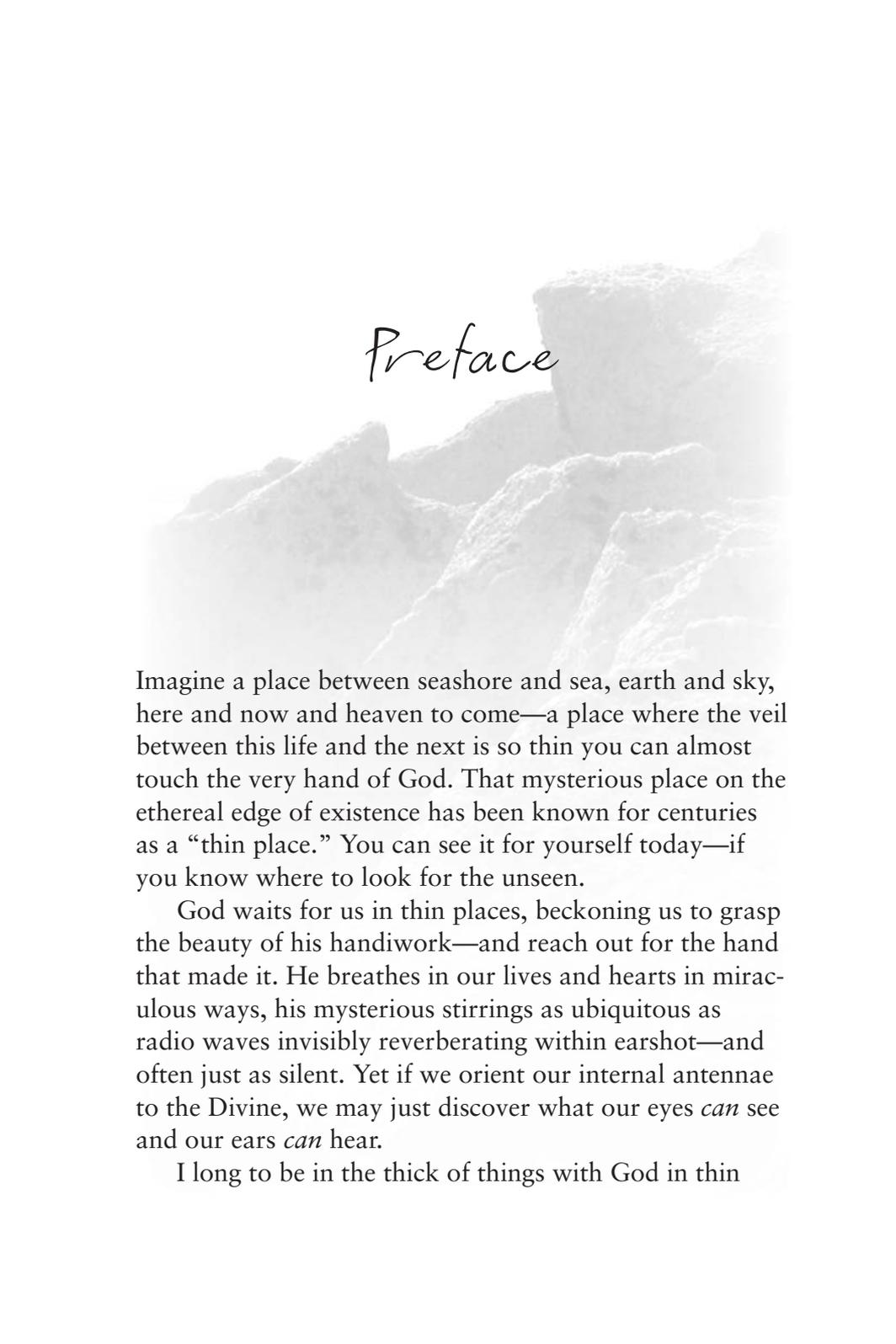
Chapter 8: Why Am I? Made for Spiritual Embrace91

Chapter 9: Where Am I? On the Border with Jesus113

PART III: How in Heaven's Name I Became a Thin Place

Chapter 10: My Father and Me—and the Son?131

Endnotes153



Preface

Imagine a place between seashore and sea, earth and sky, here and now and heaven to come—a place where the veil between this life and the next is so thin you can almost touch the very hand of God. That mysterious place on the ethereal edge of existence has been known for centuries as a “thin place.” You can see it for yourself today—if you know where to look for the unseen.

God waits for us in thin places, beckoning us to grasp the beauty of his handiwork—and reach out for the hand that made it. He breathes in our lives and hearts in miraculous ways, his mysterious stirrings as ubiquitous as radio waves invisibly reverberating within earshot—and often just as silent. Yet if we orient our internal antennae to the Divine, we may just discover what our eyes *can* see and our ears *can* hear.

