



SUMMER 1999

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doing nothing.

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*Only when peace lives within each of us, will it live outside of us.
We must be the wombs for a new harmony.—Deng Ming Dao*

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From the Publisher



The desire for transformation is usually first stirred in response to grief, misery or dissatisfaction. Life no longer makes sense and solace eludes us. We

descend into our inner world and stumble across the ever-smoldering embers of purification. Transformation is activated: time, grace, and effort begin to work on us and soon we notice results.

Early in our transformational journey we often sense that we are making progress. Our relationships improve, our depression lifts, and energy is restored to us. Life may even become comfortable. We feel grateful and measure the changes taking place in us. Ego, our sense of who we are, likes these improvements. We feel proud, content and right with life—believing we have come through the fire and are now being sustained by the glowing heat.

Then, the winds of grace may come and change the direction of the transformational fire, forging new paths. This happened to the two women who are featured in this issue's transformational stories. When the flames began moving, they followed, leaving behind the pursuit of comfortable lives. Both gave up everything to travel into the land of the sacred unknown. There, they each, in different ways, connected with spiritual essence in profound ways. Linda Spencer tells of moving into a complete surrender; giving up her meaningful career, financial security, and support system so that a higher intelligence might prepare and guide her into the next phase of her life. Annie Leight made a commitment to fulfill a spiritual vision of undertaking a transformational walk, in spite of being in poor physical health. Along the way, she came into deep connection with essence, and upon her deathbed proclaimed that the walk was her true healing path.

Both of these stories attest to the fact that profound transformation can be as arduous as it is joyful. There are no road maps on these steeper paths, but there is help. Even though we journey alone, teachers and friends are with us and the winds of grace are always clearing the way.

May *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* help clear your way.

Rick NurrieStearns
Publisher

Personal Transformation

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LAMA SURYA DAS



BASIL PENNINGTON



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WAYNE MULLER



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Level—Photography as a Healing Art." She has presented workshops to more than 10,000 people in 23 countries, appeared on radio and television, and her work has been published in The New York Times, as well as magazines and international publications.



JAN PHILLIPS

From the Editor

Being in the present—focusing our attention in the current moment rather than the future or the past—we notice what is going on around us. For example, while driving the car we need to be aware of the immediate environment and to respond accordingly, stopping at intersections and staying on the road as it curves. We have all experienced drifting into memories or thinking about the future, and missing the road we had planned to turn onto.

We can be in the here and now, yet have little awareness of the energetic state that we are in. If our thoughts are elsewhere, others may experience us as not totally present. If we are emotionally guarded and distant, others may experience us as cold-hearted. By being aware of the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual state that we are in, we are less likely to unknowingly act it out on others and we can choose how to direct our energy. We increase the possibility of becoming a life-enhancing presence.

Being in the present is also about being aware of our inner life: the world of body, mind, heart, and spirit. This is where being present intersects with “being presence.” The four kinds of “presence”—emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual—each have distinct qualities. When these states are intense they permeate the atmosphere.

We have all been with someone who is very sad. In the weeks following a tragic death, the home of the bereaved family is imbued with inconsolable grief. Powerful weightlifters have an intimidating physical presence and intellectual giants have an impressive mental presence. People who are spiritually advanced have an unforgettable presence that is peaceful and loving.

When we become familiar with our inner world, we are more able to access the love and wisdom that is inside of us. I remember hearing about a woman who was a loving presence. This woman was separated from her granddaughter for many years, after the young girl was forcefully

taken from her family and her country. For twenty-eight years, the grandmother looked for her precious offspring, never abandoning her search. Each year, on the young girl’s birthday, the older woman wrote her a loving letter and saved it in a special metal box. Then, one day, the grandmother and granddaughter made contact. The younger woman flew back to her homeland to be reunited with her family. She was met at the airport by the welcoming embrace of her grandmother. Days of visiting followed. One evening, the grandmother presented the young woman with the box of yellowed letters. The loving presence of the grandmother was contained in aging



papers, and the granddaughter knew beyond doubt that she had always been loved. Something in her heart opened and in that opening she found deep healing.

We don’t have to struggle or strain in order for love’s presence to arise in us. All we have to do is remember that love is ever present, ready to direct our actions. Love is all knowing, ready to inform our decisions. When we don’t feel love, it is because we aren’t tuned into its pulse. All that is missing is giving our attention to love. It is easy to bring love into our awareness. One way is to drop our awareness into the center of our being. There, resting in stillness, love can be heard. Reading stories of love, remembering moments of love, and talking with someone we love also brings our heart’s presence to the surface.

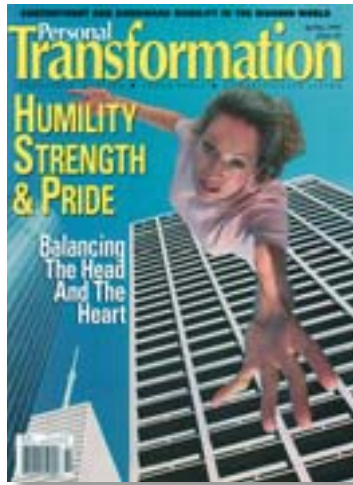
I want to be like the grandmother who faithfully carried love through the years. I can be, we all can be, when we listen to the whisper of our hearts. She transmitted love across an ocean and a generation. May we also become bearers of love.

Welcome to *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION*.

Mary NurrieStearns

Mary NurrieStearns
Editor

From our Readers



SMILE

Thanks for the exploration of humility in the spring 1999 issue. I especially liked Lawrence Kushner's words about humility. They have been ringing in my ears ever since I read them. I love the notion of creatureliness, that we all have been created to do something that only we can do. Kushner says that humility is the joyful awareness that I am a creature of God and so is everyone else. Those words have been reverberating in my ears whenever I start to feel superior to others, which happens occasionally, but also when I feel less than others, which happens more frequently. I still see his smiling face when I hear the echo of his words and I invariably smile in response. Then I have a sense of belonging, along with everyone else, in this crazy world of ours.

I never know what little gem I will pick up when I read your mag-

azine. Occasionally I think I've read enough inspirational material and am ready for a break. I thought about not renewing my subscription, but once again, I found something in your pages that is such help. So, here is my renewal. Also I like the "From the Experts."—*Mary Peters, St. Louis, Missouri.*

REFRESHING

Inspiring! Wilma Mankiller's article on the transformations in her life was truly inspirational. Thank you for letting her share with us the lessons she has learned from living: that the only way to survive is through interdependence, try to keep life as free as possible of the negative and focus on the positive, and try to see obstacles as challenges rather than as reasons to give up.

It was refreshing to be reminded, also, that spirituality comes in a variety of forms and we are wise to tap into all that are available to us, whether it's praying with the Bible or with the Eagle feather.

I was reminded, by her observation on love, of a friend years ago who said she wanted a boyfriend not so she would have someone to love her, but so she would have someone to love. Yes, Wilma, it is critical to our survival. Thank you for the lessons, the reminders.—*Jenny Moore, San Diego, California.*

GROUPS

Until recently I was not familiar with your magazine. The article

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 72

READERS ON...

DO YOU WANT TO SHARE your insights and reflections with other *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* readers? We want to know about your transformative experiences—what you learned, how you changed and how these aspects of transformation affected you and the way you relate to life. Send us a 400-500 word essay on one of the following aspects of transformation.

ONENESS WITH NATURE
(a wilderness experience, gardening, relationship with a pet, etc.).
Due July 14, 1999

**RELATIONSHIP AS TEACHER—
HEALER** (being with a loved one through crisis or death, an inspiring role model, or mentor, etc.). Due September 14, 1999.

Send manuscript, your address, and daytime phone number. Essays chosen for print will receive two free gift subscriptions. (Please note: Manuscripts will be edited and cannot be returned.)

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Transformation Groups



STEVE WOLF

Groups that Work

MARY NURRIESTEARN S

Transformation does not occur in isolation, although important realizations and spiritual centering often transpire when we are not with other people. While it is true that we need solitude, time to be with ourselves, with the divine, and with nature, even then we are not alone. We are always in relationship—with the air we breathe, the Creative Energy from which we came, our personal thoughts, feelings and body sensations, and those with whom we work and live. We cannot escape relationship.

It is through relationships that we see ourselves. All relationships are revealing if we let them be. Relationships show us the way to our maturation. They make apparent the shortcomings of our personalities, such as the ways that we are controlling and approval seeking. At the same time, relationships give us the opportunity to be forgiving, loving, and responsible, and to experience our spiritual essence.

Two kinds of relationships, in particular, are wonderful teachers for transformation. One is our intimate relationship with spouse and family. The other is participating in a conscious community of people dedicated to becoming more conscious. The group context is a powerful catalyst to the processes of maturational working in its members.

Transformational exploration is greatly benefited from the support of like-minded sojourners: from the honest communication, commitment, and shared experiences of others invested in conscious growth. Steve Wolf, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and co-author of

Romancing the Shadow, who lives and works in the Los Angeles area, has been working with transformational groups for the past several years. He believes that people coming together in groups for the purpose of self-exploration provides an invaluable step in our collective movement toward universal consciousness.

Groups are well established in our culture as agents of personal healing and growth. Leaderless groups proliferate. Twelve-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, have a long history and rich tradition for bringing sanity and sobriety to alcoholics. In fact, a recent survey of 3,000 participants reported that 19 percent of today's adults have participated in or are presently participating in a leaderless group.

In religious and mental health institutions, the group format has long been recognized as being valuable for healing. Typically, these groups have been led by a trained facilitator who guides the group process so that the communications within the group are honest, respectful, and revealing. This helps the members to feel safe, making it easier for them to express whatever needs to be shared so that they may heal and become whole.

Both leaderless and leader-led groups have advantages. Leaderless groups are inexpensive and draw upon the strengths, support, motivation, and experiences of their participants. In these groups leadership is a function which moves through the group members. It does not rest on the authority of the leader. However, a leader-led group can never provide the opportunity for each member to develop responsibility for the voice of leadership that is possible in a leaderless group. On the other hand, groups facilitated by a leader have a skilled person navigating the participants through the inevitable crises of group life, a person who can provide support for individuals who are dealing with emotional challenges are more than a leaderless group can justifiably be expected to contend with.

Dr. Wolf has joined together advantages of leader-

less and leader-led groups in his model of transformational groups. He describes these groups as “spiritually centered, psychologically oriented, leaderless groups designed for self-exploration and the creation of conscious community.” In order to incorporate some strengths of the leader-led groups into these leaderless groups, Steve

teaches methodologies to empower members to address the inevitable challenges that occur as part of the leaderless group process.

The failure of leaderless groups often comes about when individuals no longer feel empowered to safely express themselves within the group. This results in dropouts or superficial connections during

group meetings. “Many leaderless groups flounder due to their inability to deal with the five crises of leaderless groups,” says Steve. He labels these phenomena as crises because when they occur one or more members of the group feel held back, unable or unwilling to be authentic with the group. The spirit of the group then lacks full presence. The five crises involve issues of forming consensus; inability to explore deep emotional content; personality conflicts; power, authority, and leadership struggles; and loss of spiritual purpose or reason for being in the group.

The group facilitator develops each group in such a way as to empower the group to address these crises when they arise. In the first few sessions, the facilitator teaches the participants how to function in the group and gradually become independent. After meeting for a few sessions with the facilitator, the group then meets alone. The facilitator returns for the next couple of sessions with the group, then again, the group meets without the facilitator. Over time, the group meets more and more often without the facilitator. Over the course of the group’s existence, the facilitator remains available to the group to provide assistance and training on an as-needed basis. The professional facilitator is paid only when he or she meets with the group. This provides a financial “carrot” for members to strive for their independence.

An experience with a group that Steve recently started working with shows how a facilitator can teach a group to deal with their crises. Each group usually opens with a check-in, which is a brief discussion of what happened to the participants during the week. That evening the dialogue in the group

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Transformation Group Training

Learn to Train Leaderless Groups

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION magazine is sponsoring training programs for individuals interested in becoming trainers for leaderless, spiritually centered transformation groups.

The training is particularly suited for therapists, healers and other qualified persons who have done a lot of inner work, understand the importance of groups in personal growth, and would like to organize and train leaderless groups.

The format is ongoing, small groups which meet for three weekend workshops over a year. Trainees learn methodologies by participating in a leaderless group led by Steve Wolf. Three training groups are planned: one each on the West Coast, June 25-27, in the Midwest, August 27-29, and the East Coast, October 8-10.

These groups are being organized now. Take advantage of this opportunity to become a group leader and guide others on their transformational journey.

To sign up, or for information,
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ASK THE EXPERTS

Your transformation questions answered by leaders in the movement.

Is Honesty Always the Best Policy? Are there circumstances in which it is more loving to tell “little white lies” or to omit information, or should I be honest always?

DAN MILLMAN: A bigger question floats above the obvious—a question of realism and idealism, two (apparently) opposing schools of thought in our conditional world of duality. Realists call idealists “foolish dreamers who create one catastrophic experiment after another.” Idealists may liken realists to “Machiavellian cynics and apologists of mediocrity.”

Religion is about calling us to our highest ideals. Politics is the art of the realistic. Perhaps this is why we have wisely separated Church and State, like keeping apart quarreling children who just don't understand one another's views well at all. Issues of abortion, gun control, tax and campaign reform all have their idealists and realists. In fact, one can view any issue, including honesty, through either of these polarized lenses.

Idealists would say, “Always tell the truth. In the long run it is best. It may hurt, but the truth is the truth.” But whose truth? If a little girl and aspiring artist asks if you think her drawing is pretty but you do not, what do you say? If a man in a murderous rage is chasing a young woman running for her life, and asks you if she ran to the right or left and you saw which way she went, how do you respond? With the truth?

Realists use truth pragmatically. White lies have functional value. The danger is that they may be self-serving, and white lies turn darker in the shadows of self-deception.

The real question is, do we lie to ourselves? See ourselves, know ourselves, as we are, without the self-serving gloss? To me,

this kind of truth is most important. If we come to see others and ourselves realistically, we develop the compassion to use language wisely. And when we face choices of whether to lie with kindness or use truth like a bludgeon, we choose well.

There are times when emphasizing a facet of the truth requires wisdom and kindness, for there are many truths. We need to apply higher principles, such as, “What is the courageous choice? The kindest choice? What is for the highest good of all concerned here?” rather than, “What will best serve my self-interest?”

Relieving Tension

In recent years I've realized how tense I am. My back muscles readily tighten, I'm prone to worry and anxiety, and my outlook tends to be cautious—especially when I'm fatigued. I'm becoming more relaxed and I know that the roots of my tension come from my childhood. I've done a lot of psychological work but my patterns of worry and anxiety are pervasive. Any suggestions?

BELLERUTH NAPARSTEK: I'm happy you asked this because you raise an important issue that many of us still get stuck on. As a psychotherapist, I was trained (35 years ago) to believe that once we cognitively understood the sources of our pain and distress, and wept a tear or two over it, it would go away.

But over the years, clinical experience kept showing me this was not necessarily the case—people can pretty much deal with issues from the past, and yet the patterns and habits of our bodyminds can persist anyway.

The solution seems to lie in retraining the mind to place its attention elsewhere, and to use the power and reach of the altered state to access the nourishing,

IN THIS ISSUE:



DAN MILLMAN,
Is honesty the best policy or is it OK to tell little white lies?



BELLERUTH NAPARSTEK,
A solution to dealing with recurring issues from the past.



JACQUELYN SMALL,
Suggestion for dealing with long-buried feelings.



SUE PATTON THOLE,
Learn how to speak the truth and still be a nice person.

peaceful, rich, and boundless resources in all of us.

What's lovely about this approach is that the more you use it, the better you get at it. After some practice, you can release tension and distress in seconds, before it has a chance to build up, and, instead, fill yourself with the healing forces of love and gratitude—not the fake, goody-two-shoes kind—but the real power of your own open heart.

I would suggest, for starters, that when you're feeling okay and not particularly tense, you practice the following, maybe twice a day for 10 minutes: Adopt a comfortable position, folding your hands across your belly or heart. This will become your "anchoring device," the posture you can repeat, even in public, when you feel yourself getting tense that will remind your soon-to-be conditioned body to settle back down.

Take a few deep, full, cleansing breaths, all the way down into your belly, and see if you can imagine the warm energy of your inbreath going to any tight places, warming, loosening, softening them, and then lifting them, so, with the turn of the breath, you are exhaling the discomfort with the outbreath. Repeat this three or four times until you establish a slow, steady, even pattern. Keep your hands on your belly or chest so you can feel the rise of the body with the inbreath, and the way it subsides with the outbreath.

Now see if you can take a moment to notice how the inside of your body feels, traveling down from your head and neck (we want to get you out of your head!) into your shoulders, chest, belly, buttocks, thighs, calves and feet. As you check in with each area, breathe in and repeat to yourself: "My oldest friend, and steadiest companion;" with each outbreath, say, "Thank you." In this way, you express gratitude to your body for sticking with you this far, and holding up as best it can. This is powerful medicine, and even if you don't mean it at first because you hate your thighs or belly, I promise, you'll get there sooner than you can imagine.

Now imagine that you're surrounded by a cushion of energy (you are) and this cushion is gently vibrating and dancing on your skin, humming with power, sparkling and dancing with light and color, all around you. Each outbreath makes the cushion even denser, more palpable, so that it functions as a kind of protective filter, insulating you from whatever you don't want or need, but still allowing what's nourishing to come in.

Now imagine that this cushion is acting as a kind

of magnet, drawing to its field every good wish, prayer, smile, gesture of gratitude that has ever been sent your way... pulling them all in from all time and all places... and filling the field around you.

Now sense in the cushion the presence of those who love you and guide you well... past, present or future... just the ones you want with you. If you can't come up with any people right away, that's okay... dear pets, powerful ancestors, guardian angels, power animals, sweet spirits and magical beings can show up too, some familiar, some not, it doesn't matter... just so you feel their protection and support. See if you can smell someone's familiar smell, feel the soft weight of a gentle touch (or nuzzle), hear the well-loved timbre of a certain voice... so you are literally sensing your allies around you.

