

# **Out on a Limb Study Guide**

**Out on a Limb by Shirley MacLaine**

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# Plot Summary

*Out on a Limb* by Shirley MacLaine is the third memoir published by the famous dancer and actress. In this memoir, Shirley MacLaine shares with her readers her experiences in self-discovery as she made an attempt to find a deeper meaning in her life during a time of stress and uncertainty. Shirley is having an affair with an English politician, an affair that leaves her confused, lonely, and wondering what it is about her personality that pushes the men in her life away. While struggling with this relationship and the questions it creates, Shirley goes to Peru with her good friend David and learns some of David's convictions about spirituality. These convictions lead Shirley to the realization that it is her purpose in life to write this memoir in order to share this view of spirituality with the world. This memoir is a revealing portrait of a woman in crisis who finds a path to self awareness and peace, a memoir that will offend some and enlighten others.

Shirley MacLaine is a dancer and actress who makes dozens of films in her long career. This memoir is about a period of time in the mid to late seventies when Shirley is in her forties, a divorced woman having an affair with an English politician named Gerry. Shirley is deeply in love with Gerry, but fears that his guilt and his devotion to his wife and children will always leave Shirley alone. Not only this, but conversations with Gerry cause Shirley to wonder what it is about her personality that pushes men away. Gerry tells Shirley that he feels he can never live up to her expectations even as she believes she has no expectations of him. Shirley wishes she could talk to her good friend David about Gerry, but Gerry's position in the English Parliament leaves Shirley unable to discuss her relationship with anyone.

While struggling with her feelings for Gerry, Shirley is happy when David comes to town. The two meet for a yoga class. Afterward, David takes Shirley to a bookstore that specializes in New Age spirituality books. Shirley is mildly surprised by David's interest in the subject and even more surprised when he asks her to have an open mind and reads some of the books about reincarnation. As Shirley reads the books, she finds she is curious to read more and to have a few questions answered. Shirley returns to the bookstore and talks with the owner about his beliefs on reincarnation. The store owner gives Shirley yet more books to study, this time about mediums who help people understand their past lives.

Shirley reads about Edgar Cayce. Cayce channels a man who knows a great deal about medicine. This man is able to listen to people's health concerns and give them ways in which to heal their ailments. About this same time, Shirley runs into a friend from a nearby spa while taking a walk. This friend tells Shirley about a medium similar to Cayce who is currently active in Stockholm. Shortly after learning this, Shirley finds out that Gerry will be in Stockholm the following week. Shirley decides to go to Stockholm to be with Gerry and to visit the medium.

Once Shirley arrives in Stockholm, she finds herself impatiently waiting for Gerry. Soon after his arrival, Gerry tells her that his wife has flown to Stockholm to be with him, so his time with Shirley will be limited. Shirley begins spending time with a friend who lives



in Stockholm. This friend suggests Shirley accompany him and his wife to visit a local medium, Sture Johanssen, who channels an ancient man named Ambres, unaware that Shirley has already known about Johanssen and his abilities.

At Johanssen's, Shirley watches as Sture Johanssen goes into a trance and discusses spirituality with his many guests. Shirley is overwhelmed by the experience, still unsure what to believe. Back at her hotel, Shirley begins writing obsessively about everything that has been going on her life, remaining in Stockholm much longer than she originally plans. When Shirley finally returns to Los Angeles, she once again runs into her friend from the spa. This friend tells Shirley that they brought in a medium to the spa to talk with guests and that they could set up an appointment with Shirley.

The medium, Kevin, comes to Shirley's home one evening and has a pleasant conversation with her before channeling his spirit companions. These companions, John and Tom McPherson, tell Shirley that two people who are currently in her life are spirit companions who have also been a part of her past lives. In fact, one of the spirits is Gerry and he is a spirit Shirley has been married to in a past life. The other, David, is a spirit who is like Shirley's soul mate, the one spirit who will always be in her life no matter the circumstances.

Overwhelmed by her meeting with Kevin, Shirley throws herself into learning more about reincarnation. For many months Shirley studies these books while traveling with her stage show. When Shirley finally arrives back home, David comes to see her. David convinces Shirley to travel with him to Peru. Shirley agrees, though she is shocked to find they will be staying in a tiny mountain village in a hotel that is little more than two barren rooms. However, there are sulfur springs there that help Shirley find a level of relaxation she has never known before. In fact, these springs enable Shirley to have an out of body experience that helps her to become more receptive to some of the spiritual concepts David wishes to share with her.

David tells Shirley about meeting a woman, Mayan, there in the mountains while hiking with friends. This woman appears to know a great deal about David without his sharing the information with her. This woman also tells David that she is from outer space, even showed him the exact area in the sky where she has come from. Mayan tells David that the soul is a real thing, that it exists in the space between molecules that causes atoms to remain intact, a form of energy scientists do not understand. Mayan also explains that souls are immortal and they are returned to physical form in order for the soul to work out some kind of Karmic justice. Finally, Mayan tells David he will one day meet Shirley and that he should tell her these things so that she can tell the world through her celebrity.

At first Shirley refuses to believe David's story, finding the idea of aliens illogical. However, as she continues to spend time in Peru with David, she finds herself more open to his ideas. Shirley eventually returns to Los Angeles where she will form some conclusions of her own and write this memoir, just as Mayan says is her destiny.



# Chapters 1-2

## Chapters 1-2 Summary and Analysis

Shirley MacLaine is a dancer and actress who makes many successful films that include one Academy Award winning performance as Best Actress. This memoir takes place in the mid to late seventies when Shirley is in her forties.

In chapter 1, Shirley is jogging on the beach, thinking about her father, a closet philosopher. Shirley watches a bird fly over the ocean and remembers a time in which she has a dream about flying that is so vivid it seems real. Shirley also reflected on her past in which she has made more than thirty-five movies, her acting partially inspired by her dramatic mother. Shirley travels a lot in her work, something she loves to do. In fact, Shirley's previous books are about her travels throughout the world. During those travels, Shirley becomes aware of the different religious convictions of people worldwide, including the separate spiritual journeys each of her friends are conducting. One friend in particular stands out in Shirley's mind, David, a professional wanderer of sorts who pays for his travels by doing odd jobs here and there. Shirley misses David, whom she has not seen in some time, and wishes she could talk to him about her current lover, a married English politician named Gerry.