I long to be in the thick of things with God in thin

Preface

places, those spiritual sweet spots of life that are here, there, and everywhere. I wish to brave the frontier at the very edge of existence to assure myself again and again that there is more to life than just existing.

Finding thin places? Fat chance, you may say. That's what I said too, until I found myself beholding a divine spark in my dead mother's eyes as she suddenly returned to life. In that mystifying place between life and death, heaven and earth, I witnessed more than there is—because we are more than what we seem to be.

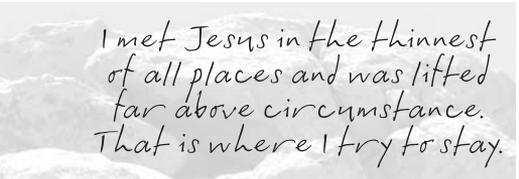
I awaken every morning in search of God in thin places—God willing, that is. For I am trapped in an unforgiving body afflicted with a neuromuscular disease and rise only by the power of his grace. I know, because several years ago, bedridden and bereft, I met Jesus in the thinnest of all places and was lifted far above circumstance. That is where I try to stay.

Since that remarkable day, I have had many amazing moments when I have felt not only spiritually whole but also physically healed—for the moment. That's because I'm healed in moments—although I've yet to be cured. Nevertheless, such amazing encounters with the Lord give me the promise of an extraordinary life to come and hope in the midst of a life that is far from ordinary.

We don't have to be on thin ice to find ourselves in thin places. They are all around us, even within us. We

need only have the determination to uncover what we are destined to discover.

So come along. We are about to embark on a journey to miraculous places. Come sense the lus-



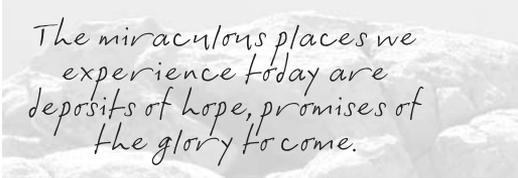
*I met Jesus in the thinnest
of all places and was lifted
far above circumstance.
That is where I try to stay.*

cious, mystical divinity of a place that lies just beyond your grasp but not your reach. Find the extraordinary in what appears to be the ordinary, seeing for yourself a vision not only of what life is but also of how it can be. Feel the Lord breathe into your heart and soul. Discover the love and grace of God in your everyday relationships. The possibilities are endless, because these amazing places not only evoke our emotions but also enable us to transcend them. You may even discover that you can be transformed, becoming a thin place for others.

Come dare to wonder, for there are wonders all around us and even within us. We may go through life absorbed in the mundane, or we may suddenly find that right in front of our very eyes is a miraculous place. We can spend our days on earth in quiet desperation, waiting for the day we reach heaven, or we can reach for heaven now, catching a glimpse of the unbroken continuum between this life and the next. The miraculous places we experience today are deposits of hope, promises of the glory to come.

Embark on this marvelous spiritual journey, and you may find yourself home, seeing more clearly where you've been and where you're going.