Now breathe in all that love and care, deep into the center of your heart... and breathe out your own gratitude... and just soak up the richness of it.

That's it. Do this for a few weeks, until it becomes automatic: i.e., you adopt that position and your heart opens and your face softens. The imagery will crowd out tension, fear, and the nattering worry in your head with the hugeness of your heart. It works every time.

But here's the thing: now that you have a powerful technique at your disposal, you have to pay attention to your insides so you know when to implement it—when you're starting to get tense. You have to lovingly police your body (your oldest friend and steadiest companion needs your protection!) so you can move into this mind state when it starts to carry on just out of habit.

Coping With the Past

I'm going through a phase in which I'm discovering and feeling anger and disappointment that has been buried for years. This is difficult not only for me but also for people around me. I know I need to face all of these feelings, but if I do, I risk alienating those I love. How do my family and I get through this?

JACQUELYN SMALL: The fact that your long-buried feelings of disappointment and anger are now rising to the surface is a good sign for your own healing process. There is a maxim amongst psychotherapists: "You can't heal it if you can't feel it." However, you need to find a good container for the expression of your pain so you can wring it all out of your heart. By "container" I mean a psychotherapist, a process-oriented bodyworker, or someone who understands emotional-release work,

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Transformations

Opening the Heart

ANNIE LEIGHT
INTERVIEWED BY
RICK NURRIESTEARN

I met Annie several years ago during a weeklong seminar. She had a clarity and intensity about her that stood out among the other participants. There was also a gentleness and directness about her. Sometimes her body hurt so badly from her cancer that it overwhelmed her and she could do nothing but moan and writhe in pain.

Annie Leight was 50-something. One of her spiritual teachers told her that she lived extremely well between a rock and a hard place, which was exactly where she had been lately. Six years ago, she was finalizing her physical, emotional and spiritual preparations for a 10,000-mile transformational walk, a task that she said was given to her in a spiritual vision right before her 40th birthday, a task which became her sacred obligation. The walk was to be in the shape of a butterfly to symbolize both transformation and the transition into a new millennium. Scheduled to begin in October 1993, Annie's walk was postponed after she was involved in a serious car accident in August of that year. While still recovering from the wreck two years later, Annie was diagnosed with undifferentiated cell cancer. Doctors told her that with medical treatment, she would live. Without treatment, she would be dead in six months. She and her husband, Rob, doubted the doctors' optimistic prognosis if she underwent treatment; they later learned there had never been any medical cure on record for her kind of cancer.



Annie knew that if she went the route of mainstream medicine and had the traditional treatments, she would be miserable. With the support of her husband and her friends, she decided against treatment and resumed plans for her butterfly walk. "I felt incredibly loved and supported. Most people assume that when you're diagnosed with cancer, you're going to follow a tried and true path even if it's inevitable that it will fail. What my friends and my husband did was give me permission to go on the journey," Annie says. "By then, the walk had become intimately and fundamentally related to my relationship with the beloved infinite spirit. By that point, I understood that I had a sacred task to do, the outcome of which I did not know. I could do nothing else." Her dream for the journey was simply to show people another way to live. "Most people are living in deep, deep levels of despair. And what I consciously wanted to do was to open my heart and being in such a way that there could be, at least on a small scale, a mirroring of other ways of being alive that did not require eighty-thousand dollar a year incomes, that did not require all the goodies. I think technology is wonderful as a tool, but is lousy as a leader. There's a danger right now in this country where a lot of people are really feeling powerless and despairing and hopeless. Everybody should have the possibility for receiving dignity and respect, because if we don't have dignity and respect, we don't have anything."

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“I am beginning to feel that death is the end of a particular, physical, concrete organism. With death you plug into a far richer consciousness that allows you to be here in terms of energy and consciousness, even if you aren’t here in physical form. There’s a growing peacefulness around the fact that I can choose to let go and not wage war between life and death.”

Annie started her transformational walk January 1, 1997. She covered 3,300 miles before the cancer forced her to stop walking eight months later. She spent the next several months at a motel near where her walk ended, on pain medication, and predominantly bedridden.

Weeks ago I received a phone call at work from a friend who told me that Annie’s health was failing and she might not have long to live. I telephoned Annie to see if she would be interested in doing an interview. A personal attendant answered the phone and I explained that I wanted to interview Annie and suggested an interview later in the week. The attendant answered in a serious tone, “if you are interested in talking to Annie you better do it in five minutes. She may not be with us this afternoon.”

I said I’d call back in a couple of minutes after I hooked up the recording equipment.

When I called back, Annie was lucid, focused and deeply centered. She spoke as if these words would be her last. Annie died a little over a week later.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION: *What was your immediate reaction to being diagnosed with cancer?*

ANNIE: I was completely devastated. I had just gone through almost two years of coping with serious health problems created by an auto accident that I was lucky to have survived.

PT: *How did being diagnosed with cancer impact your desire for doing your walk?*

ANNIE: It made me more determined to do it. When I’m up against the wall and you tell me I can’t do something or I can’t be something, I become even more determined.

PT: *In following your vision, what psychological, emotional and physical difficulties did you have to deal with?*

ANNIE: A whole series of ongoing transforma-

tions. The walk brought me into relationship with everything at very, very deep levels. I didn’t have the capacity at the beginning, although I’m developing it now, to keep from absorbing all the energies I experienced in different settings, which I think contributed to strengthening of the cancer, because I didn’t have protection. I’ve been learning and experiencing that you can both have boundaries and not disconnect. For me that was a paradox of unbelievable proportions, but allowing myself to live in that paradox opened me to life. Spiritually it opened the door to intimacy with anything, which was such a profound experience. I mean, on a day-to-day basis, I was truly living the mystic’s way. Physically, at first, the walk was agony because of all the back and spine and neck injuries which, while I walked, generated enormous amounts of pain. So the first six months of the walk, in particular, was a conscious commitment—sometimes for five minutes—to just stay with the walk.

PT: *What can you tell us about the coping skills you developed in living this day-to-day life of walking?*

ANNIE: I learned that all we have is now. I also learned that even though I was fifty years old that I could be—even with the accident, all the cancer and whatever—remarkably resilient. One of the main things I learned was how to stay with something. Also, by being and living in nature much of the time, I learned that there is a softness underlying all of life—a gentleness, a tenderness. Learning to trust that became very important for coping. I could simply be present to anything. That shifted my whole sense of power because I’d always felt like my way of seeing and exploring the world was so different that I didn’t have a connecting point. The walk allowed me to not only have a connecting point, but to have a place where there’s no disconnect.

Transformations

PT: Looking back at your life, what is the most important thing that you've learned?

ANNIE: The most honest answer to that question is that there have been a whole series of meaningful moments in which I've continued to open to life. The process of allowing yourself to be open to life, instead of fending life off, that allows for each moment to count. That's what I want to say to people.

Live your life in the present moment; don't live in the past or future because in the past or future you're no longer fully alive. In the present moment, you can take time to notice flowers and birds and watch a river trickle, and you can get back to that kind of natural inherent connection with your body and the earth and people and animals. Your life begins to flow rather than being a series of isolated events. When life is no longer a series of isolated events, when it's part of this total fabric you're weaving together with multiple shapes and colors and different threads—then any moment has the potential to be incredibly impactful. Then you don't need to create and orchestrate special occasions. The very fact that you're breathing is a special occasion.

PT: What impact did your decision not to medically treat the cancer have on others? The people who loved you must have been concerned for your health and your sanity.

ANNIE: They were deeply affected, but when I listened deeply I heard that my walk was offering encouragement, a wake-up call to live before you die instead of dying before you live. Every one of my friends is beginning to know their consecrations and responsibilities, obligations and humor, and how they connect to a full life.

PT: Do you feel like you have accomplished what you set out to do?

ANNIE: It's hard to answer that question now, because I no longer care about accomplishment in the way that it's normally defined. What I care about is an openness to life which allows our gifts and talents to be present in the world. At that point, we're no longer in a management-by-objectives world, or you're no longer in a success vs. failure mode. I stayed faithful to the consecration and didn't worry about an end result.

PT: It sounds like you've come to a deeper level of faith or trust.

ANNIE: Yes. I started out with zip. It looked like I was a pretty faithful person, trustworthy and all. But, in fact, at the deepest level, the point right above essence, I had no faith and I certainly had not built a real and honest relationship with spirit. I just hadn't done it. So, with consciousness and much support, I've been willing to go deeper into what is really going on, what my truth is, and the barriers to that truth. I've been in deep prayer and meditation saying, "Okay, I'm willing to do this the easy way now—help me to do this the easy way so that I don't have to be transformed through such arduousness, terror, and pain. I'm willing to be transformed. Transform me, but get me out of this perpetual life and death thing—where everything is always at the ultimate boundary." I've learned enormous amounts from living there but the emotional cost and the cost to my husband and friends has been enormous. I made a commitment to see if there's another way here.

PT: If you had never gotten ill do you think you could have come to the same understanding?

ANNIE: No, I couldn't have. I can honestly say that. There wasn't enough of me for anything meaningful or significant to happen. It would have just been a nice adventure story.

PT: Most people wouldn't jump at the chance to have terminal cancer or some other life threatening illness in order to transform their lives. Is there another way to do it?

ANNIE: Yes there is. When you start to feel pain, unrest, joylessness or despair; if at the earliest possible moment, you begin to understand that you're being drawn into a deeper place, open yourself to coming into contact with your guide, a human who understands this process well enough to know what is about to be evoked, then you don't have to overwhelm your body in order to allow a change to happen. You have to be open to the unknown and you have to be open to mystery. Otherwise, you're in charge, you're in control and nothing can be transformed—there's no room for the energy to move and flow.

PT: You are very close to your own death; what are your thoughts on death?

ANNIE: I am beginning to feel that death is the end of a particular, physical, concrete organism. With death you plug into a far richer consciousness that allows you to be here in terms of energy and consciousness, even if you aren't here in physical form. There's a growing peacefulness around the fact that I can choose to let go and not wage war between life and death. I can simply allow death to be the completion of one state of being while at the same time knowing—and I really do know—that there's a consciousness and energy that continues beyond death.

PT: Do you have fear or anger about dying?

ANNIE: No, I don't. I don't have fear. I could get back into fear in the next five minutes. I assume fear is always a companion. It's a matter of what kind of allegiance it's given and how much energy is devoted to it. It's there like breath is there, or like the capacity for joy and love and awe is there. It's another capacity. You have to not feed it.

PT: Do you still have hope for recovery?

ANNIE: I am doing my best not to make assumptions one way or the other. Every time I have energy, I cherish it and use it to the best of my ability. As long as I have my relationships and until I'm asked to let go of those relationships, I'm alive. When I'm asked to let go of those relationships and to surrender, I hope I'm willing to go to the place of light, the womb of life, and die in peace, honoring the craziness, joy, and beauty of a particular and unique life. Hopefully I can go with extreme gratitude. I feel that I am in relationship to God, am one with God. That is real stuff. It's not conceptual anymore, although it used to be. It is no longer a concept. It's my way of being alive in the world.

PT: In closing, is there anything you would like to share with our readers?

ANNIE: Stay with your own life; don't get distracted by trying to be somebody else. Learn to enjoy and be open to the beauty of any moment, even though there may be enormous pain, ugliness and injustice. Secondly, learn how to be in relationship to fear and terror, because fear and terror drop us down to a less harmonious and less integrated form of behavior. Thirdly, cultivate a garden of daily delights that allows you to be you without demanding recognition or praise or any of those

things. Also, find what you're consecrated to, because we're all consecrated to something. Finally, risk opening your heart and loving and allowing the beauty of love into your life as much of the time as possible.



Something More

L I N D A S P E N C E R

In the summer of 1995, my world changed. I had been the head senior minister of a large and thriving Unity church in Bellevue, Washington, for almost a decade, and had been in active ministry for almost twenty years. I loved my work: the speaking, the teaching, the chance to make the world a better place every day through service to others. By August, though, I began to feel that I had somehow

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been unplugged from all experience of creativity and meaning. I was going through the motions of my busy ministerial life but I felt emptied of everything I knew I had to share with the world. When that creativity went, I realized I had nothing to say to anyone.

In the fall of that year I facilitated a videotape series, *Canticle to the Cosmos*, for a class I was teaching at church. As I listened to Brian Swimme talk, I heard him speak about the “felt impulse” that stirs in the depths of anything that is creatively evolving, whether back at the dawn of the evolutionary process or right now. The next wave of evolution occurs, Swimme said, when a creature—whether human or prehistorical roundworm—responds fully to that creative impulse. The idea seized me that if I got quiet enough for a long enough period of time I could sense that renewing impulse in the center of my being, the evolutionary movement of my own soul.

Shortly after, I asked the Board of Directors to grant me a sabbatical. When they gave me three months, I imagined finding a little cabin by the water, until one day someone said to me, “Why don’t you go to Ecuador? A woman would be safe there traveling alone, and you would have a wonderful time.” Something in me lit up and I said, “Of course! Ecuador!”

I went to Ecuador by myself in the summer of 1996, and waited for something wonderfully spiritual to happen. I discovered that the best I could do, given that that “something” never occurred, was to get up and follow my feet. So I would get up in the mornings, wherever I was, and follow where my feet took me: sometimes into the world, where I would

walk and look and take everything in, and sometimes into my own soul, in my little room, journaling all day. It was an extraordinary experience and, I can see now, powerful preparation for where I am right now in my journey.

I came back at the end of August and I couldn’t understand why we live the way we do. I looked at everything from a completely altered perspective:

altered not because I was having profound spiritual experiences, but because I had been in a place where I had been virtually invisible as a middle-aged woman with a backpack. When I came back I couldn’t understand why our culture was so full, and so fast. Two weeks after “re-entry” I went to Nordstrom’s to get more clothes as most of mine had been stolen on the trip. I rode the escalator to the lingerie department and stood, overwhelmed, among racks and racks of gorgeous nightgowns and panties and bras and bathrobes, and burst into tears. I rode the escalator back down, weeping, minus new underwear.

In Ecuador I had discovered how little was really essential, how little we need for life to flourish. That lin-

gerie department became a perfect metaphor for my life back in Seattle. Back at the church, the quality of my teaching and speaking was far finer than it had previously been; what was moving through me was at a deeper level than I had ever experienced. The church thrived, and my life thrived, but underneath it all was a longing for the space to see again where my feet wanted to go, to feel again that basic impulse. I felt a compelling inner push to explore the void; I had a sense that Spirit was wanting all of me, for a time.

As fall of 1997 moved into winter I began to have

I have suffered a lot of self-judgment about whether I was on course or off course. What I most want to share with others in profound transitions in their own lives is, when that self-judgment begins to happen, breathe into it. If you’re breathing, you’re doing it right.

Transformations

a series of experiences that affected me physically and mentally: I knew, though, that the experiences were of a spiritual nature. I went through weeks of dizziness so intense that I couldn't hold thoughts very long. I found that something was wanting to happen in me, but I had no time to honor it. Someone whom I loved and trusted told me, "Linda, there's a new energy trying to come in and you need to meditate into it and accept the gift of it rather than trying to function and turn away from it."

I began meditating into the energy, but rather than creating the state of bliss I had expected, it created in me more and more discomfort about having to function in the world in old and familiar ways. I went away for a week for a conference, and meditated every moment I wasn't in meetings. I asked, over and over, "What do you want me to do? What are you asking of me?" I heard that voice that isn't a voice saying, "Until you step into the void, your next step cannot be revealed." I said, "I will do whatever You want," and returned home to resign my position. I stayed on at the church for five months to make a smooth transition, selling my home, leaving my community and the work that I cherished, leaving my calling, leaving Unity, which had given me the gift of life 25 years ago. I gave it all up.

Now it's been almost ten months that I've lived on the water on an island in Puget Sound. It's been an arduous process, ten months of being lost. Ten months of following my feet, my breath, every day, trusting that in the midst of confusion and loss of identity and meaning in my life, that the Divine is always as close as my own breath. I have learned to trust that if I follow my breath and my feet every day, even if I feel completely non-functional, that somehow there is a Divine process at work.

The second guessing of my smaller self goes on all the time, that second guessing that says, "You're crazy! What have you done? This isn't going anywhere. Your spiritual visions have not been made manifest. Look what you left behind!" I then just remind myself that I have made a total commitment to the Divine; I'm allowing the Divine to engineer my journey. Instead of my controlling my journey, or demanding how it should be, I'm recognizing that my job now, in this transition, is simply to stay

in the process.

For long periods of time at the beginning of my "island time," I would get up in the morning and basically be non-functional for the day, feeling devastated, sitting and staring at the water, watching the eagles circle overhead. I lost my ability to communicate with people well because I had gone so far within. Even in those days, though, at the darkest moments, if I didn't know it in my heart, I could see with some larger part of me that this emptying was the Divine at work. I knew that when someone is emptied as extensively as I had been emptied, it's because something larger is moving toward filling that in a new way.

I spent days without any apparent spiritual infilling, and then I would be in conversation with someone and I would feel light pouring into my body. I would say, "Where have you been? I've been waiting for you." There that Presence would be, and then it would be gone, and it would be just as confusing as before.

The most important lesson I've learned in this is to let go of control, to give up my small designs for a greater process. In the beginning of this process I had panic attacks: in the grocery store, or in traffic, I'd start feeling so panicky. It was all about control; I wasn't engineering things like before, in the way I had previously. I came from a spiritual tradition where you tell the universe clearly what you want and you hold it in mind and that's what shows up. Well, this process clearly hasn't worked that way!

I let go of my identity; in that there was such a sense of death. Even when we think we've let go of

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Tell about Your Transformation

In each issue, we present stories from people who have transformed their lives.

Do you experience inner peace and joy? Is your life fulfilled with loving relationships? Are you directed by your wisdom and aspirations? We want to present your inspiring story. We want to tell our readers how *you* changed your life. For information, please see page 71.