Shirley returns to her apartment, a building she built with her first professional paycheck, intending to take a shower. However, the phone is ringing when she walks inside. It is Gerry, asking Shirley if she can meet him in Honolulu that weekend. Gerry has to be in Hawaii for a North-South Economics convention and hopes to have a few spare moments to share with Shirley. Shirley quickly agrees. This conversation causes Shirley to think back on how she met Gerry. They are introduced at several parties over a span of months. When Gerry is in New York at the same time as Shirley, he invites her to dinner. Afterward they go to Shirley's apartment where they begin their intimate relationship. However, due to Gerry's wife and his political position, they are careful to never be seen together.

In chapter 2, Shirley returns to her home, thinking of her daughter Sachi's unique multicultural view on the world, where her cook is preparing dinner. Shirley goes up to her room, a room she designed herself for her own comfort since it is the one place she spends the majority of her time. As Shirley prepares to take a long bath, she thinks about her parents. Shirley's mother had wanted to be an actress when she was young, therefore she often filled the home with drama. However, Shirley also recalls how melodramatic her father could be as well. Life at home was often tense, causing Shirley to be a tense young woman who often hid her insecurities behind laughter.

While soaking in the bathtub, Shirley recalls trips to London to see Gerry. It is always so difficult to find an appropriate apartment for these clandestine visits. Often Gerry arrives rushed, in a hurry to return to his work. One visit Gerry tells Shirley that his daughter had smelled perfume on his clothing, leading him to take a shower each time he leaves



Shirley's bed even though she stops wearing perfume for this same reason. Shirley also recalls going to Parliament to see Gerry in his element and finding him to be something of a bully, acting as though he is Prime Minister already. This gives Shirley insight into Gerry's personality as well as causing one of their rare fights.

In these early chapters, the reader meets Shirley MacLaine, a forty-something actress who should have had it all, but found her life lacking. Shirley is having an affair with a married man whose guilt colors their rare meetings and causes Shirley to feel inadequate and lonely. Shirley believes herself to be in love with Gerry, but finds that being with him often leaves her feeling alone, more alone than she felt before meeting him. Shirley also finds herself questioning her own personality, wondering if it is something about herself that causes turmoil in all her failed relationships. Shirley does a great deal of introspection in these chapters, discussing the drama that takes place in her family life when she is a child as well as some of the relationships that have impacted her life in recent years. This includes a marriage and divorce that produces one well adjusted, multicultural child. All of this introspection alerts the reader to the fact that this memoir is one of self exploration and Shirley's attempts to understand not only herself, but the meaning of her own existence, setting the stage for the spirituality that will become Shirley's focus as the memoir continues to develop.



# Chapters 3-4

## Chapters 3-4 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 3, Shirley gets out of the shower and goes downstairs for dinner. As Shirley walks into the kitchen, she finds herself thinking of her cook and her husband. Marie is crippled with arthritis, but despite this affliction she will not allow anyone in her kitchen, not even Shirley. Marie is a strong, independent woman who takes her job seriously. However, on the night her husband collapses, it is Shirley she turns to. Shirley remembers rushing into the room Marie shares with her husband and holding him as he dies. He is the first dead person Shirley has ever seen and it impacts her profoundly. Shirley also recalls visiting Clifford Odets as he lies dying and hearing him express a desire to live so he could write about the pleasure in things no larger than a fly's eye.

The following day, Shirley meets her friend David at the yoga studio. After the class, David takes Shirley to a bookstore called the Bodhi Tree that specializes in occult and metaphysical books. At the store, David leads Shirley to a shelf of books dealing with reincarnation and suggests she read some of them. That night Shirley looks up reincarnation in the encyclopedia, interested in the subject simply because she has never really thought about what happens to a person after death before. Then Shirley looks up religion, connecting the two in her mind, but coming to the realization that many religions believe in a form of reincarnation. However, having grown up Christian, Shirley has never even considered the idea.

In chapter 4, Shirley flies to Hawaii to meet up with Gerry. Shirley checks into the hotel as quietly as she can, hoping not to arouse the attention of the many reporters gathered to cover the North-South Economics Convention. Shirley waits in her room for several hours for Gerry to arrive. When Gerry finally calls, he apologizes for being held up and promises to be there soon. Gerry takes a bath upon his arrival in Shirley's room and they talk, mostly about politics as they often do. When Shirley asks Gerry if he believes in reincarnation, she is not totally surprised by his quick, angry denial of such a phenomenon. After dinner they lie in bed together. Shirley has trouble sleeping. Instead, Shirley thinks about her father and a time when he is struggling with depression. Shirley encourages her father to write down his thoughts and feelings rather than bury his depression in a bottle. Shirley's father agrees and she believes his depression improved immediately.

In these two chapters Shirley begins to describe her first encounters with death, her emotional understanding of death, and her introduction to reincarnation. Shirley is a down-to-earth kind of person who is raised in a Christian household, therefore when her friend David suggests to her the idea of reincarnation, it is a foreign concept. However, in Shirley's present attempts at self discovery, she is open to the idea of reincarnation, especially as she recalls the deaths of two people she is fairly close to and sees in the final hours of death.



In these chapters Shirley also continues to describe to the reader what her affair with Gerry is like. Gerry is a powerful man who is focused on social reform. However, Shirley believes his focus is a little off center, causing him to pay attention to a broader definition of humanity rather than the individual people. Shirley also begins to see Gerry as a power hungry, basically insecure man who has difficulties with self discovery and one-on-one relationships. It is this insight into Gerry that leads Shirley to understand his immediate denial of reincarnation. It also shows the reader the gulf that is growing between these two lovers, suggesting that the relationship will not last much longer despite obvious affection on both sides.





# Chapters 5-6

## Chapters 5-6 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 5, Gerry sneaks out of the bedroom before dawn. An hour later, Gerry calls Shirley and asks Shirley to meet him on the beach. Gerry tells his aids that he will be spending the day alone to recover from jet lag. Instead, Gerry meets Shirley far down the beach. Shirley and Gerry talk as they walk around the edge of the island. At one point Gerry stops and plays in the waves while Shirley watches, wishing she could relax enough to ride the waves with him. As they dry off on the beach, Gerry tells Shirley how much he loves her. They continue to walk, coming up to Sea World where they watch the trainers feed some of the animals. Afterward, they stop under some trees. Shirley confesses to being embarrassed to be nominated for an Academy Award because she does not feel that performers should be given such awards. Back at the hotel, they separate for a short time. Later, Shirley waits in a cab for Gerry to take her to dinner. They manage to escape without being seen. Back at the hotel, they discuss their relationship. Gerry tells Shirley he cannot continue to be so obsessed with her because it is taking a toll on his emotional wellbeing and his ability to do his job. However, he does not threaten to end their relationship.

