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The human experience can be likened to a journey.

The most obvious journey is the external one—humankind's beginning somewhere in the Middle East or Africa, and then travelling over a period of millions of years to the north, east, south and west, until ultimately we have inhabited the entire globe.

But there are also spiritual journeys, such as are charted in Homer's Odyssey, or in Dante's Inferno. One thinks of Saint Augustine's Confessions, in which the author frequently likens the course of his life as a journey from darkness to light. One thinks of the wanderings of the people of Israel in search of the Promised Land. Or of the peripatetics of Saint Francis of Assisi and his followers, travelling over the earth to spread the good news.

The question naturally arises as to whether these many journeys, at long last, will come to an end. Or, to state the question more precisely, will they be brought to an end by humankind itself in some cataclysm of self-destruction.

We begin the year made famous in advance by George Orwell with this question looking us in the face. Yet I have somehow managed to avoid all the magazine articles analyzing whether Orwell's scenario, or prediction, has come true. For it seems inconsequential to argue the over details of where his imagination was perhaps too fulsome, or where it was inadequate to the true horror of the situation, or where it missed the mark altogether. For the essential truth is that it has been given to us to know the worst that evil can do, and to see how evil can burrow itself into the crannies of our lives until it seems as inescapable as the very air we must breathe. This is what 1984 means.

And we also see that the good earth, in spite of its ice ages, its floods and droughts and volcanic explosions, all of which have tried human capacity for survival over the many millions of years of this journey, is indeed a paradise in comparison to the infernos we can create through our own spiritual lapses.

Always in humankind's journey there has been an Ariadne's thread guiding us through the labyrinths of our own creation. Our innate love of Truth is this thread. And it is indeed a delicate thread. Desperate flailing about, strenuous grapplings and haulings, are not apt to get us anywhere. Rather, this thread requires of us a highly refined sensibility, quietness, delicacy of touch. Even the prospect of a nuclear holocaust must not propel us into a lot of false muscular efforts, or we shall never find our way through the labyrinth. Inner silence is the key.

Another wayfarer, T. S. Eliot, said: "In my end was my beginning; in my beginning was my end." And indeed, all the noblest wanderers knew that the worst of times were really opportunities for new beginnings. We are at such a juncture now, where the old world and the world's way of doing things obviously must pass away. And with our Ariadne's thread, assiduously tended to, we shall make of 1984 not the beginning of the end, but the start of a new age of hope, and light, and peace.