Compassion in Action

Teaching: A Way of Service

ELIZABETH CHIMENT
BY MELISSA WEST

Monday morning, 8 a.m., Oakland, California: teacher Elizabeth Chiment opens the front door of the large stucco building that is Bret Harte Middle School. Elizabeth walks into a river of jostling, laughing, screaming kids on their way to lockers and free breakfast programs, a powerful contrast to her time spent quietly meditating on a zafu before leaving for school. “When I walk through the halls I’m like a polished stone in a rushing river, a river of humanity flowing past me. They’re noisy and so present in the moment. The instant I walk through the door, I am so absorbed into and inspired by their liveliness. It’s like, whoosh!, here we go.”

Chiment wears two very different hats at Bret Harte, an urban school of 1,200 Latino, African American, Native American, Samoan and Tongan adolescents. She coordinates a peer-helping program, one of the first in the country with an HIV and AIDS prevention curriculum, and teaches science and English to deaf students.

Chiment and another teacher in the peer-helping program work with eighth-graders targeted for their leadership ability, “which does not mean that they are straight-A students or good kids. Many of them are at risk themselves for HIV, have experienced truancy or are on probation,” says Chiment. The students are grouped in teams of three to teach an AIDS curriculum to sixth-grade science students.



“These are eighth-graders who never even talked to each other, being from very diverse and at-odds ethnic and social groups. Now they’re working cohesively as a team. I’m a part of that team, so they have to see me as a trusted ally rather than just a teacher. Most of these kids have never seen adults as allies.

“The peer-helping program is a place where I engage my spiritual practice, because the work requires me to be very authentic with these young people. I have to maintain the role of teacher, but be vulnerable as a human being who is very committed to a spiritual practice. We talk about conflict resolution in families, why the highest rate of HIV infection right now is in teens of color, and how can we break that cycle by being honest and compassionate with each other.”

The teams try to develop a relationship with every sixth-grader, giving the younger students an older student they can trust and ask for help when they find themselves in risky situations. “These peer relationships allow the eighth-graders to tap into their own compassion,” says Chiment. “It’s a form of engaged practice for them. They feel empowered to be a part of a community. We have HIV-infected kids at school, and many kids have HIV-positive parents. The peer-helper program has become a tool to build community at Bret Harte, but then ripples out to touch the larger world. The kids take the information into their own communities to be volunteer public health educators. We’ve

become a hub of activism in a very spiritual, peaceful way just by doing the right thing, and doing it with a lot of heart and willingness to meet each other and the community where they are.”

Chiment’s role as science teacher to the deaf has profoundly changed in the past year. Last summer, while sitting in gardens on retreat, Chiment thought, “How am I going to get these deaf kids engaged with the earth? How can I get them to feel how I feel sitting surrounded by these gardens?”

Chiment returned to school in the fall with a new science curriculum based on gardening, and worked with her deaf students to create a green oasis in a desert of asphalt and concrete. The students began with three raised organic beds of flowers, vegetables, and herbs, then moved on to create a small orchard, replete with wind chimes the kids made themselves. Twelve more beds are planned for next year.

“The gardens have become areas of solace, joy, and sanctuary for students. Kids who in the past were very resistant to science class run full speed to the science room, pick up their shovels and gloves and are out working in the gardens every day, rain or shine.

“It’s a huge opportunity for kids who have never grown anything to not just plant plants, but to actually care for them, dovetailing with my Buddhist practice of caring for every living being. Today someone pulled up a small tree, not one of the trees we planted, but the kids came in upset and told me, ‘We have to replant this tree! This tree is suffering, we need to do it right now and not wait until science class.’ This compassion ripples out: if you’re caring for a tree that way, what about the kid across the room that you can’t stand because of the way he looks? It’s become fertile ground for dealing with very hard issues.”

Chiment and her students, through the gardens, have made contact with school neighbors resistant to having the junior high in their neighborhood. Students began bringing sick and homebound residents fresh vegetables from the garden; these same residents now regularly invite the students into their homes for cookies and tea. “These are deaf kids, and the people who invite them over don’t sign, but there’s a profound sense of each side saying, with-

out words, ‘We’re watching out for you and we know you’re watching out for us.’ Neighbors have come out of their houses, and instead of being furious that they live next to a huge middle school, they’re now very appreciative of these young people doing something to beautify their neighborhood. Kids are starting to have such positive relationships with each other and the greater community that are way outside of anything I’ve done. The ripples just keep getting bigger and bigger.”

Chiment, a serious practitioner of Zen Buddhism, took her formal Bodhisattva vows recently after five years of intensive study and practice. “During those years of study I was most moved by the First Precept, ‘First cause no suffering.’ How could I engage my practice so that I just didn’t cause suffering, but put a balm to the suffering around me?”

Chiment struggled with burnout until she began practicing Buddhism. “I would take kids on almost like a project: How can I help? What can I do?” she recalls. “Now, I take a deep breath and tell myself, ‘The most important thing I can do is to be fully present to their pain.’ Many people have tried to help them or fix their lives, but no one has been willing to simply sit with them in their suffering: abuse, rape, parent death from AIDS, or simply the suffering of being a fourteen-year-old child in this culture. Now that I have a Buddhist practice, I can do that, and students have given me consistent feedback that just listening, and not trying to change or fix anything at all, is the most profound and compassionate thing I can do.”

The children are both Chiment’s greatest gift, and her greatest challenge.

“The challenge is, am I willing to sit with children and be open and compassionate? This challenge feeds my soul and my practice. The kids are angry, scared and despairing, in gangs, using drugs, but I say to them, ‘I’m listening to you. You have my full attention. How are we going to use this moment? Are we going to develop love and connectedness with each other?’ It’s such a challenge, because sometimes kids look at me and say, ‘You know, you’re so full of shit. Why on earth should I trust you?’ I have to prove to them every year that I’m authentic.

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PICK UP

A Way of Service

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“It’s the greatest gift that I can imagine when I receive a child’s trust. I’m honored every day to walk into this school and talk to these children and have them talk to me. I’m never bored. I never have to wonder what can I do to alleviate suffering! The door keeps opening all day in my classroom. Everyone knows it’s the place where you can just come and get a cookie, a hug, a listening ear, or maybe just a quiet desk to sit in where no one’s going to ask you anything. The kids know they can get a pass to come to my classroom by saying, ‘You know, I just can’t deal right now.’ It’s an island, a sanctuary.”

Service is vital, says Chiment, because it builds love in a broken world. “If service is done with no expectations, simply for the love of doing it, all it can do is create even more love. It’s like planting our garden; we did it with love, and all these neighbors now bring us cookies. I watch the kids in the peer groups and know that many are doing something for the first time just because it’s the right thing to do. Instead of getting in trouble, they’re getting respect from other kids for standing up and saying, ‘Don’t do drugs; don’t have unprotected sex; take care of both yourself and the other person.’ They do this because they want to, but what they get back in return is the respect and admiration of a whole room of sixth-graders saying, ‘You’re the coolest person I ever met. I want to be just like you.’ They’re getting back far more than they ever thought they would.

“It’s that idea of love rippling out. Once you see that ripple happening, you want to just go with it over and over. Service then

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From the Heart

Feminine Mysteries of Love

L L E W E L L Y N V A U G H A N - L E E

*The pain of love became the medicine for every heart,
The difficulty could never be solved without love.*

—Attâr

Love is the most powerful force in the universe, and for centuries mystics have understood the transformative potential of divine love. Love draws us back to love, love uncovers love, love makes us whole and love takes us Home. In the depths of the soul we are loved by God. This is the deepest secret of being human, the bond of love that is at the core of our being. And yet we have forgotten this essential nature of our being; we are hidden from our own deepest love. The mystical path is an uncovering of this love, an awakening to our own capacity to love and be loved.

Like everything that is created, love has a dual nature, positive and negative, masculine and feminine. The masculine side of love is “I love you.” Love’s feminine quality is “I am waiting for you; I am longing for you.” For the mystic, it is the feminine side of love, the longing, the cup waiting to be filled, that takes us back to God. Longing is a highly dynamic state and yet at the same time it is a state of receptivity. Because our culture has for so long rejected the feminine, we have lost touch with the potency of longing. Many people feel this pain of the heart and do not know its value; they do not know it is their innermost connection to love.

Longing is the sweet pain of belonging to God.



Once longing is awakened within the heart, it is the most direct way Home. Like the magnet, it draws us deep within our own heart where we are made whole and transformed. This is why the Sufi mystics have always stressed the importance of longing. The great Sufi Ibn ‘Arabî prayed, “Oh Lord, nourish me not with love but with the desire for love,” while Rûmî expressed the same truth in simple terms, “Do not seek for water, be thirsty.”

The feminine mystery of longing belongs to the nature of the soul, which is always feminine before God. In the innermost chamber of the heart we look toward God, receptive and attentive, needing God’s nourishment. The mystic knows that only God can make us whole, only God can heal the sickness of the soul. The ninth-century mystic Râb’ia, one of the first Sufis to stress the importance of devotional love, expressed this mystical truth:

*The source of my grief and loneliness
is deep in my breast.*

This is a disease no doctor can cure.

Only union with the Friend can cure it.

The heart longs for God, and seeks to find its true Beloved. If we follow our longing, if we allow ourselves to be pierced by the pain of separation from the source, we will be drawn back to God.

Longing is the central core of every mystical path, as the anonymous author of the fourteenth-century mystical classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, simply states: “Your whole life must be one of longing.” Yet our present Western society is so divorced from this mystical thread that underlies every spiritual path that we have no context within which to appreciate the nature of the heart’s desire for Truth. Many people who feel the unhappiness of a homesick soul do not know its cause. They do not realize the wonder of their pain, that it is their heart’s longing that will take them Home.

A friend had a simple and powerful dream in which

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Paragon House

she was alone in a landscape howling at the moon. There was no reply, no answer to the anguish of her calling, and when she awoke she felt a failure. She had called out and there had been no answer. But the tradition of lovers has long known that our calling is the answer, our longing for Him is His longing for us, "it is You who calls me to Yourself." The longing of the heart is the memory of when we were together with our Beloved. The pain of separation is our awakening to the knowledge that somewhere we are united with God.

Longing draws us from separation back to union, from our fragmented sense of self to the deeper wholeness of our true being. The longing of the heart is the sign of the deepest fulfillment, and yet it terrifies the mind because it does not belong to this world. There is no visible lover, no one to touch or to control. It is a love affair of essence to essence that was born before the beginning of time. Sadly, we have forgotten its potency; our culture has no place for this desire for what is intangible. In the Christian tradition, this relationship is embodied in Mary Magdalene's devotion for Christ. After the crucifixion she stood at the empty sepulcher where he had been buried, weeping. And when Jesus, risen from the dead, came and spoke to her saying, "Woman, why weepst thou? Whom seekest thou?" she first mistook him for a gardener until he called her by name, "Mary," and then she "turned herself and said 'Rabboni,' which is to say, Master."

In this meeting there are longing and devotion and the ancient mystery of the relationship of teacher and disciple. It has been often overlooked that Mary Mag-

dalene was the first to see the risen Christ, but it is deeply significant; for it is this inner feminine attitude of the heart, of longing and devotion that she embodies, that opens the lover to the transcendent mystery of love in which suffering and death are the doorway to a higher state of consciousness. The lover waits weeping for the Beloved to reveal His true nature.

Our culture has forgotten and buried the doorway of devotion, and the lover is often left stranded, not even knowing the real nature and purpose of the longing that tugs at the heart. It is easy to think that this discontent of the soul is a psychological problem, to mistake longing for depression or identify it as a mother complex or the result of an unhappy marriage. We need to reclaim the sanctity of sadness and the meaning of the heart's tears. For the longing of the lover is a longing to return to the source in which everything is embraced in its wholeness. The suffering of His lovers is the labor pains that awaken us to this higher consciousness, in which love joins this world with the infinite, and the heart embraces life not from the divisive perspective of the ego but from the eternal dimension of the Self. From within the heart the oneness of love becomes life's deepest wonder, for, in the words of Hildegard von Bingen, "It is the heart that sees the primordial eternity of every creature."

If we can create a context of longing, then those whose hearts are burdened with this quest will come to know the true nature of their pain. They will no longer need to repress it, fearing it as an abnormality or a psychological problem. We need to be able to collectively affirm this inner secret:

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New World

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Pathways to Wholeness



Actualize Your Spiritual Potential

ROY EUGENE DAVIS

The average person's habitual thoughts, emotional states, lifestyle preferences, and behaviors—and thus their personal circumstances—are primarily determined by subliminal (below the threshold of conscious awareness) inclinations and tendencies. So long as this condition prevails, life is experienced as a semi-conscious dream; random accomplishments are of little value; spiritual growth, if it occurs at all, is minimal.

To awaken from this dreamlike condition and begin to actualize one's innate spiritual potential, the question that needs to be asked is, "What is life for?" If the answer to this important question does not immediately arise to the surface of awareness, the fact that it is sincerely asked will attract a response from Universal Mind referred to by Ralph Waldo Emerson as "the one Mind which is common to all of us." Information will then be provided in ordinary ways, which may be intuitively recognized as being valid.

Over half a century ago, in an endeavor to apprehend the meaning of life, I prayed for guidance and avidly read the writings of people who were considered to be enlightened—knowledgeable because of their flawless insights and their personal experiences of life's processes. I discovered that saints and sages of various philosophical traditions are in agreement in regard to why we are in this world. We are here to:

To live in harmony with the laws (processes) of

nature by using our knowledge and abilities constructively. By doing this, we can unfold our innate potential, experience personal fulfillment, and make a useful contribution to society and the ongoing trends of evolution.

To learn to experience the easy fulfillment of wholesome desires which enhance our lives and benefit others. By doing this, we can accomplish our worthy purposes and experience enjoyment without attachments to our actions or to their results.

To learn to have our needs spontaneously satisfied by the responsiveness of the universe. As our awareness becomes clarified and expanded, we become increasingly conscious of the one Power that enlivens the universe and discover that, as we compliantly cooperate with it, it unfailingly provides resources, supportive events, and appropriate relationships for our highest good.

To respond to our innate soul urge to have our awareness restored to wholeness by nurturing our spiritual growth until we are fully Self- and God-realized. The Self of us, which is to be acknowledged and directly experienced, is our immortal, true nature. We are individualized units of the one field of Consciousness commonly referred to as God.

Endeavors to accomplish all four of these primary purposes of life can be applied simultaneously. While choosing to live in accord with the laws of nature, we can also perform effective actions and be receptive to the fulfillment of desires, have faith that our needs will be met, and unfold and express our soul qualities. The key to doing this is to be established in awareness of Being while performing useful actions.

At the innermost level of our Being, knowledge of Consciousness and its processes is innate to us; here, we are always serenely conscious of our wholeness. It is only at the surface of our awareness that confusion and conflict may occur. This is why the teachers of most enlightenment traditions recommend that contemplative prayer and meditation be learned and regularly practiced.

Although the side benefits of meditation—some of which are stress reduction, strengthening of the body's immune system, enlivening of the nervous system, and orderly thinking—can be welcomed, the primary purpose of practice is to accomplish the stage of alert, tranquil awareness which allows superconsciousness to be experienced. The superior influences of superconsciousness weaken and eradicate problem-causing subconscious influences and improve the meditator's intellectual powers, allowing authentic spiritual growth to spontaneously occur in the course of time.

The key to effective living and to spiritual growth that results in emotional maturity and clarified, expanded states of consciousness is mastery of attention. A spiritually unawake person's awareness is overly identified with mental and emotional states, physical sensations, and objective circumstances. A spiritually awake person, because established in Self- (soul) awareness, is able to view thoughts, moods, physical sensations, and objective circumstances with insightful dispassion and to consciously live with meaningful purpose.

Purposes which have value (which enhance and spiritually enrich our lives and the lives of others and which nurture the planet) are meaningful; purposes which have little or no value are meaningless. Focusing attention and actions on meaningful purposes, then, is a spiritual practice.

During a conversation with truth seekers, my guru Paramahansa Yogananda said, "There is a fundamental purpose for our lives. To know it, we must understand where life comes from and where it

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Transformational Practices



Retreat: A Time for Renewal

NANCY NEAL

Everyone needs time to be alone. We are living in such rapidly changing times that stress has become a major health problem in our society. People are busier than ever with the demands of daily living, some leading lives of quiet desperation. Job stress costs American industry more than 150 billion dollars a year in absenteeism, lost productivity, accidents, and medical insurance. Every week, 112 million people take medication for stress-related symptoms.

In our “getting and spending,” we often lay waste our most valuable assets—inner peace and spiritual power. Finding time for reflection and renewal to recover these spiritual qualities can seem as elusive as the Holy Grail, but with a little planning and determination, it can be done.

One answer to the proverbial cry, “Where can I go to get away from it all?” is to go on retreat. Retreat is a spiritual practice that opens the way for renewal. Whether for a day, a week, or a weekend, taking time out from the demands of daily living can help put a harried lifestyle back on even keel. The greatest gift we can give ourselves is time for solitude and inner reflection to reassess where we are in life and to reflect on our purpose for being.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines retreat as a place affording peace, quiet, privacy... a period of seclusion, retirement, or solitude.” It is an opportunity to draw back and explore what is going on within us, to rest in the sacred center of love and peace at the core

of our being and allow it to heal us. Just as pauses give color, texture, and richness to a musical composition, retreats are the pauses that add color, texture, and richness to our life experience.

There are a variety of retreat formats. Some retreats are highly structured, featuring workshops, guided meditations, social activities, and religious services or inspirational programs, while others are unstructured, allowing the retreatant complete seclusion and privacy. If you are around people much of the time or experience considerable job stress, you may welcome the quietude of a private retreat. If you spend much of your time alone, you might prefer interaction with people at a workshop retreat; even the highly organized retreat allows time for solitude.