In chapter 6, Shirley returns to Los Angeles where she runs into David again. Frustrated, but unable to talk about Gerry, Shirley asks David what he thinks the purpose of life is. David tells Shirley to look inside herself for her answers. This causes Shirley to think of the many times when she has experienced a type of *déjà vu*, when she knew something was going to happen before it did. Shirley admits to David that she has begun to embrace the idea of a spiritual side to herself, but that she would like proof of it. David tells Shirley that he cannot offer proof. They turn their discussion to Christ. David suggests to Shirley that Christ is a human of a higher spiritual order, that he teaches reincarnation and spirituality, but that the stories of some of these teachings have been changed to hide their true meaning. Finally David explains to Shirley that he believes spirits or souls are often returned to human bodies in order to work out some kind of Karmic justice, to learn a lesson or to make right a wrong committed in an earlier incarnation.

In these chapters, Shirley spends a great deal of time with Gerry away from his normal environment and discovers that he is really a peaceful, down-to-earth kind of guy. However, Gerry's life does not allow him to be true to his own personality. Shirley wonders several times during her day with Gerry if it would be possible to help him find a more relaxed way of being in order to help him repair what is wrong with his marriage. It is somewhat ironic that Shirley would want to help Gerry help his marriage, but it also shows how much Shirley cares for Gerry; she wants him to be happy, with or without her. Gerry suggests too that he has become too obsessed with Shirley and might consider ending their relationship. However, Gerry does not end the relationship, but leaves the idea out there for Shirley to worry over.



Shirley's fear and frustration with Gerry causes her to seek out her friend David again. When she does, David and Shirley have a long discussion about reincarnation, the purpose of life, and spirituality. David explains Karmic justice, or cosmic justice, and explains to Shirley that reincarnation not only promises a new life after death, but that it will be a life used to pay some debt or learn some lesson missed in a previous incarnation. This is news that fascinates Shirley and gives her a sense of purpose.



# Chapters 7-8

## Chapters 7-8 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 7, Shirley goes to the bookstore where David had taken her the week before and talks to the owner, John. John listens to what Shirley wants to ask and then begins to discuss with her the Akashic Records, a kind of panoramic record of everything that has ever been thought or felt or done. John then introduces the idea of mediums to Shirley, giving her multiple books on the subject that he suggests she read. Among the books, Shirley reads a biography of Edgar Cayce. Cayce is a humble farmer in Kentucky, uneducated, who is suffering from asthma. While undergoing hypnosis for the condition, Cayce channels a man who sounds different from Cayce and who offers a cure for the condition. Cayce tries the cure and it works. Soon after, Cayce is able to induce in himself a trance that allows this other person to talk to other people in need of medical advice. Almost all of the treatments this other person offers work when used according to the directions. Cayce is also able to tell people about their past lives, explaining away illnesses or mental blocks that those people do not fully understand.

In chapter 8, Shirley spends the night reading about these mediums, fascinated by the idea. The following day, Shirley goes for a walk and runs into Katerina, assistant to the owner of a nearby spa, The Ashram. Katerina tells Shirley about a medium in Stockholm that her boss is currently visiting in the hopes of convincing him to come to California. Katerina tells Shirley she should visit this man, a humble carpenter who channels a man named Ambres. When Shirley returns home she calls Gerry and learns that he will be in Stockholm in few days. Shirley sees this coincidence as a sign and decides to go to Stockholm to be with Gerry. During this phone conversation, Gerry also mentions that he feels he is a disappointment to Shirley. This causes Shirley to think this idea through, comparing it to other men who have said the same thing to her. Shirley begins to wonder what is wrong with her personality that would cause men to feel this way around her.

In these chapters, Shirley begins to investigate the idea of a medium who can channel mysterious people from another time or another physical plane. The stories of Edgar Cayce are overwhelming. Dozens of people attempt to disprove Cayce's powers in his time, but none are able to do so. It seems impossible for Cayce to be faking the trances based on his own knowledge of medicine, but the idea that Cayce is channeling a spirit from another plane is also unbelievable. However, Shirley finds herself believing this story as well as stories of other mediums who cannot be disproved. Therefore, when Shirley learns that there is a practicing medium within her reach, she decides to go. At the same time, Shirley's ongoing romance with married politician Gerry hits a rocky place. Gerry is now accusing Shirley of having high expectations of him. This reminds Shirley of other relationships that end for the same reason, causing her to wonder what is wrong with her that men feel so inadequate with her.



# Chapters 9-10

## Chapters 9-10 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 9, Shirley arrives in Stockholm and has dinner with an old friend. The following day, Gerry calls and asks to come over. Shirley gives him a massage, his first, and then they spend an intimate few moments together. Afterward they discuss the idea of love and how they feel about one another. Gerry swears that he loves Shirley, but that he can no longer afford to be obsessed by her. Gerry discusses his wife with Shirley and his desire to keep her from getting hurt. Finally, Gerry has to leave, leaving Shirley convinced that he is burdened by his need to be admired by people, a fact that will cause them to always be apart.

In chapter 10, three days pass without Shirley hearing from Gerry again. Shirley's friend, Lars, calls and asks her to go with him and his wife, Birgitta, to visit the home of Sture Johanssen, a local medium who channels a man named Ambres. Shirley pretends to have not known about Johanssen before and agrees to go with Lars and his wife. On the way, Shirley questions Lars and Birgitta about their belief in Ambres. Both swear that Ambres is real and that every meeting with him has led to a new sense of spirituality for them both. They say their lives are more peaceful since meeting Ambres. At the Johanssen home, Lars introduces Shirley to Turid, Sture's wife. Turid welcomes them into her home where other believers wait. Shirley looks over these people and wonder why they come to see Ambres.

Sture comes out of the bedroom where he has been resting and is introduced to Shirley. Sture talks for a few minutes before relaxing and going into a trance. In his trance, Ambres comes out and speaks to those present about Creation. Ambres explains that God is an Intelligence who comes into being with the creation of matter. Ambres speaks for two hours about Creation. Finally Sture Johanssen comes back to consciousness and thanks everyone for coming. Shirley goes back to her hotel and begins thinking over everything that she has heard.