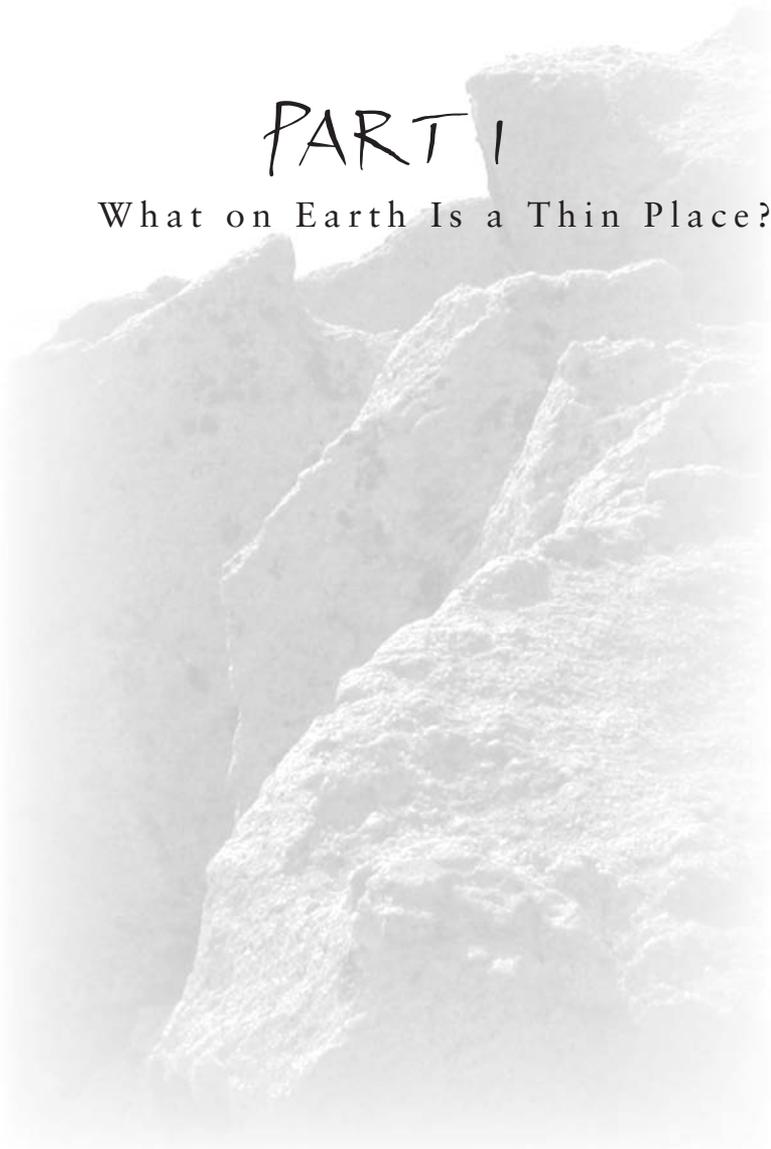
You need not take my word for it. Nor do you have to believe in thin places. You need only have faith with which to see.