In retreat we seek to reconnect with the Source of power within us—not physical power or power over others, but the spiritual power that enables us to maintain equanimity in our daily encounters. All power has its birth in the silence.

One of my spiritual teachers tells of the time she and a friend visited Grand Coulee Dam. The floodgates were open and water was gushing forth with tremendous force. “Look at all that power!” she exclaimed. A guide standing nearby interrupted by saying, “But, ma’am, all the power is on the silent side of the dam.” Our power to cope with the pressures of life is created and sustained in periods of silence and solitude.

When our days are filled with work, family, appointments, deadlines, recreational activities, and volunteer service, we tend to forget that our true essence is spiritual, that we are spiritual beings going through a human experience. Seldom do we take the time in the daily rush to examine our core values or to reassess our purpose in life. Problems overtake us and stress kicks in, often leading to physical ailments. Retreats provide an opportunity to heal ourselves on many levels.

For example, once, when I was feeling burned out from work and deeply concerned about some personal challenges, I went on retreat to the Osage Monastery

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Forest of Peace in Sand Springs, Oklahoma. Late the first night there was a severe thunderstorm. In the morning it continued to rain heavily, the gray day only adding to my depression. I spent the morning reading, meditating, and journaling. After sitting for a long while, I felt the need to move about. The downpour prevented a walk, so I stepped outside onto the porch of my cabin, which faced the woods.

I watched and listened. The rhythmic sound of the rain was punctuated by birdsong overhead. The birds were literally "singing in the rain," and their lilting melody echoed through the forest like a gentle symphony. I spotted a woodpecker hammering away on a tree nearby. Squirrels darted across the forest floor and scurried up trees. It was a transcendent moment, for I realized that in spite of the rain, the birds kept singing, the woodpecker kept pecking, and the squirrels continued their playful antics—life goes on! They instinctively knew that the rain would eventually stop and the air would once again be filled with the freshness that heralds new beginnings. As simplistic as this experience appears, it was nevertheless a healing moment and I was able to let go of my depression and resume my solitude with a fresh perspective.

Retreatants come from all walks of life, are all ages, and are not necessarily religious. Monasteries, abbeys, and convents with guest facilities are generally open to people of all faiths as well as to those with no religious persuasion. Their mission is to provide a quiet place to nurture one's soul, and participation in religious services is usually optional.

Your purpose will determine what type of facility will work best. Workshops, lectures, and marriage enrichment formats lend themselves to group interaction interspersed with periods for quiet reflection. A private retreat offers maximum opportunity for solitude, personal study, and introspection. Inquire as to whether you will be expected to attend religious services.

Cost and type of accommodations are also important considerations. Decide what type of accommodations you want—cabin, motel, or dorm. Do you prefer a private or shared bath? What type of meal service and menu do you prefer—hamburgers or filet mignon, vegetarian, or bring-your-own food? Accommodations can run the gamut from sleeping bag to posh hotel, and costs vary from a responsible donation to \$165 a night, with \$35 to \$65 a night being the norm. When comparing retreat facilities, be sure to ask what is and is not included in the basic fee.

Although some retreat houses are located in the city, most are located in tranquil rural settings conducive to solitude and healing. Guests are expected to remain at the facil-

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Learning to Love

L A M A S U R Y A D A S

Once heard a story about a group of recently departed men and women who found themselves standing in line before the proverbial pearly gates. Anticipating divine judgment about their lives, they all began to question themselves about their earthly behavior. “Was I a good parent?” “Did I accomplish something of value in my life?” “Did I attend religious services on the Sabbath?” “Did I donate enough to the needy?” And when they finally reached the gate, all these souls were asked was only one question, “How well did you love?”

It is possible that there is only one question that seekers need ask themselves about their spiritual progress and that is, “How well do I love?”

Since the beginning of time, men and women with great, noble, and tender hearts have urged humanity to love one another. The Dalai Lama has told his followers, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” Mother Teresa once said, “It is not how much

we do, but how much love we put into the doing. It is not how much we give, but how much love we put into the giving.”

Learning how to love is the goal and the purpose of spiritual life—not learning how to develop psychic powers, not learning how to bow, chant, do yoga, or even meditate, but learning to love. Love is the truth. Love is the light.

What do you think of when you think about love? Do you think about the people you love—your children, your romantic partner, your parents, your friends? Do you think about your pets—your dog, your cat, your oh-so-smart and talkative gray parrot? Do you think of the things you love—enjoying nature, fishing, sitting in your garden, swimming in a lake on a brilliant summer day? Do you think about Prince or Princess Charming, and the love you hope someday to feel? Do you think about love of God, love of your community, love of music, sports, or reading? How about love of justice or freedom? Do you extend your



love to yourself; do you consider your own level and degree of self-love, self-esteem and self-acceptance?

When we talk about the love we have in our lives, often we are describing an appreciation for something that is beautiful, or at least beautiful and moving to us. When we say we love something or somebody, what we often really mean is that we love the way that something or somebody makes us feel. We might say we love a specific person, but if we look into it, what are we really loving? Our thoughts frequently reflect an attitude of “I love how I feel when I am with you—most of the time.” Or, “I love my work, but I can’t wait for the weekend.” So what does that mean? That we don’t love this person or job when he, she or it fails to produce a good buzz? As we walk the spiritual path, we’re trying to come to a better understanding of what love means; we’re learning to open our hearts and cultivate a deeper, less self-centered, more reliable, and all-inclusive brand of love.

My first guru in India was the amazing Hindu saint, Maharaji Neem Karoli Baba. His whole teaching reflected a passionate love of God combined with a loving service to mankind. As a Hindu “bhakta” (devotee), he devoted his entire spiritual practice to finding union with God; as a teacher, he

opened his heart and taught his students that the divine love-light shines in and through everyone. A translator-attendant often walked beside him. Even so Neem Karoli Baba, whom we called Maharaji, which means great king, spoke few words and gave even fewer lectures or speeches. All his teachings seemed to be contained in the radiant love with which he embraced us, his disciples and followers.

After Maharaji died some of us were given pages from the diary that he wrote in every day. I remember hoping to receive such a token of his legacy and anticipated reading these pages, for I somehow imagined that they would contain notes about his life and thoughts. I hoped and expected that they would perhaps shed some light on or reveal to me something about this mysterious saint, whom for a period of my life I saw almost every day, but who seemed to most of us to be perfectly incomprehensible. When the pages were handed out, we all saw what Maharaji had been writing. On each page, there was a new date, and then the only other word written down again and again, in red ink, was “Ram, Ram, Ram,” which is another way of saying God. This was Maharaji’s mantra, and this love of the divine was his legacy.

I remember one day at Maharaji’s ashram; he was



sitting on his bed on the porch, and about twenty of us were sitting in front of him. He surprised all of us by asking through his translator, “How did Christ meditate?” We were all dumbstruck. We had never thought about Christ and meditation. Then Maharaji answered his own question by exclaiming, “He was lost in love, lost in love, lost in love... lost in love.” And then he was silent.

Plato explained love by saying, “Love is a kind of madness, a divine madness.” How can one define or explain a holy madman? Who can understand the God-intoxication of St. Francis, Rumi, or other such “fools for God?” The great Tibetan yogi Milarepa once sang “Craziness is the characteristic of my lineage; crazed with devotion, crazed by truth, crazy for Dharma.” Neem Karoli Baba’s life exemplified that kind of loving madness. His passionate love of the sacred glowed through him and cascaded over whoever was near. When you were with him, you felt as though there was simply nowhere else to be. His main teaching to us was to love, serve, and remember God by loving, serving, and remembering humanity—serving God through serving man.

When I met him, Neem Karoli Baba was already well into his eighties, or perhaps even nineties; no

one could help noticing that he treated everyone equally—people he had known for fifty years as well as people who had just walked up the road that morning. He was a great inspiration. In his ashram, various holy men would often read and tell us stories from the Ramayana, the ancient Sanskrit epic. The Ramayana, which Hindus consider sacred, tells the story of Ram, an incarnation of the God Vishnu, and his divine mate Sita. In India, God is imaged in both male and female forms. Ram and Sita thus represent and personify Mr. and Mrs. God.

The Ramayana is an allegorical, mystical work full of both good and evil spirits. Throughout its pages, Ram and Sita face many trials; in these they are aided by the sacred monkey king Hanuman, whose unique capacity for passionate love and service is reflected in the devotion he feels for Ram and Sita.

The stories of Hanuman are among my all-time favorites. At first, like most Westerners, I didn’t understand the concept of a monkey god. What was this, I wondered. A *monkey*?!! Then as it was further explained and clarified, the secret began to reveal itself in all its profundity and relevance to my own life.

I always remember the complete devotion that

the monkey, Hanuman, feels for Ram and Sita. He loves them with all his heart and wants desperately to be with them all the time, night and day. Finally Sita comes and tells him, “Hanuman, when the Lord and I are alone at night you can’t be with us.”

“Why, Why, why?” he wails.

Sita patiently tries explaining it to him. “Hanuman,” she says, “Do you see this red mark, the tilak, on my forehead? That means that I am married to God and only I can be with him day and night.” (For in India, that red tilak forehead mark is like a wedding ring on the fourth finger.)

Thus Hanuman stops asking *why* he can’t be with Ram and Sita and instead—like a good seeker—begins to focus on how he too can unite with the sacred—with God. In this way, he jump-starts himself onto his own spiritual path. In India, the color red represents God and divinity. So Hanuman, jumping to a logical conclusion for a brilliant monkey, goes to the marketplace bazaar by night and pilfers a whole bag of powdered red dye. He uses this to dye his whole body and soul the color of the divine so he can be with his God figures, Ram and Sita, wherever they go. Ever since then, as the story goes, Hanuman has never been apart from them. His time is completely absorbed with serving the divine.

Hanuman represents man’s wish to be with God; his animal nature represents the animal nature in all of us. Yet Hanuman’s animal nature is transformed by a life of service to the divine. He embodies the idea that if we dedicate our lives to service and love, then we too become godlike or saintly. That’s why Hanuman is called a monkey god. Just as Charles Darwin found out, we evolved from monkey-like beings into higher and more conscious beings—a knowledge incorporated into mythology around the world centuries before Darwin.

In the religious art of India, Hanuman is often depicted tearing his breast apart. Buried deep in his open chest and heart is a picture of Ram and Sita, standing together hand in hand, as couples do for a marriage ceremony, amid a garland of flowers. Through his deeds and service, Hanuman was able to internalize the sacred and find it in his own heart. He exemplifies the path to God through devotion, unselfish service, and unconditional love.

Once, at our ashram, while we were all listening to a mendicant or holy man, known as a “saddhu,” read from the poetic Ramayana, Maharaji became so overcome with emotion at the recounting of Hanuman’s love and devotion that he jumped up from where he was sitting, tears streaming down his face, and hurried into his room. He just couldn’t contain himself at hearing of the love that was expressed in this epic tale he had certainly heard thousands of times before. Whenever I feel spiritually dry or complacent, I think of Maharaji and remember the monkey’s tale and smile to myself, always.

Maharaji died near one of his ashrams in India at the exact time of the full moon of September 1973. When the huge procession of followers accompanied his body through the ancient holy city of Brindavan, tens of thousands of mourners lined the street to throw flowers at the bier. In his memory there were spiritual songs, music, and chants, as well as charitable feeding of the people of that city for days.

In Maharaji’s temple there is a huge reddish-pink marble statue of the beloved, saintly, and heroic monkey Hanuman. Everyone tells me that on the day of Neem Karoli Baba’s cremation, tears were seen rolling down the marble monkey’s cheek. Maharaji’s teachings of serving God by serving humankind were really heart-opening. It’s been more than twenty-five years since his death, and I think often of his great love of God and man.

All religious and spiritual traditions have holy men and women who inspire love because of their capacity for love. Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, St. Francis of Assisi, Albert Schweitzer, Baal Shem Tov, Rumi, Kabir, St. Theresa of Avila, Hildegard von Bingen. In every culture, in every time, and in every place, there have been spiritual giants who walked among us. Some may never have been recognized or canonized by any formal religious groups, but their behavior spelled out sainthood nonetheless. And the quality that these spiritual giants embodied was love.

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A Time of Sacred Rest

AN INTERVIEW WITH WAYNE MULLER
BY MARY NURRIESTEARN

Wayne Muller is a therapist, author, ordained minister and founder of Bread for the Journey, an innovative organization serving families in need. We have featured Muller's words previously, as he is a wise and poetic writer about personal transformation. When his newest book, *Sabbath*, crossed my desk I set it aside for my personal reading. I savored it, for this treasure of a book is medicine for our harried lives. In it, Muller shows us how to create a special time of rest, delight, and renewal—a refuge for our souls. He also makes clear how constant striving causes exhaustion, deprivation, and longing for rest and time with loved ones.

Sabbath is a time of sacred rest that restores us, pleases us and eases the suffering caused by the maddening lifestyle of our modern society. Wanting our readers to discover how Sabbath can reduce suffering and bring joy, I contacted him for an interview at his home in northern California, where he lives with his family.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION: In your book "Sabbath," you refer to the mainstream American lifestyle as the road of progress, one that pursues accomplishment, materialism, and productivity. What is the suffering caused by this lifestyle?

WAYNE MULLER: The sufferings are of different kinds, some obvious, others delicate and not so obvious. On the obvious level, as we become busier, we move quickly and hold many responsibilities in our hands, so that even when we try to do good, we do good badly. We don't have the wisdom required to hear what is truly necessary—to hear right action, right understanding, right livelihood. We inadvertently break things even as we try to fix them. Our busy-ness becomes a kind of violence because it destroys the root of inner wisdom that makes work fruitful. On one level, suffering comes because we inadvertently bring harm to the world that we're trying to help—whether we're raising money to pay the bills, serving the homeless, or feeding the hungry. Having been in non-profit worlds for twenty-five

years, I can say that the faster we go, the more we unintentionally mishandle the ones we love. They become an object of our ambition rather than the subject of our heart's attention, which requires a certain amount of time and company as well as money.

On more delicate levels, suffering comes because we don't allow time for the ache in our soul to be healed or for us to be shown the way. In spiritual practice we invite forces larger than us, such as Jesus, Mary, or the Buddha, to work on us in some way. Some amount of time is required for us to be worked on. Healing doesn't always require us to work; sometimes we need to be worked on. Sabbath allows us to compost in a way that the quiet seeds planted in the soils of our bodies, hearts and minds can germinate. If the seeds that we so diligently plant with our spiritual practice aren't given a period of dormancy, then like iris bulbs planted in the fall, without dormancy, they will not flower in the spring. We lose the harvest of our practice if we don't have time to take our hands off the plow and rest in the hammock of delight provided for us by the Sabbath precepts of many spiritual traditions.

PT: Are you saying that suffering isn't caused as much by the pursuit of accomplishment as by our sped-up relationship with time?

MULLER: The problem is imbalance. Clearly both time and action are necessary. Things need to be done in the world. Homes need to be built, children need to be raised, food needs to be grown, medicines need to be discovered. Because we're incarnated in human bodies, there are things in the world that require our attention in order for us to be healthy and to grow as a family of beings on the earth. The problem is not necessarily working hard, the problem is working so hard and long without rest that we begin to imagine that we're the ones making everything happen. We begin to feel a growing, gnawing sense of responsibility and grandiosity about how important our work is and how we can't stop because everything is on our shoulders. We forget that forces much larger than we are, in fact, do most of the work. When we don't stop, we don't remember that. One thing I love about the Sabbath practice in most spiritual traditions is that it starts at a particular time, like the sun

going down in the Jewish tradition or the sun coming up on Easter Sunday morning. The onset of Sabbath is usually tied to the sun or the moon—something that you can't mess with. You can't negotiate away the time to stop working. You can't say, "I'll stop as soon as I finish this report." Sabbath time is the time when we get stopped.

PT: When Sabbath begins is determined by forces greater than us.

MULLER: Exactly, and it invokes humility by remembering that the peace we bring to the table, while precious, is also quite small. For some people that might seem like an insult, but for a lot of us, it's a tremendous relief.

PT: In our society, we think of rest as useless. You describe rest as joyful as well as useful.

MULLER: We need to listen to the spiritual traditions. Jesus said, "Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy," and "Come, that you might have life and have that abundantly." The Buddha spoke about joy being the fruit of spiritual practice. No spiritual tradition says that God wants us to be exhausted. No scripture says we're supposed to be totally burned out. Almost every scripture says that the fruit of life is joy—being happy in all that we have been given and all that arises in the course of human life. There are sorrows, but the more spacious we become, the more joyful we become in being able to embrace everything. The Sabbath has a joyful uselessness to it. We are not supposed to accomplish anything of any significance so that we can stop looking for what's not there and have the time to drink from what's already here. When we're on the wheel of constant work, our eye is on the next thing that has to be done, what hasn't been accomplished yet. Sabbath is a time to eat what you've cooked, to harvest what you've planted and to give thanks for what you've been given. It's a time to bless our loved ones and to eat, drink, and make love. The sensual delight associated with Sabbath reminds us that one of the fruits of spiritual practice is useless happiness.

PT: As I listen to you, I understand that the Sabbath is a gratitude for and a pleasuring in the abundance of our lives and loves rather than an external pursuit of abundance.

MULLER: Right, and in fact, petitionary prayer is discouraged in the Hebrew tradition on the Sab-

bath. On the Sabbath, you don't ask for anything, you just give thanks. You can ask all you want on the other six days but the Sabbath is the day that you just give thanks. Sabbath also brings up a different definition of abundance. Abundance can be an image of more than we need rather than an image of sufficiency that means whatever we've been given is enough. The Sabbath invites us to consider that whatever we have is abundance and that we don't always need to accumulate. Sabbath is about feeling the desperate urge for some new acquisition fall away at the end of the day of walking, praying, napping, eating and making love. You don't feel that desperate need to accumulate after a lovely day like that.

PT: I'm quoting you, "Sabbath; the time to stop, to refrain from being seduced by our desires." Talk about the difference between the pleasure and joyfulness of Sabbath and the seduction of desire.