In these two chapters, Shirley continues to struggle in her relationship with Gerry. On the one hand, Gerry continuously tells Shirley how much he loves her. On the other, Gerry tells Shirley that he cannot continue to be so obsessed with her because it is interfering with his everyday life. Gerry has no plans to leave his wife because he respects her too much. This knowledge is not a surprise to Shirley in these chapters, but something she has already suspected. However, it continues to leave her in limbo as to the future of the relationship.

At the same time Shirley is struggling with her relationship with Gerry, she goes to see the trance medium, Sture Johanssen. Johanssen trances into Ambres and talks about Creation. Shirley finds herself in a surreal situation, sitting in witness of two separate realities. This causes Shirley to begin thinking stronger about the idea of reincarnation and all that it implies.



# Chapters 11-12

## Chapters 11-12 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 11, Gerry calls Shirley and tells her he has been away so long because his wife surprised him by coming from London. In his absence, Shirley begins to write about everything that has been happening to her, including her relationship with Gerry and the idea of reincarnation. Gerry finally comes to Shirley's hotel room the following night. Gerry insists he loved Shirley and cannot bear to leave her, but in the end he does. Shirley remains in Stockholm for several weeks, writing and thinking about her relationship with Gerry. Gerry comes to Shirley once again and she talks to him about reincarnation. Once again Gerry speaks passionately against the idea of reincarnation despite Shirley's clear interest.

In chapter 12, Shirley returns to Los Angeles and throws herself into research on trance mediums. There are many trance mediums recognized since Cayce, some who become famous for their work, others who cannot handle the wealth of information that comes through. It is next to impossible to prove the existence of the spirits these mediums channel except through the information they provide. All this research causes Shirley to recall her friend Peter Sellers. Peter and Shirley once work on a movie together called *Being There*. During the final days of filming, Peter shares with Shirley his conviction that during a heart attack some time before he leaves his body and watches as the doctors resuscitate him. After coming back to his body, Peter is overwhelmed with a lack of direction, wondering why his life is spared. Two years later, Shirley has an overwhelming feeling that Peter has died. A few moments later a reporter calls to get her reaction to the death of her good friend, Peter Sellers.

In these chapters, Shirley moves deeper into self discovery. Shirley begins writing about the things happening in her life as well as her relationship with Gerry. Shirley's relationship with Gerry has grown difficult and Shirley is aware that he is not in the same place that she is, leaving her feeling a growing chasm between them. This is topped by the fact that they cannot see each other for a long time because of a show she will be doing soon. It is clearly a turning point for the relationship, leaving Shirley even more frustrated and alone than before.

Shirley turns to spirituality when she returns home from Stockholm. Shirley begins researching trance mediums and finds herself remembering her dear friend Peter Sellers who also had some belief in reincarnation and an afterlife. This story not only shows that other people have the same beliefs, even some people often thought of as down-to-earth and practical, but that Shirley has some spiritual awareness that allows her to know that Peter has died. This shows the reader that Shirley is already aware of her own spirituality even if she is not consciously aware.



# Chapters 13-15

## Chapters 13-15 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 13, Shirley sets up an appointment with a trance medium that The Ashram hires to do readings with customers. Kevin appears to be a mild mannered, normal young man when he arrives at Shirley's door. Shirley gives him tea and asks questions about how the process works. Kevin tells Shirley about two of the four spirits who often channel through him. Kevin says that John comes out first most often and he speaks in Biblical speech. Another common guide that comes through Kevin calls himself Tom McPherson. McPherson is an Irish pickpocket in one of his lives and chooses that persona when he comes through Kevin. As Shirley prepares to witness Kevin channeling these spirits, she wonders how much of it she can honestly believe.

In chapter 14, Kevin begins to go into his trance and almost immediately John begins to speak. John explains to Shirley that he is her spiritual guide and he is there to help her understand spirituality and the Akasha Records. When Shirley suggests to John that she needs evidence that spirits exist, John tells her that if she exists then she should not doubt that God and a spiritual plane exist because God is a metaphor for her own soul. Tom McPherson comes to the surface then, discussing with Shirley one of his past lives and what it is like to exist on the astral plane. Tom and Shirley then debate the idea of God and the gap between science and religion.

In chapter 15, Shirley tells Tom she would like to know about her own past lives. John returns and tells Shirley she has been reincarnated multiple times over a course of a five hundred thousand year period. John announces that Shirley had lived multiple times in ancient times, twice as a man and once as a woman. At this point, John stops to explain that spirits are androgynous and can live as either sex, that sex is a human concept, not a spiritual one. John then tells Shirley that some souls have a twin soul that is like a soul mate. Shirley has one of these and hers is David in this lifetime. John also informs Shirley that she has another soul who often appears in her lives, sometimes as a spouse and often as a lover. This spirit is Gerry.

John tells Shirley that there are more spirits than those on Earth and those spirits visit Earth to help guide humans. These spirits are known as extraterrestrials. Many of these extraterrestrials are more advanced in their understanding of spirituality and come to Earth to help humans advance their own understanding. John also explains to Shirley that humankind has a great deal to overcome, but is basically good. John urges Shirley to accept that life is the thought of God and God is love. However, John warns Shirley to take the Bible with a grain of salt because it has been reinterpreted by the Church over the years to protect humans from knowing the real truth. When Shirley wants to know why so many people are resistant to understanding this truth, John explains that many people suffer from altered ego, an ego that is altered by the Church and other teachers who deny the truth. John tells Shirley that she operates on a higher level of awareness that allows her to accept this truth easier than others. Finally John leaves and Kevin



comes back. Shirley finds herself alone with all the information John and Tom have given her, struggling to understand it all.

In these chapters, Shirley meets with a trance medium who speaks her own language and is willing to work with her one on one. In this meeting, Shirley learns an overwhelming amount of information about spirituality. For instance, Shirley learns that she is a twin soul to the spirit living as David, perhaps explaining the closeness of their relationship. Shirley also learns that she was married to Gerry in a past life, and that they had been together in multiple lives but it has not always worked out. This information seems to reassure Shirley and to help her believe the spiritual guides a little easier because they seem to have information about her that Kevin could never have known.

The parts that Shirley struggles to understand, however, are about the place of religion in this spiritual world and the idea of extraterrestrials. Many people believe in aliens, but most of these people are considered crazy in modern society, therefore Shirley is skeptical of the idea even though it makes a measurable amount of sense to her. Shirley also struggles to consolidate her own religious beliefs with the ideas of God and Jesus that are associated with the concepts John and Tom are trying to share with her.