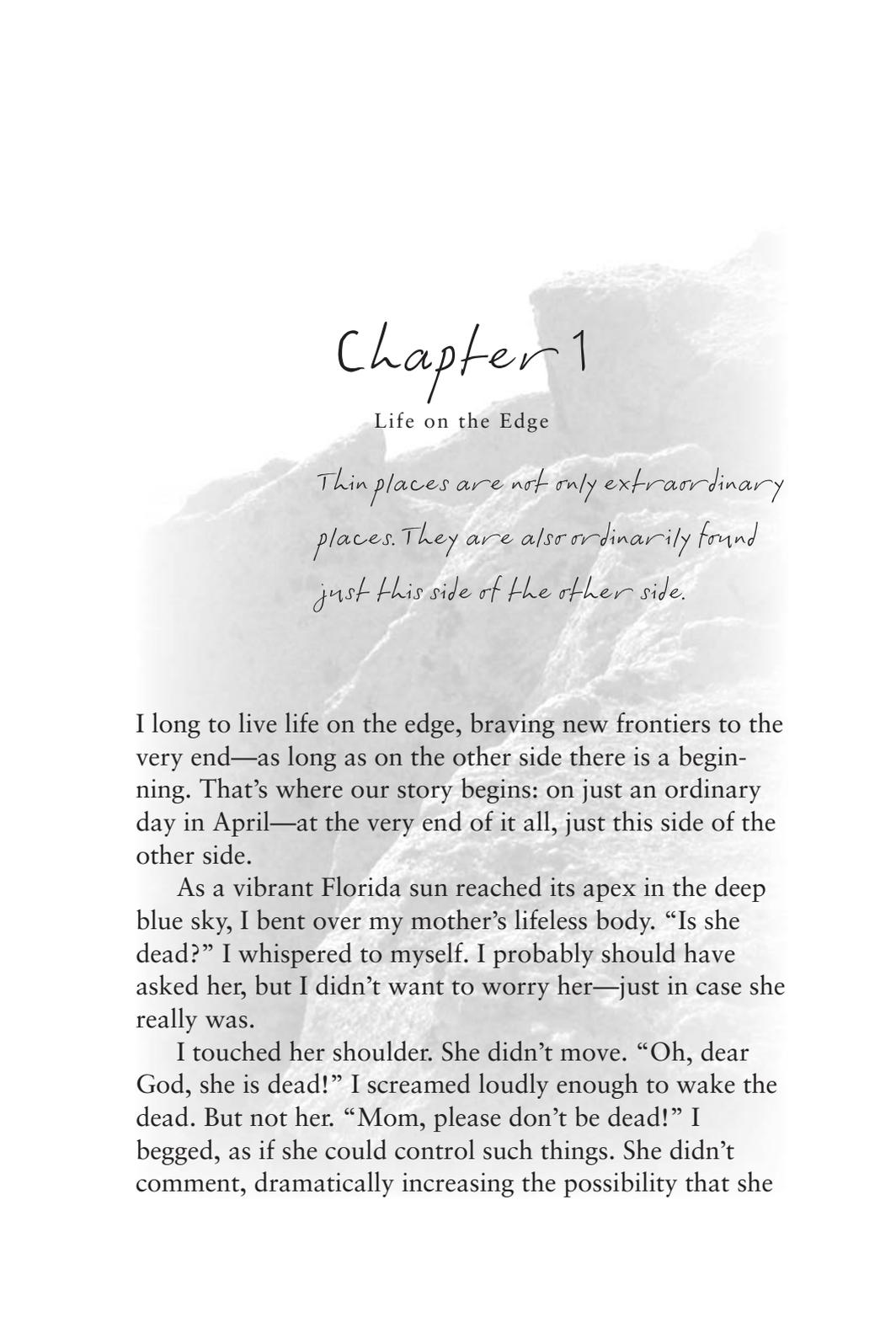


The miraculous places we experience today are deposits of hope, promises of the glory to come.

PART I

What on Earth Is a Thin Place?





Chapter 1

Life on the Edge

Thin places are not only extraordinary places. They are also ordinarily found just this side of the other side.

I long to live life on the edge, braving new frontiers to the very end—as long as on the other side there is a beginning. That’s where our story begins: on just an ordinary day in April—at the very end of it all, just this side of the other side.

As a vibrant Florida sun reached its apex in the deep blue sky, I bent over my mother’s lifeless body. “Is she dead?” I whispered to myself. I probably should have asked her, but I didn’t want to worry her—just in case she really was.

I touched her shoulder. She didn’t move. “Oh, dear God, she is dead!” I screamed loudly enough to wake the dead. But not her. “Mom, please don’t be dead!” I begged, as if she could control such things. She didn’t comment, dramatically increasing the possibility that she

so close, i can feel God's breath

was. When it comes to Jewish mothers, death is usually the only explanation for silence.

I placed my hand over her mouth to feel for breath and thought I detected a wisp of air. Or was it just the breeze rattling the shades protecting her from the scorching Florida sun? If only she could have been shielded as easily from the vicissitudes of life.

Frantically, I checked for a pulse. My heart pounded. Hers didn't. Her body grew rigid; her gaze became fixed and glassy. I stared into the faded blue-gray eyes that had once overflowed with love, filled with compassion, sparkled when she laughed, grown intense when she spouted pearls of Yiddish wisdom. I had so often chosen to see life through my mother's eyes because they were so full of life. Now all I could see in them was death. My body froze while my mind raced.

Only minutes before, my mother had awakened me from sound sleep. "I don't feel well." That was all she'd said. I helped her back to her bedroom before she collapsed onto the bed, took several labored breaths, and fell silent.

"Breathe, Mom, breathe!" I shouted over and over again. But she wasn't deaf, just dead. Finally, in resignation, I whispered, "I love you, Mom. I love you." I thought they would be my last words to her.

Then I had an insight. I placed my mouth over hers and blew a stream of air into her lungs. Suddenly she stirred to life. It wasn't long before she took advantage of her newfound breath to speak. "I was floating. It was so nice and peaceful. Then I heard you say 'I love you,' and I decided to come back." *From the dead, Mom?* I wondered. But I dared not ask.

The paramedics finally arrived to rush her to the

emergency room. She was long settled in her hospital bed when I found myself sitting on a bench on the local boardwalk, trying to calm myself down. The death scene may have been over, but the dreadful reruns played on in my mind.

I removed my shoes and headed for the shoreline, laboring hard in the soft sand to make it to the water. It was the same route I had taken so many times before. But this time was different—I could hardly walk. The symptoms that would later be diagnosed as an incurable neuromuscular disease had overtaken my thirtysomething body, leaving me practically bedridden, unemployed, and living with my parents.

Whether or not I could walk, I needed to flee to a place of refuge—to a familiar place of transcendence, where I could be lifted up when the trials of life were getting me down. For years I had made tracks in the moist, packed sand along the edge of that beach, feeling the grains settle comfortably between my toes. It was always a marvel to me how sand, so thoroughly infused by the rising sea, had not yet been claimed by it. Borders are like that. They impart a unique strength and hope, somehow managing to hold a tension between here and there while retaining a distinct place between places for themselves.