MULLER: Desire is a powerful force. The Buddhists describe desire as a thirsting and craving that is the ultimate source of human suffering. Desire is a fundamental dissatisfaction with what we have and a thirsting and craving for what we don't have. Pleasure and delight is feeling the blessing of what we already have. Our civilization canonizes desire as the engine that drives our monetary system, which is sad because desire, by definition, is based on dissatisfaction. When you're satisfied, your desires melt away. When you have a nice meal, your desire to eat more disappears. When you have a relationship with someone you love, the desire to run off and meet somebody else naturally falls away. Whenever we're satisfied with what we have, desire dissolves of its own accord. We place desire on the altar of our civilization. Once you have one car, you're supposed to want two. Once you have a two-bedroom house, you're supposed to want a three-bedroom house. Once you make \$25,000, you're supposed to want to make \$50,000. Everything is supposed to grow. The ethos of the free marketplace is that there is always supposed to be more. The Sabbath is a revolutionary challenge to the presumption that that's what life is for.

PT: Let's talk about love. What happens to our innate ability to love when we rarely slow down?

MULLER: Love is an enormous word that conveys many feelings and experiences and relationships. There's love of design, love of fragrance, love of our children, sexual love between partners, love of music, love of humanity. Regardless of how we define love or which aspect of love we talk about, love requires time in order to grow. Love experiences

The Sabbath has a joyful uselessness to it. We are not supposed to accomplish anything of any significance so that we can stop looking for what's not there and have the time to drink from what's already here. When we're on the wheel of constant work, our eye is on the next thing that has to be done, what hasn't been accomplished yet. Sabbath is a time to eat what you've cooked, to harvest what you've planted and to give thanks for what you've been given. It's a time to bless our loved ones and to eat, drink, and make love.

require the sweet soil of unstructured time in which we bring presence, resting our attention on the subject of our love. We then have intercourse with those things, intercourse in the deepest sense of becoming one with. Nothing that we love can be bought. Money can't buy you love—not because it's too expensive—it's the wrong currency. The currency that gives birth to love is time. All love grows in time. When we live without taking time for love to grow, there is only a thin veneer of what we really are looking for. The depth of the love we seek requires time to work in us. Most spiritual traditions counsel that Sabbath time isn't a lifestyle suggestion for your blood pressure, it's a commandment. Rest. You must stop your work and allow yourself to be worked on by time.

PT: What else grows in the soil of time?

MULLER: Some people lament the fact that we've lost the traditional values in our civilization, and write books about honesty, courage, integrity, and responsibility. While I appreciate the question of where these values have gone in America, I think it's dishonest to question individuals in a civilization without looking at the civilization itself. Our civilization requires people to trade time for money. Honesty, courage, mindfulness, and integrity can't grow without time for thoughtful reflection on our behavior. These values require time to be together with one another, to teach each other how it is to be in the other's company. That's how we grow in relationship skills. When I see the impact that my tone of voice or actions have on my children, by taking the time to listen to what they have to say, then I, God willing, learn how to be a better parent. We can't purchase these things. They only grow in time.

PT: Discuss the Biblical scripture Mark 2:27, "You are not made for the Sabbath, the Sabbath is made for you."

MULLER: Some of us associate Sabbath with dry, boring Sundays of our childhood, where Sabbath was the day you had to get dressed up and not have any fun. That's not what I'm invoking. I'm invoking what Abraham Hesholl, the Jewish scholar, calls the day of delight. The Sabbath precept in most religions is a vehicle for our delight. We don't have

to fill our time with twelve hours of prayer and fifteen hours of synagogue to be religious. The Sabbath isn't a responsibility, it's a gift, and if we don't take that gift, we all suffer. The point isn't to take the Sabbath in order to avoid spiritual trouble with a cranky God who's going to punish you. The point is to take Sabbath in order to be as nourished, fed and delighted as we're meant to be.

PT: Does Sabbath require a certain intention or expectation as we undertake it?

MULLER: According to Isaiah, Sabbath is supposed to be a delight. The Sabbath is a gift of time. We live in time; our lives are made of days and how we use the time that we've been given. The Sabbath is an instruction about how to feel the rhythm of time. Our heart and lungs are a rhythm. The tides of the earth and the seasons have a rhythm. Everything alive has a rhythm, and if we fall into Sabbath rhythm, we fall into rhythm with the heartbeat of the world. When we work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, we live like people who are at war, we live in war-time. What's the war about, whom are we fighting and how will we know if we've won? The Sabbath intentionality is to open up a space for listening to that which is most precious, nourishing and deeply true, and letting ourselves be worked on and delighted and fed.

PT: Say more about letting ourselves be worked on.

MULLER: There's a story about a nun who used to walk the fields where they kept cattle, near the convent. As she walked she looked for herbs. There were about a half dozen herbs growing naturally in the field. The herbs she stumbled upon helped her decide what she was going to cook that day. A visiting herbiculturist explained to the convent residents that rather than allowing the cattle to graze the whole field, it would be better to keep them in a small section of the field for a period of time and let the rest of the land lie fallow. The herbiculturist recommended a Sabbath for the land, something the Hebrews talked about 3,000 years ago. This Sabbath consisted of letting the animals graze and fertilize one section of the land, then moving them after a season from one section of the field to the other. One spring, after two or three years of this

practice, the nun went looking for herbs and found about a dozen new herbs growing in the field that had never grown there before. Nobody planted them, nobody seeded herbs in the field. When the cattle roamed the field, the herbs tried to come up but they never made it. They were in the soil, but because of the constant activity of the cattle on the ground, they never had the time or the space to break through the ground. In a way, Sabbath time allows those plants that are ready to break through the crust of the soil of our life to do so. If we presume that we have to make everything happen, that the only way to get herbs in the field is to plant them, we never stop or rest, and we never know that the herbs come up by themselves.

PT: *Let's move to a discussion being Sabbath. You quote Mother Teresa as saying, "Let us remain as empty as possible so that God can fill us up." How do we become Sabbath?*

MULLER: A couple of images come to mind. As a psychotherapist, I noticed over the years that I did less therapy and more holding the faithfulness present in the midst of whatever sorrows or aches people brought to me. Even on my good days, the best I could do was sit and patiently see where they were already the light of the world, where they were already saturated with Buddha nature. My job was to sit there with no agenda and to simply be in their company as they poured their sorrows into this empty vessel that we became together. Then the grace, the courage, the inner light—whether you call it Buddha nature or kingdom of God—that refused to be extinguished, slowly arose of its own accord, without anyone doing anything to anybody. The quote, "to attain knowledge every day, something is added to it; to attain wisdom every day, something is subtracted," also speaks to us being the Sabbath. There is a way in which we empty ourselves of preconceptions and presumptions. Emptying ourselves of expectations, we can be filled by whatever winds blow through us, cultivating what Suzuki Roshi called the beginner's mind. You can cultivate emptiness through a Buddhist meditation practice where you follow the breath and allow the preoccupation with thought to soften and fall away. In the emptiness, new kinds of peace, equanimity

and well-being become possible. Sabbath is an opportunity, every week, to have a new beginning, where all things become new, as it says in the Christian gospel.

PT: *Talk about the relationship between Sabbath and healing.*

MULLER: A friend of mine had cancer and he went through chemotherapy. By the third round of chemotherapy—going through the infusion of chemicals and having his body checked over—he said, "We have to stop this, because it feels to me that through these treatments, it's like you plant seeds in my body, and every week you tear the seeds out of the ground to see if they've grown any roots yet." He added, "We have to let the seeds that have been planted in me get a chance to germinate, take root and grow, we have to leave them alone, we have to let them be." Like love, healing grows in the soil of time. Healing requires time for the body/soul/spirit to reorganize itself in a new way. Transformation is dependent on right effort, right understanding, right livelihood and right mindfulness, but it also requires a willingness to surrender into the arms of the divine. It requires a surrender into knowing that forces larger than us can have their way with us and do the work that they need to do on us without our being involved directly. Obviously, physical rest is important, but also, the rest of thinking that it's all up to us, one of the gifts of Sabbath, allows those things working on us to do their work so that we can be the recipient of their blessing. It's hard to be blessed if you don't stand still.

PT: *This culture of progress focuses on individual pursuit and implies that we are alone. The Sabbath reminds us that we are connected to something greater than our individual selves.*

MULLER: In most Sabbath traditions, there is at least some time dedicated to gathering in community with other people. We gather with friends or with family. We put our hands on the heads of our children and offer them our blessing or we go to church or the synagogue. We have some kind of worship with other beings. We get isolated in ever-smaller cubicles into which we are being put in the marketplace. Sabbath time brings us back together.

PT: *In the same way that marketplace activi-*

ties separate us from people, busy-ness separates us from ourselves. If keeping busy is, at times, an attempt to cope with suffering inside, won't resting on the Sabbath bring all that forth?

MULLER: Certainly, some of our busy-ness can be a mask for ache, sadness or grief. A couple of doctors told me that living so close to people's illnesses and often deaths, they fear that if they stop and feel their deep sadness they would weep for a month. A lot of treatment speed is to avoid the invariable tenderness that would arise if they were open all of the time. Another physician made the same point from the opposite direction. In medical school, he learned to be exhausted, which is, as I understand, the primary curriculum of medical school. The more tired he got, the more tests he ordered on people. As he grew more exhausted, he could rely less on his intuition, his quiet voice that told him what was going on with a patient. When he got some rest and returned, he could hear what was going on with a patient and order one test to confirm the diagnosis. Even when the practice of speeding up to avoid suffering looks like a good idea it isn't necessarily ultimately a useful practice.

PT: Although pain that we have been avoiding may arise when we rest, the comfort that soothes the pain also emerges in rest.

MULLER: A lot of people are afraid to stop because they're afraid that if they do, they will feel those aches or an emptiness inside that frightens them terribly. That's why I think very few Sabbath practices focus on self-introspection. Sabbath is not to go inside and find who you are or to root out all those demons, it's to stop and enjoy yourself. It's seductive for the mind to think that it always has to work on problems. If we presume that larger forces than us are already at work on our problems, we can sing songs and have a good time while the forces work on them.

PT: As we relax and tap other sources of strength, when it does come time to talk through our aches, we're more able to do it. We are less overwhelmed.

MULLER: There's less desperation.

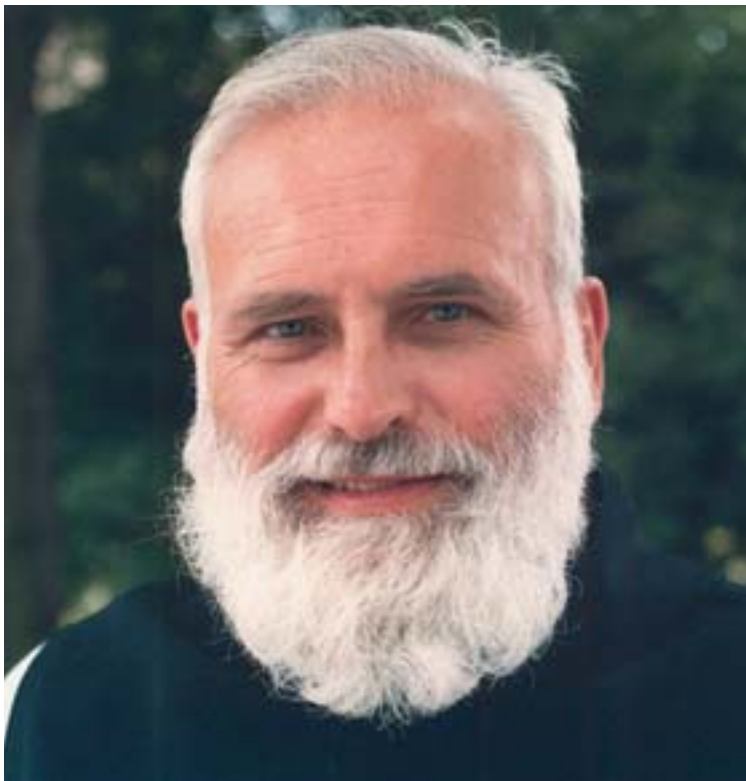
PT: Before we close, discuss Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there will your

heart be also."

MULLER: Jesus is pointing to a simple principle of spiritual physics—whatever we give our time and attention to gets our love. If we give all our attention to our job, we'll be successful at work and other things will fall by the wayside. Whatever we give our attention to flourishes—it's going to end up on the altar of our life's story. If you want to know what you love, open your appointment book. Whatever you give your time and attention to is, in effect, what you really love. Sabbath practice invites us to be more intentional on a regular basis, making sure that we put on our altar things that are delicious and delightful so that when we taste, hold, and dance them, they bring us delight and help us remember that we're the light of the world and that God wants us to be happy and not exhausted. Sabbath is a time to treasure those things that are completely free and gratuitous—the smell of warm bread, making love with your lover, taking a walk in nature. When we make time for those things, we begin to remember that joy is one of the things that a human life is for.

There is little permission in our culture for Sabbath. In fact, the only permission we have is illness, so cancer becomes our sabbatical. When people get a life-threatening illness like cancer or AIDS, everyone agrees that it's all right for them to take time off. But to say, "I'm leaving now and I'm not going to work today," is looked upon as self-indulgent and people feel guilty. In reality, it's a commandment in most of the world's spiritual traditions. If we don't take this time, we will not do well in the world. It's hard to live ethically without rest, when we speed along trying to get projects done. It's easier to talk ourselves into lying about this or that because we know it'll help get the project done. The more we live without rest, the easier it is to live out of balance. It's strange, living in a world where no one feels permission to rest, while we simultaneously claim to ascribe to spiritual traditions that insist that we rest. I'm making a plea for Sabbath-keeping, reminding people that they already have permission to rest. Sabbath doesn't need to be justified with the promise of some great spiritual insight. Sabbath is a gift that we're supposed to drink from. •

Transforming Suffering



AN INTERVIEW WITH BASIL PENNINGTON
BY MARY NURRIESTEARN

Basil Pennington is a Cisterian monk whose worldwide ministry focuses on bringing contemplative practices into the lives of spiritual seekers. He is a spiritual retreat leader, lecturer and author. He is most known for his work in the Centering Prayer movement, which is how I was introduced to his ministry. He resides at St. Joseph's Monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts.

Upon the recommendation of a friend, I read his recent book, *Lectio Divina*, a description of the meditative practice of praying with the Christian scriptures. I came to understand more deeply how sacred texts can bring us to union with the divine and how contemplating inspired words can ease suffering. Realizing that he had a depth of understanding on suffering, its transformation, and the use of meditative practices in easing suffering, I arranged to interview him by telephone. His spiritual presence and depth of understanding were apparent during the interview and are present in the words that follow.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION: Let's begin with the question: What is suffering?

BASIL PENNINGTON: First of all, it is important to distinguish between pain and suffering. As the Buddhists make very clear, suffering comes from wanting something and then not having it or feeling that you can't have it. Pain causes suffering because we think we should not have it. We think we should be free from pain, that we should be filled with pleasure. Suffering is when something is going contrary to what we want. That is why some Buddhist schools say the way to get rid of suffering is to get rid of desire. We Christians believe that we are made for God. St. Augustus says, "Our hearts will not rest until they rest in you, O Lord." There is always going to be desire, but happiness can be found in knowing either we have what we want or we are on the way to getting it. We can want to participate in a certain amount of suffering and pain, and find a deep joy, because we have what we want. For example, when a little child suffers ter-

ribly, the mother and father want to be with that child. Even though it will cause them to suffer, they want to be with their child in that suffering

PT: *If suffering comes from desire, and there is a difference between pain and suffering, do young children suffer or do they have pain?*

PENNINGTON: From a very early age, not to want to have pain is there. Pain is alien to us, so there is probably some suffering, but not the same kind of suffering we have later in life. There is suffering because we instinctively do not want pain. Only somebody more mature can see a value in pain or can transcend pain so that it does not cause them suffering.

Children suffer, but not as much as somebody older who has a reflective consciousness and suffers not only the immediate desire to be away from that pain but also suffers from the frustration of their desires.

PT: *Let's go back to the example of the parents wanting to be with the child when the child suffers. The parents want to suffer with their beloved.*

PENNINGTON: When you willingly enter into suffering, a lot of the suffering is relieved, even though suffering is very much there, because not wanting the suffering increases the suffering. When Christians speak of suffering we think of the crucified Lord and the tremendous sign of His Love for us. He said, "Greater love does no one have than He lay down his life for his friend." Jesus laid down his life in this graphic and dramatic way as a sign of His love, His concern for us. At one level, He suffered a great deal. Part of him did not want to go through that pain and suffering, and there was suffering because he took on all of our sins and stood before the Father in that sinful state. He suffered, but in the end He said, "Not my will but Thy will be done." Love conquered. The Beloved, His Father, wanted Him to go through this as a sign of love for us, and so He went through it. His love and concern kept overcoming his suffering. He was concerned about his executioners and forgave them, He was concerned about those being executed with him and promised them eternal life, He was concerned about His mother and saw that she was cared for. Even while He, at times, on the cross, prayed, "My

God, my God, why have you forsaken me?," He went on to triumph. In the end He gave a magnificent cry and had such a victory over suffering and death that the centurion said, "This must be the Son of God." Suffering can be very much there, but love constantly overcomes it when one embraces that suffering because she wants the fruit that that suffering can bring about.

PT: *Love overcomes the suffering—whose love and the love of what?*

PENNINGTON: The persons suffering are less conscious of suffering because their concern is their love; they either want to suffer or are so concerned about something else that they don't notice their suffering. The Buddhist idea is to get rid of all desire so you don't notice the suffering. But love can be so great, going back to the parents who want to be with their child in the suffering, their love is so much with the child, that it would be more suffering for them not to be with the child in the suffering. The question is basically, "What do we want?" If we want to be free from all pain, if we want to be free from anything, and it is there, it begins to cause suffering.