# Chapters 16-18

## Chapters 16-18 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 16, Shirley shares her experience with a friend, Bella Abzug. Bella is skeptical, urging Shirley to avoid talking about her new beliefs in public. Shirley begins buying more books on spirituality and studies them closely. These books include not only new age books, but books by philosophers and writers such as Plato, John Milton, Benjamin Franklin, Voltaire, and Walt Whitman. Shirley also finds writings by John Ellis McTaggart that especially make sense to her, an idea that suggests past life recall is not only about believing in spirituality, but finding purpose in those experiences for the current life. At the same time Shirley is reading these books, she is on tour with her live show. While with the other members of the cast, Shirley questions people about their spiritual beliefs and finds many people open to the ideas Shirley is herself newly exploring. When Shirley returns to Los Angeles, she runs into an ex-lover while reading one of her spiritual books in the park. Shirley asks this lover if he thinks she is naive. The lover replies that she is not, but when he realizes what Shirley is studying, he cautions her that going public with such ideas could ruin her career.

In chapter 17, Shirley sits with David and talks with him about some of the things she has recently learned. David shares with Shirley some of his theories on Jesus, including the idea that Jesus lived and studied in India during his lifetime and that many of his teachings had to do with reincarnation, but that the Church masked these teachings, although some still remain if only the reader knows what to look for. David takes Shirley to dinner that night and gives her yet more books to read. This time together leads to deeper conversations, including the idea that extraterrestrials have been coming to Earth since the beginning of time. David reinforces this idea with literature from Von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods* and other such evidence.

In chapter 18, Shirley studies the Bible to find the proof of reincarnation as David suggested. Shirley finds many incidences of what David has claimed would be there, such as a passage in Exodus that speaks of a pillar of fire and another in Numbers that appears to be a description of a UFO. Shirley also reads about the Mayans, the Incas, and the Tibetans. Shirley finds all of this information to be overwhelming and deeply against everything she has been taught. However, Shirley is open to these new ideas. As a result, David invites her to visit Peru with him.

In these chapters, Shirley attempts to understand all that she has learned. It is difficult for Shirley, but she finds it easier to talk these things over with David. David continues to fill Shirley full of information, first making strange suggestions about the teachings of Jesus Christ and then discussing extraterrestrials. However, now that Shirley has talked to Kevin and his spiritual guides, she is more open to these ideas. David appears to be a teacher of sorts for Shirley at this point, leading her to a bigger revelation that Shirley does not see at this point. However, the reader can see this and wonders exactly where David is taking Shirley and for what purpose.





# Chapters 19-21

## Chapters 19-21 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 19, Shirley flies on a night flight to Peru and is met at the airport by David. David has a car and he tells Shirley they are going into the mountains. They stop part way up for lunch and David makes Shirley breathe in pure oxygen for a few minutes in order to keep herself from fainting due to the high altitude. Late in the evening they arrive at Llocllapampa, their destination. Shirley is shocked to find that their hotel is simply two small rooms with no indoor plumbing, and no electricity or heat.

In chapter 20, David takes Shirley down to the mineral springs. The water is effervescent, causing Shirley's limbs to feel as though they are floating as she sits in the warm water. While in the water David tries to get Shirley to meditate, but she is too aware of their nakedness to relax enough. However, Shirley is able to reach a sense of oneness with everything around her, taking what David claims is the first step. Afterward, David and Shirley have dinner in a small building named simply Food where a couple of local women provide them with bread, warm milk, and stew.

In chapter 21, David and Shirley wake early and go for a walk after retrieving Shirley's boiled eggs from the Food building. As they walk they talk, opening each other up to the joys of nature. Shirley finds herself once again thinking about all she has learned and all that she has known, trying to reconcile the two. Soon they come upon another mineral spring. David takes her down inside and they undress, this time leaving on their underclothes because of the presence of a few local people. David meditates in the water for more than an hour while Shirley lies relaxing in the water. Finally they leave and begin to run and skip back to the village like children.

In these chapters, David takes Shirley to a village high in the Andes of Peru. This village is very remote, very high, and exists without most modern conveniences, including electricity. This village also houses some unique mineral springs once thought to heal, but long since abandoned by tourists. The reader is not sure why Shirley is brought here, but Shirley does not seem to care. Shirley is taking this time away from the stress of civilization, not only to relax, but to concentrate on the things David has been teaching her, helping herself to better understand the ideas of spirituality. Perhaps this has been David's plan all along, but the reader suspects David has an even larger motive.



# Chapters 22-23

## Chapters 22-23 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 22, Shirley wakes the second day in the mountains to find that David wants to go to a nearby town of Ataura and that they will be giving one of the women who works in Food a ride to the market. In the car, Shirley finds herself listening to the woman describe the frequent visitations the village has had of spacecrafts that appear to be from outer space. David explains that the valley above their village is inaccessible by humans, therefore it is a perfect place for the extraterrestrials to hide out. The woman says it is popularly believed that they are mining something in the mountains there. In Ataura they walk through the market and David tells Shirley a little more about the culture of the people, including encouraging people to talk about the extraterrestrials, trying to prove to Shirley how common an idea this is in the mountains of Peru.

On the drive back to Llocllapampa, David confesses to having something he wants to tell Shirley but is clearly nervous about saying it aloud. Shirley encourages him until finally David begins talking about a woman he meets once on a visit to Llocllapampa who seems to know a great deal about him on their first meeting. This woman, Mayan, introduces David to the idea of spiritualism and begins him on his own path of self discovery. Mayan is an extraterrestrial who comes to David for this express purpose.

In chapter 23, Shirley questions David again about his story, clearly not sure what to believe at this point. However, David has strong arguments for the idea of extraterrestrials that Shirley cannot possibly refute. As Shirley struggles with her acceptance of David's story, he tells her that Mayan has a message for Shirley. In fact, David reminds Shirley of a time when a stranger comes to her door with three colored stones that a Masai chieftain had given to him in the express purpose of giving them to Shirley. This person was a stranger to Shirley at the time, but David now confesses that the stranger was him. In fact, Mayan refers to that story and tells him that they are meant to be friends. Mayan also tells David that Shirley has to learn about spirituality because she has to use her celebrity to tell the world. David tells Shirley it is her destiny to write a book about her own path to self discovery. Shirley fights the ideas that David is filling her with, arguing with him on nearly every point. David is sympathetic, telling Shirley that he struggled the same way when he first began to accept these truths.