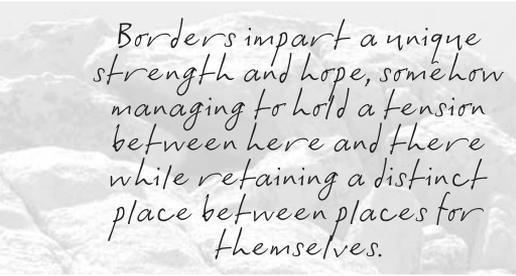
One minute she was here and the next, where? My mother's body lay whole on the bed, minus my mother. It was as if she had planned a dinner party, furnishings freshly polished, dinner on the table, then slipped out the back door, leaving a cadre of expectant guests waiting. A hospitable hostess such as my mother could never abide such a lack of courtesy. Besides, the fallout from some of our less than gracious relatives would kill any nice Jewish mother—that is, if she weren't already dead. My mother

so close, i can feel God's breath

would have even come back from the dead just to make a socially acceptable exit and save face.

I had to face it. One minute her eyes were vibrant; the next, vacant. One moment they were valuable agents of sight; the next, obsolete orbs. In those eyes I saw her leave and then return as if she had never left. Somewhere in between, I caught a fleeting glimpse of the person who was my mother. She was not the body she was in—and out of—and in again. She was far more.

I was not much of a believer in the afterlife, having been raised in the Jewish religion, which doesn't take an official stance on such matters. Some Jews choose to believe in heaven; others don't. My statement of faith was best expressed by a postcard I had taped to my wall after a particularly enjoyable trip to California



Borders impart a unique strength and hope, somehow managing to hold a tension between here and there while retaining a distinct place between places for themselves.

many years before. Underneath a drawing of the Golden Gate Bridge was the caption, "There may not be a heaven, but at least there is a San Francisco."

Even I doubted that in the split second between life and death my mother had gone to "the City by the Bay." *But where did she go?* I wondered—and how had she managed to come back? I knew it was biologically possible to revive a dead person. But for a dead person to travel somewhere and then return because she had heard me say "I love you"? I thought my words had fallen on deaf ears.

Mysteriously, I had experienced a body without a person, while my mother claimed to have been a person without a body. It was as if a flame could exist without a

wick. Didn't something have to enable the flame to burn? Was it possible that what I had witnessed in her eyes as she returned to life was a divine spark? I didn't know, but I had come close enough to know that something was there—and only the thinnest veil had kept it from my literal sight. Years later, I would come to realize that in that miraculous, mystifying moment between life and death, I had ventured into a place unlike any other place. That's because thin places are not only extraordinary places. They are also ordinarily found just this side of the other side.

Endnotes

Chapter 2: Discovering the Unseen

¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 85.

² “Thin Places,” <http://www.thinplaces.net/> (accessed July 22, 2005).

³ Harold S. Kushner, *To Life* (New York: Warner Books, 1993), 148.

⁴ “Gandhian Institute,” <http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap10.htm> (accessed July 22, 2005).

⁵ Kushner, *To Life*, 151.

Chapter 3: Who Am I? Born of Divine Breath

¹ Kushner, *To Life*, 37.

² Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1949), 73.

Chapter 4: When Am I? Eternity in Time

¹ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 418.

² Ibid.

³ George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 222.

⁴ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 359.

⁵ Isaac Asimov, *Treasury of Humor* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1971), 240.

Chapter 5: Who Is God? The Unknowable Made Knowable

¹ Woody Allen, *Without Feathers, Getting Even, Side Effects* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1989), 6.

² Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 85.

³ Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Humor: What the Best Jewish Jokes Say About the Jews* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1992), 147.

⁴ Allen, *Without Feathers*, 25.

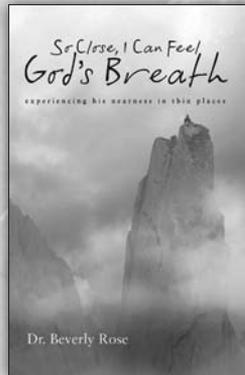
⁵ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1960), 32.

⁶ Elie Wiesel, in a speech given at the White House on April 12, 1999, entitled “The Perils of

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The action is a reminder of the opening sequence of Genesis: the Holy Spirit, the "breath of God," is the agent of the "breath of life" (Gen 2:7; John 20:22). As God breathed life into Adam, so Jesus, "the last Adam," breathes new life into His people. Jesus becomes, in Paul's language, "a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). It marked the appearance of the apostles "God's foundational, rather than normative, church builders (Eph. 2:20). The Bible. God's Breath (a, 'ãffãf%ãf-ãf-ã,¹ Goddoburesu?, "God Breath"), sometimes misleadingly localized as Judgment, is a powerful Wind-elemental spell that was once considered to be the strongest spell of its element. This spell creates a pillar of immense atmospheric pressure that crushes enemies into the ground with a tremendous force of wind. This spell has no relation to the Angel Skill or Fonic Hymn known as Judgment, nor with the other spell that also goes by the localized name, Judgment, which is currently