PT: *Buddhist precepts say it is our nature to suffer.*

PENNINGTON: Christians say suffering is an effect of sin. Because we are all sinners we all have suffering in our lives. Once we are able to completely overcome sin, we will no longer have suffering, or the effects of sin, which is in all our lives, because death itself is an effect of sin.

PT: *How is death an effect of sin?*

PENNINGTON: The understanding of the Judeo Christian tradition is that God first created humans to live eternally, and because they rebelled against God in some way, part of the punishment was that in time they would die.

PT: *For the sake of definition, what is sin?*

PENNINGTON: We understand sin as something that is contrary to the will of God, whether His will is expressed in explicit commandments, in the Revelation, or in the way God created things and meant them to function, what we call the Natural Law.

PT: *Is there anyone who does not suffer?*

PENNINGTON: No, everyone has some suffering. Our Lord took on suffering voluntarily. The rest of

Many people equate pain with suffering. Because they are so desirous of being free from all pain, pain immediately causes suffering. In meditation you learn to move to another state of consciousness and you leave pain behind, so you gain a growing freedom from pain.

us sinners suffer for our sins. We aim toward arriving at a state of complete union and communion with God. The result of that would be we would no longer suffer. In deep meditation we are completely free of suffering but we can't abide in that beautiful state all the time.

PT: *What is the best medicine for our suffering?*

PENNINGTON: In a way, suffering is a sickness and the best medicine for it is love, although love itself can cause suffering.

PT: *Does love transform suffering, is suffering sloughed off?*

PENNINGTON: Suffering is caused by desire, so when we change our desires, what was originally suffering can become a sort of joy. When someone you love greatly suffers and you enter into their suffering, their suffering remains, but there is a deep joy in sharing suffering, and that solidarity may ease their suffering. In Christian thinking, we believe that Christ's suffering is redemptive and, to the extent in which we can participate in Christ's suffering, our suffering can become redemptive. In our love for our brothers and sisters we are happy to enter into redemptive suffering.

PT: *What are the most prevalent ways that suffering is manifested in our individual lives?*

PENNINGTON: Many people equate pain with suffering. Because they are so desirous of being free from all pain, pain immediately causes suffering. In meditation you learn to move to another state of consciousness and you leave pain behind, so you gain a growing freedom from pain. In lovingly going out to others, you forget your own pains and sorrows because you are concerned with theirs. For instance, when you visit a retirement home, you find some people in absolute misery. They are taken up with the aches, pains, and limitations that age has

brought upon them. They are miserable and they make everyone who comes near them miserable; nobody wants to be near them. Other people who have as much or more aches and pain are outgoing and loving. They are a joy and people like to be with them. Throughout their lives, they gradually schooled themselves, from meditation perhaps and through outgoing love, to leave their pain and suffering behind. For most people, suffering is experienced through pain or frustrations in love—being lonely, not having the persons they love with them, or not having anybody who is in communion love with them.

PT: *I appreciate how you link suffering to desire, especially the desire to be free from pain. I thought suffering came more from a sense of separation from a spiritual self or from God.*

PENNINGTON: Separation from God is the essential suffering and we call it hell. Many people don't know that much of the emptiness or longing desire that they suffer from is because they are not in touch with God or whatever name they give Him. Separation is a very real form of suffering in this life. Many, many people suffer because there is nobody in their life. They are not in touch with God, with the inner spirit. They are not in touch with their true selves, and they are not really in touch with anybody else.

PT: *When we suffer, whether that suffering comes in the form of physical pain, loss of meaning, or alienation, what can we do?*

PENNINGTON: Of ourselves, in a certain sense, we can do nothing. The Lord says, "Without me you can do nothing." But, by the grace of God, and coming directly from Him, or through others who reach out to us, we can begin to open up to reality. The reality is that we are infinitely and tenderly held by the divine. We cease to exist if

God does not bring us forth every moment in His creative love. We are united with everybody else in our human nature and in our sharing of a divine nature, so we are never really alone, we have all this union and communion. Getting in touch with that reality is the greatest healing. We can adopt meditative practices which enable us to begin that journey of finding our true inner selves or transcending our separate selves and leave behind some of the pain and suffering. Relief occurs only during the time of meditation until, through meditation and the grace of God, we come to experience the reality beyond our individual selves that then flows over into our lives.

PT: *What practices transform suffering?*

PENNINGTON: Meditation practices are found in all the major traditions. In our Christian tradition are many forms of meditation. One that is growing in popularity, which goes back to ancient times, is today called “Centering Prayer” and originally called “Prayer in the Heart.” It is a simple form of meditation where we turn to God, who is within, and rest with Him. He says, “Come to me you who are heavily burdened, I will refresh you.” In this practice we leave everything else and rest with Him within, silently uttering one word of love, such as God, peace, Shalom, to quietly stay with Him. That’s a simple and ancient Christian form of meditation which is effective and fairly easy to practice.

The meditation practice of Lectio Divina is somewhat different. It is opening to the experience of God. One of the reasons we leave the words in Latin is because simply translated as “Divine Reading” conveys a false idea. I used to annoy my translators when lecturing in different languages around the world by quoting that old Latin phrase, “*Traducta estraditor es*,” meaning that every translator is a traitor. If you translate a word, you leave so much behind and you pick up other meanings.

Lectio does not mean reading in the sense of printed symbols immediately conveying ideas to the intellect. Lectio is hearing a word—whether you see it on the page, pronounce it yourself, hear somebody else speak it, or recall it from your memory—hearing that word in the here and now being spoken by the one speaking it. In Lectio Divina, God himself is speaking. In the practice of Lectio Div-

ina we read sacred texts which we believe have been inspired by God as a means of communicating with us. Lectio Divina is coming into communication with God and letting Him speak to us now, and reveal Himself to us now, through His inspired word. It is a type of transcendental meditation, at the same time it uses the rational mind to work with the words. In a meditation like Centering Prayer, you leave the rational mind and emotions behind, open yourself to rest in the Divine. St. Thomas Aquinas says, “Where the mind leaves off, the heart goes beyond.”

PT: *Lectio Divina is the practice of praying the scriptures...*

PENNINGTON: I am not comfortable with that expression, because praying is a word that has different meanings to people, but it could be a valid way of saying it if praying is understood the right way.

PT: *How do we need to understand prayer?*

PENNINGTON: It is being with God in His inspired word, meeting God in His inspired word.

PT: *I understand Lectio Divina as allowing the Word to take life in us, to move in us, so that it is a living experience of God in our hearts, not just an intellectual exercise.*

PENNINGTON: It is letting God be present to us in His spoken word. You could read my books and know a lot about me and my thoughts but you wouldn’t really know me. But if we have lunch together and visit for a while, you still hear my words but now it is a real experience of me and afterward, you know me.

PT: *I am quoting from your book, “The simple little practice of each day meeting the Lord in His word and receiving from Him a word of life can indeed transform our lives.” How does this practice transform our lives?*

PENNINGTON: The actual moment, the time of reception, is transformative in that God is present to us, speaking to us, reforming our minds and our hearts, and bringing us into His understanding. In order to remain as much as possible at that level, and there is only so much we can do, we take some particular word that He has given us at that Lectio session and we carry it with us. We come back to it as much as we can through the day. That word

The virtue of humility means acceptance of reality. If we are not in reality, then we can't possibly be in the things of the spirit. The reality is that God is good, all loving and that his creation is good. What immediately follows upon the perception of reality is beauty and goodness, and what follows that is love.

makes Him present with us but also invites us into His way of seeing things.

Maybe a concrete example would be helpful. Sometimes God seems very present, sometimes Lectio really speaks the word to you and you come alive with it. Other days, you listen and listen and it is just words you've heard before, and at the end of Lectio you have to choose a word on your own. One morning I was doing my Lectio and the Lord did not seem to turn up, so I chose the words, "I am the way." I let that word be with me when I was not tending to something else. A few hours later I was walking down the road from the monastery to the guest house, saying, "I am the way," and suddenly I realized, I am just not walking down a road, I am walking "in the way," the way to eternal life. Ever since then, when I walk down a street or a corridor, this comes back to me. I am, the whole of my life, is in the way. That word, at that moment, transformed my consciousness about walking through life. When I got to the guest house, a young fellow was waiting for me. The poor guy had about every problem in the book. I sat there listening to him, and I asked, "Lord, what am I gonna say to this fellow?" The Lord poked me in the ribs and I remembered. I told him about the Lord saying, "I am the way." As I shared that word with this fellow you could almost see the burdens falling off his shoulders. He now had a way to go. The word was a living word for him and it really changed his life. I remember, toward the end of that day, climbing the steps to the church. I was exhausted, and as I climbed up the steps, I said, "Lord, how I am going to get through Vespers? I will sing every note flat." Again, the Lord poked me, and I said, "Oh yes, You are the Way." I went

up and sang Vespers and had a great time.

PT: If we look at Lectio Divina as a practice to transform suffering, the word for the day is something to hold onto, a word that guides us when we feel overwhelmed or lost.

PENNINGTON: I am doing an anthology of Aelred and I read a passage this morning where Aelred said, "how sad it is for those who don't know that they can go into the field of scriptures when they seek consolation." He uses the image of Isaiah who, after his mother died, went out to the field in sorrow and in the distance saw his beautiful bride coming. He said, "They can go out into the field of scriptures and lift up their eyes and the Lord will come to them, the beautiful bride will comfort them." In our time of suffering and sorrow we can find consolation and divine love in the scriptures, if we know to go there.

PT: This leads to my next question. I am again quoting your book. You say, "We need to separate ourselves from the enslavement of this world's values. We have to be in the world, we cannot be of the world." How can we be in the world, but not of the world?

PENNINGTON: It is taking the world in two different senses. We live in this world, this creation, but are not of this world, in the sense that we don't accept the materialistic outlook and values. We are invited to see the world the way God sees it, as a wonderful evolving process which has been going on for millions of years. Evolution has reached a high level in us humans who can now, through Grace, be transformed to participate in the divine life. We are destined to pass beyond or transcend the materialistic world to enter into the divine level of being in life and love. The revelation of God

through the scriptures reminds us, calls us to, and assures us of the help and the means we need to go beyond this material creation and enter fully into the divine reality.

PT: *Talk about the four-stage process of lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio in Lectio Divina.*

PENNINGTON: In practice, sometimes we separate these phases, although more naturally this process takes place at the same time and in varying degrees, depending on what's happening in the relationship at the moment. Lectio is primarily opening ourselves to let God speak to us, to be present to us in, through His inspired word. You can do Lectio with Nature too. God speaks to us through everything in Creation—the flowers, the wind, the beautiful child. You can do Lectio in a broad sense through everything, but His inspired word is the vehicle of His communication with us. He says: "I no longer call you servants but friends because I make known to you everything known to me." Lectio is meeting the Lord and letting Him speak to us and invite us into deeper relationship with Him, to realize our call and our destiny.

Meditatio, in the earlier Church tradition, is when we take and carry that word as a way of having the Lord as a presence, walking with us throughout the rest of the day, beginning in the session itself. This particular word speaks to us and we let it drill down into our hearts, into the powerful experience of the presence of God and the transforming call.

Oratio is translated as prayer. Here prayer means the complete response of giving oneself to God, trusting God, who has spoken to us through the Lectio. That word has become alive in Meditatio and our response is prayer, a trusting response to His word.

Contemplatio is when we rest together and nothing more needs to be said or even be thought of. It is being together with God. I learned contemplation when I was four years old, sitting with my grandparents on the porch. They sat there for hours saying nothing. I felt wonderful and I loved to sit with them. I realized later that they were with each other in love and that love embraced their little grandchild. I experienced the Contemplatio of love in that presence of my grandparents. So it's coming just to sit with the Lord in that embrace of

refreshing love. You can't love what you don't know, and Lectio is where you get to know that loving.

PT: *We are talking about intimacy with God. What is your understanding of God?*

PENNINGTON: My understanding flows out of the Catholic expression of the Christian faith, of knowing that Jesus is God incarnate. God became man so that He can bring us into the fullness of the divine life. Jesus is the Son of the Father, and they have in them immense love, they embrace each other in Holy Spirit. I experience God as an immensely loving Father. I am very compassionate and sympathetic with women and others who have a problem with that name of Father, but it has been there for me for over sixty years. Also, I was blessed with a very special father, so it makes it easier for me to use Father. I look to Jesus in the gospel to help me understand this tremendously loving Father. As a monk of the Cisterian tradition, I have been fed by St. Bernard of Clairveau, who spent the last eighteen years of his life commenting on the Song of Songs, the beautiful love song in the Hebrew Bible. Their God is very much the lover, and I have grown to enter into that experience with God as an immense mother, an all-embracing love and creative energy. To enter totally and be completely embraced by divine love has all the richness of the very best experience and understanding we can have of personal love, and yet is so much more. Trying to talk about my concept of God is complex and difficult because it is so rich, and yet in experience it is absolutely simple, it is simply a communion in a totally satisfying love.

PT: *I am quoting you, "Herein is the true purpose of our practice, to free ourselves from the empiric domination of our own thoughts, passions and desires, to free the spirit for the things of the Spirit." What are the things of the Spirit? I ask this because I see a relationship to things of the Spirit and the reduction of suffering.*

PENNINGTON: The first and most fundamental one is reality. The virtue of humility means acceptance of reality. If we are not in reality, then we can't possibly be in the things of the spirit. The reality is that God is good, all loving and that his creation is good. What immediately follows upon the perception of reality is beauty and goodness, and what fol-

We all suffer because of our parents. One element of maturing is realizing that our parents were poor stupid sinners like we are. Even if they did their best, they failed in ways. However, we can never thank them enough because they have given us, with God, the gift of life and being.

lows that is love. We love this immense beauty and we love most of all the author of this goodness and beauty, God himself. These are things of the spirit. It is astounding when we start to reflect that God, the source of all goodness, all truth, all beauty, all life, all love, did, in His enormous love, enter into our struggling evolving human reality and accept our suffering. Suffering is a thing of the spirit, too, for that reason. It has been made a vehicle of love and everything can become something of the spirit when it is informed by love.

PT: We have talked about suffering, particularly as we experience and relate to it in our personal lives. Let's shift to social issues. First, I would like you to talk about suffering in a social context. Then I would like your comments on the war in Kosovo and Yugoslavia. Can we have any impact on suffering in Kosovo and Yugoslavia?

PENNINGTON: We all suffer because of our parents. One element of maturing is realizing that our parents were poor stupid sinners like we are. Even if they did their best, they failed in ways. However, we can never thank them enough because they have given us, with God, the gift of life and being. Along with that comes struggling. If that happens in the individual, it also happens in the social level. The failures of many, or the limitations of many, build up and become our inheritance. Kosovo is an example of that. The suffering in the Balkans, except for the short time that Tito held it in an iron grip, goes back centuries to the time when Islam invaded and conquered parts of the area, leaving this heritage of strife. The willingness to live together and share was never engendered, which is what we have to learn to do everywhere in the world today. They are not the only ones who did that. We did it to the Native Americans, the Scotch Presbyterians did it to the Irish Catholics in North Ireland, and the

Jews have done it to the Palestinians in the Holy Land. We can find instances of it all over history.

When you take away people's land, when there is not a willingness to live and work together in some way, inevitably there begins to be a minority group and that minority suffers, like the Native Americans in the United States. At some point that minority revolts or seeks violent means, after decades of non-violent means not getting them anywhere. Sometimes just a few turn to violence, but it involves all the others. Then there is the problem of what the oppressive majority does in the face of that violence. They usually react with even more violence. These days the human community steps in to try to relieve that situation, often making it worse before it makes it better.

It is out of the complex heritage of our poor sinful struggling human family that these situations arise. Sometimes media makes us intensely aware of things going on and sometimes it doesn't. There is less awareness of what is going on in Afghanistan and East Africa. When we hear about violent oppression we are confronted as fellow humans. Those of us who are Christians should be conscious of how Christ suffered and died for every human person. Therefore, these people are precious to Christ and they are precious to us.

PT: Then comes the question, what can I do about it?

PENNINGTON: We believe in the power of prayer. God and Christ have told us that our prayer is effective. "Ask and you shall receive." God, who constantly brings this creation forward in his creative love, is affected by what we ask and seek of Him. Prayer is important because of the deep inter-solidarity of the human family and the whole cosmos. Creating deeper peace in ourselves creates a level of peace for the whole human family. By giving

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Relationships: Work and Blessing

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOYCE AND BARRY VISSSELL
BY MELISSA WEST

Joyce and Barry Vissell, a nurse and medical doctor, have been married since 1964. The authors of four books on relationships, parenting, and healing, they travel internationally conducting workshops. The Vissells are the founders and directors of the Shared Heart Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing consciousness to all our relationships. They live with their three children, Joyce's parents, four golden retrievers, five cats, and one horse at their home and center on a hilltop near Santa Cruz, California.

Their latest book, "The Heart's Wisdom," is a guidebook to integrating the two paths of spiritual growth and loving relationships. According to the Vissells, "the highest spirituality is attained through loving relationships." Based on their own rich thirty-five-year marriage, and decades of work with other cou-

ples, the Vissells propose that relationships offer a precious chance to grow as individuals. Every relationship, they maintain, serves as a mirror in which we can see and understand the deeper, hidden parts of ourselves. "As the two of us have traveled throughout the country sharing our work," write the Vissells, "we have often heard people describe the same spiritual longing—a longing for deeper connection not only with other people but with their own hearts as well."

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION: *What do you mean by the "soul mirror" approach to relationship?*

BARRY VISSSELL: The concept of soul mirrors is where every intimate relationship holds a mirror in front of your face: the closer you are to someone, the more gets mirrored back to you. It's an opportunity for your own spiritual growth.

PT: *So someone can practice this even if they*

aren't in an intimate committed relationship?

JOYCE VISSELL: Yes! The key is, the closer you get to another person, the more the mirroring occurs. If you want to get closer to your parents, stuff is going to come up. When you're close to your children or friends or co-workers, you're going to see in them reflections of yourself that you may or may not like.