In these two chapters, the reader and Shirley both finally learn why David has brought her to Peru. David tells Shirley about his encounter with Mayan, an extraterrestrial who teaches him about spirituality and tells him that Shirley should write about her journey of self discovery in order to help all humans become more aware of their spiritual side. This announcement is unbelievable to Shirley who has been struggling with the idea of aliens since they are first brought up to her. Like most people, Shirley is open and willing to accept the idea of eternal life and reincarnation, but to accept that aliens roam the Earth, that they are of a higher awareness than humans and have always been a

part of human culture, is much more difficult. Shirley is a product of a modern American society, therefore she cannot readily accept these ideas. However, David is persuasive and the simple fact that Shirley writes this book as Mayan predicts suggests that she does eventually accept even this outlandish idea.



# Chapters 24-26

## Chapters 24-26 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 24, Shirley spends the following morning alone, thinking about all David has told her. Eventually David catches up with her and gives her a bracelet that matches one he always wears, one that is supposed to provide for her more clarity. Together they go to the mineral baths and David begins to tell Shirley what Mayan has told him about God. Mayan describes the soul as the energy within matter that makes the electrons and protons with an atom rotate around one another, to create the atom. This force is called the Source, or the soul, and it comes from the Divine Source, or God. David goes on to explain that everything is energy and even scientist believe energy never dies, therefore people never die, only their bodies do. Therefore a soul lives forever and why can it not return to human form?

Shirley began to meditate as she thinks all this over and quickly finds her soul leaving her body. Shirley soars over her body and over the mountains, aware of a golden tether holding her to her body that grows and lengthens as she flies. When Shirley comes back to her body, David explains the tether is what keeps her soul attached to her earthbound body. When that tether snaps, her body will die and she will remain free. That night, Shirley returns to the hotel to rest, but finds her mind so full she cannot.

In chapter 25, David and Shirley spend the next few days walking and talking, allowing Shirley to continue working through all this new information. One night they sleep outside under the stars in a hope that they will be able to see the UFOs, but fall asleep before they see anything. Several weeks pass. On Shirley's last day in the Andes she hears that there has been a blackout in New York City that results in some looting. Shirley immediately thinks of her friend, Bella Abzug who is running for mayor. David takes Shirley to a psychic of whom she can ask about Bella. This woman tells Shirley that Bella will not win the election, but that a bald man with slender fingers will. The psychic also tells Shirley that her relationship with Gerry will not continue. Shirley is upset by this news, but decides not to do anything about it. When it is time for Shirley to leave the following morning, David sends her down the mountain with a friend, deciding to remain in the mountains himself.

In chapter 26, Shirley meets with Bella in New York upon her arrival. Shirley does not tell her what the psychic said, but is not surprised when Ed Koch wins the election some months later. The relationship with Gerry cools and ends. Shirley continues to travel and study about spirituality, finding support from such surprising sources as Carl Jung and Martin Luther King Jr. The idea of extraterrestrials continues to bother her, but Shirley slowly comes to find evidence of that as well, especially when she studies such things as the Great Pyramid of Giza. Shirley also finds people like musicians, housewives, writers, and actresses who also believe the things she is beginning to understand. Shirley continues her studies, but also continues to find herself at a crossroads. Then a

conversation with Bella helps her see there is no harm in believing in a better world, in the basic good in life.

In these chapters, Shirley continues to struggle with her belief in David's story, in the entire idea of spirituality and her need to write this book. Shirley is honest with her readers about the struggle she finds herself in in trying to accept these truths. However, Shirley finally finds a place where she feels comfortable sharing her story and showing her readers that even though she is not completely open to all David has to say, that she wants to remain open to the ideas he shares and that is enough for now. In doing this, Shirley expresses to her readers that an open mind, no matter what the ideas, is the only way to experience self discovery and new ideas.



# Characters

## Shirley MacLaine

Shirley MacLaine is an actress who at the time this book is set has made more than thirty movies. Shirley is having an affair with an English politician that causes her to look deeply at herself and figure out why she can never find happiness with a man. It seems to Shirley that no matter what she does, the men in her life feel that they can never live up to her expectations of them. This causes Shirley to often find herself alone and unhappy. As a result, Shirley begins a journey of self discovery that will ultimately end in this book.

Shirley has a friend who introduces her to the concepts of reincarnation, trance mediums, and extraterrestrials. These concepts are something Shirley will struggle to understand, but will eventually embrace. In fact, Shirley will learn that this friend is her spiritual twin with whom she has lived many lives. In the end, she will learn that it is her destiny in life to write this book, to share with the world these concepts so that humanity as a whole might begin down a path of spiritual awareness that will lift them up to higher plane of spirituality.

## David

David is Shirley's good friend. Once David lives life in the fast lane with a high paying job, fast cars, and many women. However, David meets a woman named Mayan in the mountains of Peru and learns about spirituality and extraterrestrials, a knowledge that changes his life. David stops living his life in the fast lane and instead begins traveling the world, expanding his spiritual beliefs, until he finds a friend in Shirley MacLaine.

David has known for a long time that it is his destiny to be a friend to Shirley MacLaine. David is told by Mayan that he will meet her and that he will help her to learn about this spiritual plane because it is her destiny to write a book about this understanding. David becomes a guide of sorts to Shirley, helping her through her journey of self discovery.

## Gerry

Gerry is an English politician who is married and has several children. Gerry is once a young husband whose wife dies in childbirth, so as a result of this tragedy he finds himself married to a woman he does not love and does not find happiness with. This leads Gerry to an affair with Shirley MacLaine. However, the affair takes Gerry's concentration from his work and his family, causing him to back away from Shirley, eventually leading to the end of the affair.



## **Bella Abzog**

Bella Abzog is a friend of Shirley's who has political ambitions. Shirley is close enough to Bella that she feels comfortable sharing with her the experiences Shirley has with Kevin, a trance medium. Bella is the first of many to warn Shirley not to go public with her beliefs. Later, however, it will be Bella who will help Shirley make the decision to write this book and share with the world all she has learned.

## **Kevin**

Kevin is a trance medium who gives readings to people. Kevin goes into a trance and one or all of four spirit guides who speak through him come through. These spirit guides have information about the spiritual plane and about spirituality as a whole they share with people. Kevin is the first trance medium Shirley is able to speak with one on one who is able to address some of her past lives.