PT: So the soul mirror approach is a way of life, rather than a concept reserved for relationship with one other person?

BARRY: Right. That's really the essence of "The Heart's Wisdom." The path of relationship is a spiritual path, a path of the heart.

PT: You write in "The Heart's Wisdom" that "positive projections, the goodness in ourselves that we can only see in another, can just as much stand in the way of relationship growth as negative projections." Can you explain that?

BARRY: People talk more about negative projections, or projecting shadow aspects of yourself onto another person. In reality, projecting *anything* on another is going to get in your way. For example, say you see something beautiful in another person and attribute it just to them. You need to realize that to see beauty, you contain that beauty within yourself. If you don't take responsibility for being the beauty that you see in another person, you're missing the point.

PT: How does a person go about reclaiming these projections, both positive and negative?

BARRY: That is the key for getting into the heart! It requires courage to own what you project. It's not easy to reclaim everything that you see outwardly. When you're angry and pointing the finger at someone, it's a challenge to admit to yourself that what you're angry at is not just outside of you. You have to look inside and ask, "What is it in me that I'm not accepting right now?" We don't need to metaphysicalize everything that happens and take responsibility for everything "out there," though. Sometimes it's appropriate to get angry with another person. However, the deepest and quickest way to the heart is to take complete responsibility for what's going on inside: our feelings, our thoughts, our inner world.

PT: To allow for both realities, that there is another person "out there," but to also take full responsibility for my internal experience.

BARRY: When Joyce and I have an argument, we fall into blame and anger. What heals the fight is to come back into my own heart and ask, "OK, what is it that I did to contribute to the disharmony? How am I upset or disappointed

When we got married, it was with a resolve that whatever came up, we were going to work it through. So much came up! It was really difficult, particularly in the beginning, because of our very different childhoods and upbringing. We never put anything aside. When we were angry, we worked through it. We talked, we tried to understand the mistakes we had made. It took real dedication to work through all the hard places and trust that there was more love on the other side. Also, we've made our relationship and our children a huge priority...

in myself, as well as in Joyce?” It’s a balance of external and internal.

PT: *With this compassionate coming back to oneself, I am reminded that you wrote in “The Heart’s Wisdom” that the challenge for each of us is to be our own soul mate.*

BARRY: Yes! That is *the* challenge in every committed relationship. We knew a man who was really convinced that he’d found his soul mate in his wife. She found someone else and left him suddenly. He was very hurt. A month or two later he met another woman and jumped in. We felt it was premature but he did the same thing: he made her the soul mate. She, too, left him. A couple of months later I bumped into him and he told me he was engaged. I had the feeling, “Oh no, don’t do this again to yourself,” but he smiled and said, “I’m engaged to myself.” He actually planned a wedding ceremony in one of his favorite places. He was so happy. I could see that he finally got it: until he really acknowledged that the soul mate he was looking for was within himself, it wouldn’t be manifested outwardly. Of course, he’s much happier. He created a ritual to symbolize the marriage of his inner man and woman. We recommend everyone do something like this.

JOYCE: To try and find this special one person who’s going to fulfill everything—it’s so overwhelming. We like to see it instead that people are destined to be with each other. For some people, they’re destined to be with a number of people. It’s not that the relationships that ended were mistakes. They were destined to be with each partner and learned and grew. Their souls received tremendous benefit and then it was time to move on.

PT: *Given your relationship challenges, which you write about openly in “The Heart’s Wisdom,” how have you thrived for thirty-five years?*

JOYCE: When we got married, it was with a resolve that whatever came up, we were going to work it through. So much came up! It was really difficult, particularly in the beginning, because of our very different childhoods and upbringing. We never put anything aside. When we were angry, we worked through it. We talked, we tried to understand the mistakes we had made. It took real dedication to work through all the hard places and trust

that there was more love on the other side. Also, we’ve made our relationship and our children a huge priority, bigger than our career. We’ve met people in all different fields who, when they have decided to make their relationship a priority, found that their career has blossomed as well. On the other hand, when people make their career a priority, the relationship often just withers and dies from lack of attention. When you make a relationship a priority, it richly blesses your whole life. There’s nothing more important.

PT: *So to see relationships as blessings, not just as “work.”*

BOTH: Yeah!

JOYCE: Relationships *are* a lot of work, but they are such blessings to your overall life. The main thing for us was the dedication to work through every hard place that came up. And many, many things came up; we haven’t had an easy time at all.

BARRY: I would add that our spiritual focus, developing a common spirituality, has been an important key to why we’re together in a very deep, intimate bond. We pray together, we meditate together, we do the spiritual work, alone and together. That brings so much joy and depth to the relationship.

JOYCE: It’s also so important to have a sense of purpose together. It could be raising your children in a really loving home. Barry and I feel a tremendous fulfillment working and serving together. There can be so many purposes where your relationship is really for the higher good.

PT: *You write about intimate relationship being a vehicle for service to the planet.*

BARRY: When two people deeply love one another, and become really bonded in love, we feel that the relationship releases an energy of love to the entire planet. It blesses everyone, like a flower opening and releasing its perfume to the whole world. That’s what it’s like when a relationship opens and two people work through challenges and come to a higher state of love together. It makes the whole world a better place.

PT: *You mention praying together in “The Heart’s Wisdom.” How might a couple do that?*

JOYCE: Often in our workshops couples pray together for the first time. We ask each of them to

speak a simple quiet prayer from their heart asking for help for their relationship, or giving thanks—whatever they're feeling. It's always a very positive and powerful experience, something people take home and continue to do.

BARRY: For people who are religiously wounded from their childhood and turned off by prayer, there are other ways that aren't couched in religious terms to bring spirituality into a relationship. For example, people can make a conscious practice of appreciating each other every day, which brings new love into the relationship. Or they can be in nature together, or plant a garden together. All of these are spiritual practices, and yet different from traditional praying. Each one, though, requires a willingness to make the relationship a priority in your life. Most people give so much more time and energy to their careers than to their primary relationships. There are a lot of people in this country who give more attention to their cars than to their relationship!

JOYCE: One of the most frequent complaints we hear from couples is that they don't have the time to nurture the relationship. One couple we worked with had three children under five years old. In all reality, they *didn't* have much time. We realized they could appreciate each other right in the moment of their busy days. For instance, if the wife was changing the diapers, the husband could thank her and appreciate her for the love she was showing in that task. Even in this very active stage of having young children, they found a way to reach out and show gratitude, so that each knew they were being noticed and appreciated.

PT: *So even if a couple is extremely busy, there's always the possibility of acknowledging each other with love in the present moment.*

JOYCE: Yes! Being too busy is never an excuse. Even this couple, who was probably the busiest we've ever seen in counseling, found a way to deepen their relationship.

PT: *You write in "The Heart's Wisdom" that anger is a cry for help. What do you mean by that?*

BARRY: To realize that all anger is really a cry for help allows people to go deeper both into themselves and the relationship. What comes before anger is hurt, always. Sometimes it takes only a mil-

lisecond for the hurt to be covered up by anger; you don't even notice it. Instead of just indulging in anger, if you can feel and express your hurt, there's more of a chance of bringing healing into the relationship.

PT: *What if my partner acted quite angry with me? How could I work with that as a cry for help instead of being reactive?*

BARRY: This can be some of the most difficult work. It's very hard for me when Joyce expresses anger at me; often that throws me into feeling like a little boy who blew it again. When I can realize that she's hurting, it makes all the difference: I don't have to go into feeling like a guilty little kid. I can be a mature adult who sees that Joyce feels hurt, and the anger is the call for help. Then I can be there to help. It's about staying aware.

PT: *In "The Heart's Wisdom" you write about saying "no" in a positive way, which surprised me, given that most of us tend to think of "no" as negative. Can you say more about that?*

JOYCE: Say one partner really wants to make love, and the other is not in that space. What is important to realize is that "no" can be said with as much love as "yes." When you give yourself permission to say no, the no can come out as very loving. You can put your arms around your partner and tell them that you love them very much and you appreciate their interest and affection, but that you're not in the space right now to make love. I think when no comes out in a hurtful way it's because we don't know it's okay to say no, that we feel we have to go along with whatever our partner wants.

PT: *You're talking about sexuality here, but this can happen in any area of a relationship.*

BARRY: Joyce, I'm thinking of a time just a couple of days ago when you were wanting something very much and it didn't feel right to me. I simply said to you, "I'm sorry, I can see how much you want this, but it just doesn't feel right to me," and I said it in such a way that I didn't close my heart.

PT: *So often we feel like we have to close our hearts in order to say no.*

BARRY: Definitely. But the openhearted no is so much more effective.

JOYCE: And for anyone who was never given per-



THE VISSELL FAMILY.

mission to say no as a child, to be able to say no with love and authority within themselves is the most healing thing that a person with that kind of wound can do.

PT: *In your own relationship, you have periodically taken retreats from each other. I notice, however, that you call them “advances.” Why do you take these “advances” and how can they help a relationship grow?*

BARRY: Partners in relationship can get trapped, afraid to give each other space and time apart. Fear of abandonment, rejection, whatever the reason, many people are afraid to take a step back from the relationship. Sometimes there’s no more positive work that can be done than to take that step back. These times of separation can really be an advance, not a retreat, a healing way to work on the relationship that’s just not possible when you stay under the microscope together. There’s an objectivity that can happen with enough time apart. Joyce and I have had several lengthy separations, especially early in our relationship.

PT: *What can a person do on these “advances” to help their relationship?*

BARRY: “The Heart’s Wisdom” is filled with practices. For instance, there’s one we call “practicing the presence of your partner.” It’s being with

your partner, but not physically, really seeing who this person is with your consciousness, in your inner vision. Appreciating them, feeling what you love most about this person. It’s a very powerful practice.

PT: *You write that the only thing you consider a failure in relationship is shutting the other person out of your heart. If someone has been involved in a very painful breakup, why is it important to keep the other in their hearts?*

JOYCE: Because until they can open their hearts fully to their ex-partner, they cannot fully open their hearts to another person, or even to life. As long as your heart is closed to one person, you cannot fully open your heart to anyone or anything else. Even if your ex-partner won’t have anything to do with you, you can do this work on yourself, by yourself. It’s harder, but very possible. Just the one person doing that work to open their heart and seek understanding, remembering the parts of that other person they did love and appreciate, heals the one making the effort, but it also energetically affects the other person as well. This practice is absolutely critical if there are children involved.

PT: *It’s so refreshing in “The Heart’s Wisdom” to see your honesty about your own ups and downs. What has led you to be public about your relationship?*

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JAN PHILLIPS

The Healing Journey Inward

JAN PHILLIPS

It's not easy these days, making time for creative work. Voices call us from everywhere demanding our attention, energy, and hours. And many of us, somewhere along the path, got the message that making art was self-indulgent, so we relegate our creative projects to the bottom of the list. It becomes the thing we get to when the laundry is done, the books are in order, the groceries bought and put away.

We get so caught up in the flurry of our lives that we forget the essential thing about art—that the act of creating is a healing gesture, as sacred as prayer, as essential to the spirit as food to the body. It is our creative work that reveals us to ourselves and allows us to transform our experience and imagination into new forms, forms that reflect to us in a language of symbol who we are, what we are becoming, what we have loved and feared. This is the alchemy of creation: that as my energy fuses with the Source of energy, a new-

ness rises in the shape of who I am and I myself am altered in the course of its release.

I am never the same in the wake of this work. As I create, I come into my power and wisdom, into my deeper knowing, into that newness that becomes the gift I share with the world. As a result of the time I spend at my work, there is more of me to give—more awareness, more joy, more depth. I become centered in the process, focused on the interior, attuned to the inner voice. Life is no longer about time and demands and errands. It is about the extraordinary metamorphosis of one thing into another. What begins as cocoon emerges as butterfly. What once was sorrow may now be song.

And as I am changed by the art that passes through me in the process of becoming, so am I changed by the creations of others. Having read your poem, mine will contain it and add to its truth. Hav-

ing felt the cold of your cobalt blue, my red will remember and its voice will be sharper. In the stroke of your brush, the wail of your cello, I find fragments of myself I have long forgotten. In your photographs and sculptures, I find my passions mirrored, my visions revived.

My walls are covered with creations that move me and help me remember the whole I am part of. When I awake in the morning, my eyes focus first on a photograph of polar bears dancing in the snow. It is in that instant I feel my bear-ness, that need to hibernate, to romp through nature, to hunt and search for that which feeds me. The image enters into me, allows me to understand more clearly, more symbolically, the life I am living and attempting to create.

Throughout my house are portraits of strong and powerful women—old women, dancing women, women together, women isolated and alone—all from cultures outside my own and each in its way reflecting me and my oneness with her. I'm healed by these images, comforted and encouraged, for where they have journeyed it is safe for me to go.

It is the same with music—there is something for every need, to be chosen from the stack for comfort, inspiration, dance, meditation, celebration. And on my bookshelves are works that have changed my life, altered my consciousness, led to journeys to far-off places and inner worlds—novels, poems, nonfiction, screenplays, each adding essential ingredients to who I am and what I am becoming.

What others have created has shaped my life, and I am moved by the power of these works every day, conscious of the obstacles that each artist faced in the process of birthing them. And I think if these artists reckoned with their fears, their lack of time, their feelings of inadequacy and still went forward, then so can I.

For it is the same with all of us—we have our terrors, our doubts, and our cultures that negate the work of the spirit. And yet we continue, journeying inward to find what is there that seeks release and offers comfort. Over and over we transmute one thing into another, turning tragedies and triumphs

into sculpture, dance, novels, boldstroke paintings, and heart-rending operas, all conjured in our private hours and offered to the whole like food for the soul, a wrap against the chill.

The call to create is a calling like no other, a voice within that howls for expression, shadow longing to merge with light. It is an act of faith to respond to that voice, to give it our time, and in return, if grace be with us, we are blessed with a piece that can be of use, a piece that has light and a life of its own. One honest poem can spark a revolution, one play thaw a frozen heart. And who knows what works have been inspired by Michelangelo's *David*, O'Keeffe's paintings, Rodin's sculptures? What one of us conjures inspires another.

For there is power in the work we are moved to create—prophetic power, redemptive power. Art that emerges from our inward journeys is a revealing art, a tale-telling mirror that collapses time and expands dimension. Our creations contain the past and the future, the known and the unknown, the breath of spirit and the flesh of politic. As we respond to the world we are part of, what we create adds to its essence, changes its shape, heals its wounds.

No matter what the medium, art reveals us to ourselves and heightens the level of human consciousness. I find myself in another's poem, see myself in another's image, become more myself through another's unfolding. Art is a mirror not only to the soul of the artist, but to the whole of civilization that celebrates its creation.

We as creators hold in our bones the lessons of history, the paths to the future. The lines we draw are lifelines, lines that connect, lines that hold the contours of the ages to come. It is up to us—those who know that urge to create, who have felt the tug of that inner voice—to create the world we want to be a part of, to release the words we want to inspire us.

Simone Weil once wrote, "The work of art which I do not make, none other will ever make it." It is up to us, to you and me, to heal ourselves and by that, the world. So let us give our time to the work that heals, to that creative journey that will lead us home. •

Readers Write about Exploring and Expressing Inner Life



When I was in my twenties, struggling with who I was and what I wanted, I wrote in my journal every day. I lived alone and wrote mostly in restaurants, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. I used my journal to describe the complex, exquisite pain I was in, and to exhort myself to change. I have a box full of notebooks from that time, and they are virtually interchangeable. Daily writing enabled me to create a plucky imaginary self, someone who was insightful, analytical, and doing everything she could to find happiness.

My journaling fed an illusion—the belief that I was making real changes in my life. But even though I wrote endlessly about new insights, new regimes, new relationships, the trap I was in was invisible to me. I was drinking every night and hung over every day. I had no idea I was creating my own hall of mirrors, because journal writing felt like progress.

It was not. I was obsessively describing and categorizing a life that I could not let myself simply see and feel—I used words (and alcohol) to detach from life. My compulsive journaling stopped when I surrendered into sobriety and learned another way to use words—talking and listening in recovery groups. There, it was almost impossible for me to maintain my illusions about myself.

Years later, I had another encounter with the ambiguous power of journaling. Inspired by Julia Cameron’s “The Artist’s Way,” I woke up every morning at 5:00 a.m. and poured out groggy spontaneous words in “morning pages.” The point of morning pages is to write from the heart, but for me this technique simply fed the noise and static of my mind. Half-formed ideas, recurring frustrations, simmering hostilities became self-serving stories, made solid and real by being put down on paper. I was creating (and dwelling in) what Buddhists call *samsara*, the noise and bluster of the world. The chatter of my mind and the whirlwind of my feelings were being made ever more substantial by writing them down at dawn.

As Pema Chodron tells us, things can wake us up

or put us to sleep. Journaling offers me, always, both options. Awake writing may sometimes leave me feeling more grounded and connected, but it is more likely to leave me feeling less safe, even more vulnerable. Awake writing won’t necessarily soothe or uplift me—it doesn’t tell me what I want to hear, so that I can feel better about myself.

The descriptive, analytic writing I did while drinking, and the manic, word-spill writing I did in morning pages seemed like ways for me to wake up, but they were really ways to keep myself asleep. They protected me from experiencing life with clarity and freshness. I am learning, now, to respect the double power of journal writing, and to be aware of how easy it is for me to use writing to protect myself.

I can mistake journal writing for self-care, when instead it is another way to pad myself against life. The challenge is to find ways to let writing open me up to the complexity, and mystery, of my life. The challenge is to let writing honor what already is, rather than offering me yet another way to escape from it.—*Joli Jensen*•

My day begins with a ritual. Each morning, I go to my rocking chair with a cup of cappuccino (topped with whipped cream), turn on my table fountain, light a candle, sit down, take a deep breath, and take out my journal. I write the day, date, and time. Then I wait for the words to begin to flow. Sometimes I will take a quote from a daily meditation book “A Deep Breath of Life” by Alan Cohen is one of my favorites, and write how the quote related to me. Often I begin my writing about how I am feeling and what is of concern to me in that moment. Often I never know what I will write about until I begin. But once I begin, the words just seem to flow across the page as I write with abandon, knowing all of my thoughts are private, not intended for anyone’s eyes but my own.