## **John and Tom McPherson**

John and Tom MacPherson are two of Kevin's four spirit guides. John is an ancient spirit who speaks in Biblical English, often using language that is so difficult to understand that he stops speaking and allows another spirit to come out. Tom MacPherson is once an Irish pickpocket who chooses to continue with that persona from the spirit world because he so enjoys that particular incarnation. John and Tom tell Shirley some about her past lives and speak with her about religion and spirituality in a way that helps her to understand more about the concepts she is struggling to learn.

## **Sture Johanssen**

Sture Johanssen is a trance medium in Stockholm. Sture is a carpenter before he begins channeling a man named Ambres. Sture makes it his life's work to allow people to speak with Ambres, believing that it is important for people to learn all they can about what Ambres has to tell them. As a result, people help support Sture and his wife with donations when they come to a reading, casting some doubt on Sture's gift.

## **Ambres**

Ambres is the spirit that Sture Johanssen channels. Ambres speaks in an ancient form of Swedish. When Shirley meets Ambres, she is struck by how different his voice is from Sture's voice. Ambres speaks about spirituality and the creation of life when Shirley is in his presence, causing her to be overwhelmed by his knowledge and convinced that Sture cannot be faking Ambres' presence.



## Peter Sellers

Peter Sellers is an actor that Shirley works with on two films. During the filming of their second film, Peter tells Shirley how uncomfortable he is to be in the studio where they are working because it is a studio in which he had a near fatal heart attack a few years before. Peter then tells Shirley how he believes he left his body and accompanied it to the hospital, watching as doctors fought to save his life. Peter claims he saw a white light and a hand reaching for him, but a voice told him it was not his time. During the final few years of his life, Peter finds himself wondering why he was sent back and about the purpose of his life.

## Edgar Cayce

Edgar Cayce is one of the first documented trance mediums. Cayce is a farmer who suffers from asthma. While under hypnosis to treat his ailment, Cayce channels a man who gives instructions on how to treat the ailment. Cayce follows these instructions and is cured of his illness. Afterward, Cayce learns to put himself in a trance so that he might channel this man for other people. When placed under scrutiny, it is discovered that all of the cures this man offers work when followed according to instruction. No one is ever able to prove Cayce is faking.





# Objects/Places

## Books

Shirley studies many books about spirituality, trance mediums, and extraterrestrials during her journey of self discovery.

## Bible

Shirley turns to the Bible to find information about spirituality and extraterrestrials and is surprised to find multiple references to both.

## Kabala

The Kabala is a Jewish religious book to which Shirley turns to find information on the spiritual teachings her friend David is sharing with her.

## Shirley's House

Shirley has, along with an apartment building, a house in the Los Angeles' mountains where she spends a great deal of time in the course of the book.

## Shirley's Apartment Building

Shirley builds an apartment building with her first paycheck from a major movie so that she will always have a place to live if her career is not successful. The novel begins on the beach alongside this building.

## Bodhi Tree Bookstore

The Ashram is a spa, or health camp, in the Calabasas mountains above Shirley's Los Angeles home. Shirley finds herself often turning to Katerina, an employee of the spa, for information about trance mediums.

## Los Angeles

Shirley resides in Los Angeles during the time period in which the book is set.



## London

Shirley's married lover is a politician from England and she often goes to London to see him.

## Stockholm

Shirley flies to Stockholm for the joint purpose of seeing her lover, Gerry, and to meet the trance medium Sture Johanssen.

## New York City

Shirley often spends time in New York City for both business and pleasure. It is in New York that Shirley's affair with Gerry begins and also here where Shirley ends her book in a conversation with her friend Bella.

## Peru

Shirley flies to Peru and spends several weeks in the Andes mountains to study with and learn from her friend David.



# Themes

## Spirituality

Spirituality is different for everyone. For some, spirituality is religion, it is believing in and worshipping a god. For others, spirituality is a state of being, a way of facing life with an understanding that only a higher power has the capacity to harm or injure one's soul. For Shirley MacLaine, spirituality means the New Age, a new way of looking at one's soul. Shirley thinks of spirituality as something that is often mocked and a state of being in which a person deludes themselves into believing things that can neither be real or proven. However, Shirley's understanding of spirituality changes.

Shirley finds herself in a moment of crisis in her life. Shirley is having an affair with a married man that leaves her feeling inadequate and alone. Shirley's friend David introduces her to the idea of reincarnation, the idea of Karmic justice, that causes Shirley to begin going down a path of self discovery. This path eventually leads to an understanding that life is so much more than she or anyone can truly understand. Life is not a one chance deal, but it is a momentary lesson, a moment in a lifetime that can span multiple generations, that can allow one soul to live many, many different lives filled with many different experiences.

Spirituality becomes a literal thing to Shirley. Spirituality becomes a description of the soul and the world where the soul exists outside of human understanding. Spirituality becomes reincarnation and a scientific explanation of the soul. Spirituality becomes a tangible thing for Shirley that she knows she has to share with the world. Spirituality is the goal of this book, making it a major theme not only of Shirley's life, but of the book as well.

## Self Discovery

Despite being an actress and dancer who has found great success, Shirley finds herself in a place of great loneliness and self doubt. Shirley is having an affair with an English politician who is married and unable to commit not only to his family, but to Shirley as well. This politician leaves Shirley wondering what is wrong with her, why she often pushes men away and leaves herself alone. Shirley wonders if she has too high an expectation for those around her, making it impossible for people to love her. This worry makes Shirley open to self discovery and starts her down a path that will change her life.

No person ever sets out to discover the truth about their own personality. Most people are too bogged down in the realities of everyday life, of the stress of work and family, to care about the flaws of their own personalities or to worry about the purpose of their lives. Shirley, however, finds herself frequently alone and frightened, wondering what it is about her personality that drives people away. This fear allows Shirley to open herself



up to self analysis, leading her down a path of self discovery that becomes a theme of this novel.

## Celebrity

Shirley MacLaine is an actress who has made well over forty films in her career. At the point in time in which this novel is set, Shirley has made more than thirty films. For this reason, Shirley is a celebrity, a well known person throughout the world. Celebrity makes Shirley a public figure, someone the public is interested in knowing and learning about.

As Shirley makes a very private journey of self discovery, she learns a great many things not only about herself, but about humanity, religion, and life after death. These discoveries are confusing to Shirley, causing her to struggle with her own background, her own understanding of life and religion, her own view on life. It is a private journey, but it soon becomes a public one.

Due to Shirley's celebrity, Shirley's friend David tells her that it is her purpose in life to share her journey of self discovery with the world. David explains that if more people understand God and the afterlife, that maybe the world will become a better place. For this reason, David encourages Shirley to write this book. Shirley does, with the acknowledgement that she does not fully understand all she has learned, but that she wants to share her story with the world for the same reasons David encourages her to do so. For that reason, celebrity is a theme of the novel.

# Style

## Perspective

This novel is written as a type of memoir, or autobiography, of the life of Shirley MacLain. Therefore, the author's perspective is a highly personal one. Shirley shares with the reader ideas that she is aware the reader might not easily accept because she herself had trouble accepting them. However, the evidence is so overwhelming that Shirley feels she has no recourse except to share her experiences with the world.

The perspective of this novel is interesting based on the subject matter. The book begins as a memoir, similar to two other memoirs the author writes before it. However, the book quickly becomes something more, a story of self discovery that shares with the reader ideas of spirituality that are far reaching and often difficult for people in a modern society to understand. No matter what perspective the reader takes, however, MacLain's is a personal perspective that is honest and clear, making this book one in which all readers cannot help but see the positive intentions of the author.

## Tone

The tone of this novel is solemn as the writer tells a highly personal story about her own struggles, not only with her everyday life, but her understanding of life as a whole. The book is written from the point of view of a woman going through a personal crisis, trying to find a reason to why she is always alone, why the men in her life feel as though they cannot live up to her expectations of them. This struggle leads the author to a journey of self discovery that culminates in the idea that everyone's life on earth is temporary, a journey through Karmic justice, that will end only to begin again.

The tone changes as the author begins to study about spirituality. There is some objective study in the book, showing the reader opinions of other scholars, some of whom are highly respected and not known to believe in what might be considered crackpot ideas. However, the tone remains personal, filling the reader with the emotional struggle that the author goes through and helping with information that might aid a reader through a journey of self discovery of their own.

## Structure

The book is divided into twenty-six chapters. Each chapter is written in the first person point of view, beginning at the beginning of the author's journey of self-discovery and ending not at the end of that journey, but at a point where the author feels comfortable telling her story to the world. The book is told mainly in a type of internal monologue, with the author sharing with the reader her thoughts and feelings about certain events in her life. However, it also includes detailed conversations the author has with the people in her life and others who help her along the way with her journey of self discovery.

The book contains no plot, no story line like a fictional novel might have. However, it does tell Shirley MacLaine's personal story of self discovery. This story begins on a beach in California and takes her to London, Stockholm, Peru, and finally to New York City. The story is one of self discovery, of accepting a level of spirituality that perhaps even Ms. MacLaine is not aware she is capable of. There are no subplots, but there is the story of Ms. MacLaine's affair with an English politician that begins her journey of self discovery and ends with her understanding of herself.



## Quotes

"Maybe it didn't really matter what we did to preserve ourselves." Chapter 1, pg. 12.

"I felt I had somehow been compelled to involve myself in this relationship that I knew could offer little more than irreconcilable obstacles. The question was, why?" Chapter 1, pg. 40.

"I loved hatha yoga because it was physical, not meditational, although it did require concentration and a sense of relaxation." Chapter 3, pg. 89.

"I couldn't believe in anything that had no proof and besides, I wasn't all that agonized by the need for a purpose in life or something to believe in besides myself." Chapter 3, pg. 99.

"The notes that he sends me are short and each one tells a story, a story from the life of a man who influenced me deeply, because he inadvertently taught me to love brilliant and complicated men who needed someone to help unlock them." Chapter 4, pg. 134.

"When she went to live with her father in Japan, maybe she had actually planned it before she was born, and her talent for languages was based on having actually spoken them in previous lives." Chapter 7, pg. 189.

"'I know,' he said, 'to get to the fruit on a tree, you have to go out on a limb.'" Chapter 11, pg. 294.

"I wondered what my ideal impression of a credible trance medium would be." Chapter 13, pg. 327.

"'Because those who feel the need to conquer do not understand the truth of themselves.'" Chapter 15, pg. 376.

"'It's a pity everyone needs their own private proof,' he went on, 'because from what Mayan told me, the extraterrestrials are superior because they understand the process of the spiritual domain of life.'" Chapter 23, pg. 555.

"Many others seemed to be searching also for a balance between their inner lives and their outer lives." Chapter 26, pg. 635.

"Maybe one day I would take a trip to the Pleiades and see what was on the other side. Would it be as full of wonder as the inner journey I was just beginning?" Chapter 26, pg. 659.



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Gerry? How does Shirley meet him? What is their relationship like? Why can Shirley not talk about Gerry with anyone? Why does Shirley go to see Gerry at work? Why is she not impressed with his behavior? What does Shirley think Gerry should do differently? Why does Gerry keep telling Shirley that he does not want to call her from work anymore? Why does Gerry claim he is too obsessed with Shirley? What eventually happens to Shirley's relationship with Gerry?

Who is Shirley MacLaine? What was her childhood like? Who is her brother? What is significant about the behaviors of Shirley's parents? Why does Shirley recall learning her father was drinking too much? What advice does Shirley give her father at that time? What part do Shirley's parents play in her decision to be an actress? What role do they play in her journey of self discovery?

Who is David? How do Shirley and David meet? Why is David one of Shirley's good friends? Why does David take Shirley to the Bodhi Tree bookstore? What purpose does David have in mind for Shirley? What does David teach Shirley about spirituality? About reincarnation? What are some of David's theories on Jesus? Are these plausible?

Discuss the difference between spirituality and religion. What is Shirley told some of the differences are? What does Shirley find in the Bible about reincarnation and extraterrestrials? Why does Shirley find information about these things in the Bible? What role does the possible visit to India by Jesus have to do with some of these things?

Discuss extraterrestrials. What are they? Where have they been seen? Why does Shirley find it difficult to believe in them? What does John tell Shirley the extraterrestrials are? What does John suggest the extraterrestrials have done for humans since the beginning of time? Who is Mayan? How is she connected to these theories? Why does Mayan want Shirley to write a book about spirituality?

Discuss the soul. What is the soul? Where does it exist? What does modern science know about the soul? What does religion say about the soul? What does David tell Shirley about the soul? What is the difference about what Shirley knows about the soul from religion and what she learns in all her studies?

Discuss trance mediums. What is a trance medium? What do they do? How many have been proven to be legitimate? Where are the spirits who come through these mediums? Why do they speak through these mediums? What purpose do they serve? Who is Edgar Cayce? Why does Shirley believe he was real? Why is it hard to prove the validity of these mediums?