Going back to previous journals (there are 98), it is clear to see how much I have changed, matured, or

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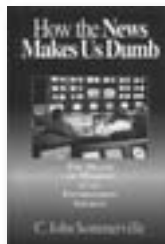
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Briefly Noted

How the News Makes Us Dumb: The Death of Wisdom in an Information Society, by C. John Sommerville. *InterVarsity Press*, 1999, 155 pages.

Watching the news, says C. John Sommerville, can be hazardous to your mind. The problem isn't with political bias in the news, oversimplification of complex realities or reporters who aren't experts on the topics they cover. The problem, contends Sommerville, is much more basic. It's the simple fact that news is daily and must be daily to support the "news industry."



This "dailiness" creates a news glut and our gluttony has blinded us to what news is truly significant. In days gone by, says Sommerville, we got news only when something newsworthy happened. The news began to make us dumber, he notes, when it became an industry that generated news daily. Today, millions of column inches and airtime hours are filled with information every day and in some cases, every hour of every day. While that means we have more information than ever available to us, Sommerville says being informed is not enough. We need to learn to be wise. Sommerville, a professor of history at the University of Florida, Gainesville, discusses news addiction, the celebration of celebrity, how news schedules drive our government, how the news serves as a substitute for culture, and more.

Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh: Lessons for Transforming Evil in Soul and Society, by Matthew Fox, *Harmony Books*, 382 pages.

Author Matthew Fox re-examines good and evil in the postmodern worldview, and in particular, attempts to embark on an exploration of our sins.

We are a species wanting attention, he contends, a people who have ignored their heart needs for far too long. Now, says Fox, we need



to probe deeply into who we are as a species. That probe must include an exploration of our sins, and the point of attack for the struggle against evil must begin within one's own soul. Fox leads his book with a discussion of goodness, the blessings of the flesh, and the seven chakras that name some of the blessing-energy inside all of us. Once grounded in our capacity for goodness, Fox then explores East and West views of human sinning. The third part of his book focuses on the ancient Middle Eastern and Western tradition of the "seven capital sins" and the "sins of the spirit" and ties them to the Eastern tradition of the seven chakras. Fox's book proposes a blueprint for individual spiritual renewal and real-world activism through a reconciliation of spirit and flesh.

Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time, by Paul Rogat Loeb, *St. Martin's Griffin*, 1999, 362 pages.

You can make a difference. And Paul Rogat Loeb can show you how. In "Soul of a Citizen," Loeb urges, prods, and pleads with read-

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 64

Maple Forest Monastery

8n1p64

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ers to overcome the cynicism of the time, get off the couch, and get involved. Loeb presents a vision of hope and courage, of how individuals can participate in their communities and take responsibility for the future, how they can make their voices heard and their actions count. The book examines how people get involved in larger social issues and what stops them from getting involved; how they burn out from exhaustion or maintain their commitment for the long haul; how a spiritually grounded involvement can give a sense of connection and purpose rarely found in a purely personal life. Loeb offers several lessons: Our efforts can do more for ourselves and the world than we can imagine; we don't have to be saints or wait for the perfect opportunity to take action; changes happen little by little, step by step; the impact of our efforts will ripple outward in ways we can't predict; we can savor the journey of engagement, whatever our ultimate destination. Loeb's book has been called the handbook for activism for the turn of the century.



.....
A Call for Connection: Solutions for Creating a Whole New Culture, by Gail Bernice Holland. New World Library, 1998, 249 pages.

There is good news and there is bad news, and Gail Bernice Holland offers readers a huge serving of the good in an inspiring and hopeful book that focuses on what can be done and is being done right now to improve society and create a better way of life for humanity.

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Her research has revealed a yearning for wholeness, a focus on taking care of the whole person: mind, body and spirit. Often missing in today's society, Holland says, is our heart, our conscience, our spirit. But that's starting to change as people realize the only solution to many of society's problems is to cultivate and connect with the best in human nature. Holland documents through interviews with researchers and activists a world-wide shift in values that focus on integrity, compassion and spirituality. Her interviews with leaders such as Dr. Jane Goodall, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, environmentalist Carl Anthony, Nobel Laureate Brian Josephson, Boston Philharmonic conductor Benjamin Zander, Dr. Dean Ornish, author Paul Hawken and others reveal this new focus on promoting the best in each of us to create a more compassionate, unified society. The book also includes a resource guide of organizations, books, and projects to help readers to take action and be a part of this movement.



Trust in Yourself: Messages from the Divine, by Jaya Sarada.
Grace Publishing, 1998, 182 pages.

Its message, on one level, is simple: Trust in Yourself. Ignore the temporary realities of the physical, emotional, and mental bodies, and know that the consciousness of your soul is devoted to divine essence. Meditating on the



Richard Moss

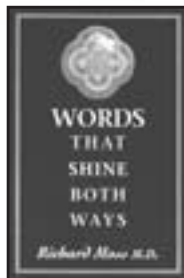
“What is it that allows me to touch my own experience in faith?”



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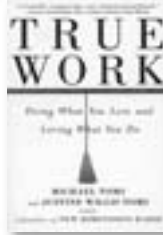
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eternal plane can raise consciousness to the state of knowing your true reality. When you transcend the lower nature of the personality, pure consciousness can take control, shifting you from a point of selfishness to selflessness. When your consciousness moves beyond the physical plane, you touch the deep inner core, your real essence, and feel the oneness of all creation. Following your inner conscience is following the voice of your true self. Beyond all aspects of your personality lies a being of goodness and holiness that can be discovered by moving beyond your ego and turning within to your inner source of love and wisdom. The key: Trust in yourself.

True Work: Doing What You Love and Loving What You Do, by Michael Toms and Justine Willis Toms. Bell Tower, 1998, 208 pages.

If you're dragging yourself out of bed in the morning and dreading the next eight hours at your job, take a look at "True Work: Doing What You Love and Loving What You Do." The husband-wife team of Michael Toms and Justine Willis Toms says "True Work" is simply doing what you love and loving what you do. It's following your inner voice, heeding your spiritual call, and living your passion. Anyone can find True Work; if you're lucky, you'll be able to combine your work with your passion. If that's not possible right now, the Tomses offer insight on how to transform how you view what you do so that it becomes a source of enjoyment and refreshment rather



than an endurance exercise. Attitude and keeping the proper perspective are everything, they say. The key is to bring love to whatever you are called to do right now. The Tomses have interviewed thousands of inspirational leaders on their nationally syndicated radio series, New Dimensions. They weave their stories and advice—from Joseph Campbell, Buckminster Fuller, the Dalai Lama, Alice Walker, Thich Nhat Hanh, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Marsha Sinetar, and many others—into their text, revealing the spiritual dimension to the reality of work. And they offer these tips for pursuing True Work: take initiative, engage your work with energy and enthusiasm, hold the future loosely, and persevere. •

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Experts Answer

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who can hold this energy for you in a safe and therapeutic setting. This way you won't have to "leak" it out inappropriately onto those you love... unless, of course, these deep feelings pertain to any of them. Then it is appropriate to therapeutically express it to them in the presence of a good family counselor.

On another level, please know that these feelings belong not just to you personally right now, but to Humanity, our one collective Soul, as well. Disappointment, disillusionment, anger, and hopelessness are currently trans-individual: a universal archetype is up, a horrific aspect of Humanity's shadow. Kosovo, Colorado, our children's despair, terrorism... and before that, Monica/Clinton... and before that O.J. and the family violence theme... all ravaging our TV screens for months. The great psychoanalyst Carl Jung said, "We can never separate from our archetypal roots any more than we can separate from the organs of our body;" we are part of a whole. At the surface of our psyches we feel as an individual; at the deepest source of our psyches, we feel universal. Crisis takes us to our source. These archetypal issues arise in the psyche like "steam" from a boiling pot, pleading to come out of denial to be owned and healed! Those who are the "sensitives" in our world pick up these feelings and make them known.

Some of your feelings of disappointment may be landing back on you, so please hear me when I say you are doing something quite natural and helpful for us all. Thank you for being so authentic. You have our support.

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Pilgrimage to the Ancient Sacred Sites of

EGYPT

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MORE THAN A TOUR, AN ADVENTURE OF THE SOUL

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Breaking Free

I read about women coming into their own after 50, but here I am, age 54, soft-spoken, and not wanting to hurt other people's feelings. I'm not speaking up for myself even though I want to make some changes. How do I break free?

SUE PATTON THOELE: Not being able to speak up for themselves and speak out about their wants, needs, and beliefs is a common lament from women of all ages. In fact, I have a wise friend who maintains that most women are "conflict-a-phobes." I know I could wear that label, and with good reason! Like most women—especially those over fifty—I was trained to appease, acquiesce, and act in a "lady-like" manner, which didn't include assertiveness, or easily speaking my truth.

Most women have a strong desire to be liked and accepted but may, instead, be judged and rejected when they speak up for themselves clearly and honestly. Gloria Steinem underscores that silencing technique when she says, "A man can be called ruthless if he bombs a country to oblivion. A woman can be called ruthless if she puts you on hold." Is it any wonder we keep silent?

That said, what's to be done about this dilemma?

First, we need to unlearn the societal messages that keep us uncomfortably silent and retrain ourselves to move beyond our fears into greater freedom and self-expression. Easily said, not easily done. I believe it's close to impossible to change life-long habits and limiting patterns of behavior without support and guidance from other women. We need hands to hold as we traverse the often-dark corridors of personal change.

Therefore, it's important that you find a support group of like-minded women, trusted friends, and/or a therapist who can guide and encourage you as you begin the changes you desire. These supporters can also help you ferret out the fears that lurk behind your hesitancy to speak out. For me, fear of rejection is my most effective and prevalent muzzle. Just yesterday, I needed to tell a friend that I wasn't comfortable with the tone of an article she'd written about me and I wanted some changes made. Before the call, I was a mess. Tearful, semi-nauseous and afraid my friend would be hurt or angry. Somehow I mustered the courage to make the call in spite of how I felt. I've learned that even though we may never feel totally comfortable with speaking our truth, we can choose to do so anyway.

In order to be truthful without hurting others' feelings, we need to be educated in the art of constructive communication. A savvy women's group or a competent therapist can teach you these communication skills and practice with you until you are adept at using them.

In a nutshell, to speak up and break free, it's important that you seek out the support and guidance of a therapist and/or group, courageously find and transform your self-limiting fears, and learn the skills that allow you to communicate clearly and constructively. Although speaking your truth may never feel absolutely comfy, it will certainly be freeing.

DAN MILLMAN is a former world champion athlete, college professor and coach. He is a speaker and the author of ten books including: "Way of the Peaceful

Warrior," "The life You Were Born to Live" and "Everyday Enlightenment." Dan is a youthful grandfather who lives with his family in northern California. His web site is at <http://www.danmillman.com>.

BELLERUTH NAPARSTEK is an author and nationally recognized pioneer in the field of guided imagery and intuition, best known for her popular "Health Journeys" guided imagery audio series. Her books include "Your Sixth Sense" and "Staying Well with Guided Imagery." She lives with her family in Cleveland, where she maintains her clinical practice, manages her audiotape company, consults, teaches, and writes. Her web site is at <http://www.healthjourneys.com>.

JACQUELYN SMALL is a pioneer in the emerging field of spiritual psychology, a speaker, writer, and leader in the area of personal and planetary transformation. She is the author of eight books on these subjects, including "Becoming Naturally Therapeutic," "Transformers," "Awakening in Time," and "Becoming A Practical Mystic." She heads her own healing/training institute, Eupsychia, and certifies students in Psychospiritual Integration. She lives in Austin, Texas, and can be reached at (800)546-2795, or via e-mail at: eupsychia1@aol.com.

SUE PATTON THOELE is a licensed psychotherapist who lives with her husband, Gene, in Colorado. Her passions include being with her children and grandchildren, writing, and swimming with free dolphins. She is the author of 10 books, including: "Freedoms After 50," "The Woman's Book of Confidence," "The Woman's Book of Courage," and "The Courage To Be Yourself."•



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From Readers

Continued from page 9

“Transformational Groups: Leaderless Groups that Work” by Steve Wolf really resonated. After President Bush lost, most of my Rolodex of political appointees were out of work. I knew people who were collecting resumes, reassuring job seekers that somehow a collection of resumes in their desk drawer would be helpful.

Instead of a job bank, I started a self-help group that shared job leads once a week at a roving kitchen table. Many people’s inspiration was to find a job so fast that their quarterly turn to host never came up. That “If she can do it, I can do it” motivation really helped us get over some rough times, including uprooting families and leaving like-minded political friends.

I kept thinking our leaderless groups would die, but we moved to faxes and emails, and next week a web site (www.jobpod.com). People used to inherit their career from their father, now we create an artificial family wherever we see the need. The Job Pod’s “currency” just happens to be job leads.

After the Vietnam War, psychiatrists discovered that group therapy worked just as well as private sessions. It works well in the healthy, too. I founded The Job Pods, but the liveliness, openness, and helpfulness of each member is what keeps it going. Thanks for reminding me.—*Donna Wiesner, Arlington, Virginia.*

I HAVE ENJOYED

I love your magazine! Ever since my mother introduced me to it, I have enjoyed and benefited from your articles and the insights to which they have led.

I am also writing to find out if there is some way in which I could

Transformations

Continued from page 22

purchase some of the marvelous photographs and art work found in your magazine—for example, in Spring 1999, pages one and three. They would make marvelous additions to my home and office art collections.—*Rev. Mark Davis, Email.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: We have received several inquiries about the pictures in our magazine. The images are supplied by a company that rents their usage, so we are unable to supply reproductions.

CONTENTMENT

Finding contentment in today's society seems almost impossible sometimes, but your article by Jerry Ruhl and Robert Johnson gave me a few insights that can help make contentment a reality.

So often, I have felt the "slender threads" they describe. Sometimes, even though my intuition or gut instinct or whatever you want to call it, was to let the slender threads guide me, instead, I took charge, took control, and ended up fighting the slender threads that could've helped me through the situation. Inevitably, I turn those slender threads into cords that strangle—until I am willing to let go and be guided by them.

I have discovered over and over again that the less I try to force reality to fit my picture of life as it should be, the less anxiety and stress I must then find ways to diffuse. Contentment begins in being able to accept reality for what it is, in letting go of the reins once in a while and letting the slender threads guide me, and reconciling my Ego and my Spiritual Self to this plan. Ruhl and Johnson helped put that back in focus for me.—*Sandy Roberts, Houston Texas.*

attachment, how attached we can still be to all the ways we define ourselves. I was so attached to being a caring person, a person who brings meaning to the world. I lived my life committed to making a difference, hopefully making the world a better place every single day. I gave up that attachment, and when I gave it up I moved into a state of worthlessness: Why do I exist if I'm not making a difference? Is it enough to be present in the world without being a contributor who's showing up for others?

I had devoted so much of my life to service, but I have realized how much of it was bound up with an ego identity that said in order to belong in the world, to be a spiritual person in this world, you have to give something back. In this last ten months, quite often I was not capable of caring for someone else; I couldn't even pretend to be caring. The core of this process has been about unraveling everything I identify with, and identify myself as. I know there's more unraveling; I, all of us, are so bound to a definition of being and much of that has been stripped away.

In the midst of this kind of transformation we are blind, not unlike the snake shedding its skin. We are blind and vulnerable, a kind of vulnerability where everything is so frightening because we have lost the illusion of being in control. That vulnerable place, however, is the most fertile place of all. I can't say I've held on to that wisdom constantly during this process, particularly in the middle of the night when I was being tormented by my own demons. But when I could see clearly enough that Divine process is at work, even if I don't believe and cannot see or feel it, it made a

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 74



Welcoming the sojourner in search of
personal and social transformation.

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(On relationship issues)
Sidney B. Simon
July 18 - 23

**Celtic Spirituality and
The Book of Creation**
Philip and Alison Newell
October 15 - 17

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Tansy Chapman
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The Experience of God
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WORLD EVENTS IN SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

The advanced Beings who guide the evolution of humanity are preparing to emerge into outer visible functioning in the world. In preparation for this, the inner side of world developments is gradually precipitating into human consciousness in the form of a growing global impetus toward freedom and right human relations, a necessary first step.

Could the fact of this preparatory stage explain some of the constructive and destructive events we see unfolding in the world? Could there be a positive purpose behind apparent chaos?

More on the theme of the emergence of the Kingdom of God on Earth is given in a compilation from the writings of Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, available free from:

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huge difference.

In the first months of my island time, it was as if the energetic tide of my own soul was going out, and out, and out, and out. Recently, though, I have noticed a shift; the tide is starting to come in. The energy that was completely gone is coming back, in a movement forward. I can move my body again.

I think that the evolution of the Divine is happening very strongly in me and in us all right now. The universe requires points of expression to bring forth new energies. We can all respond at any moment, like those roundworms at the beginning of evolution. I simply surrendered into the arms of the Divine and allowed It to do within me what It needed to do. I believed that in responding to that felt impulse I would get a clear message and clear direction, but my experience has been oblique, and more unknowing than knowing. This journey has been—and continues to be—about following my feet, and breathing. The impulse feels strong in me, but I do not know where it is taking me.

During these ten months, I have often questioned, “Am I doing this right?” I often felt I must not be doing this right because if I were doing it right I’d be meditating more, or doing something “spiritual” more. I have suffered a lot of self-judgment about whether I was on course or off course. What I most want to share with others in profound transitions in their own lives is, when that self-judgment begins to happen, breathe into it. If you’re breathing, you’re doing it right. You just breathe and do what’s there, in that moment.

I can’t say where this process will take me. I have no idea at this point where my life is going. There have been times when the money was

gone, and I mean gone: nothing, and nowhere to turn. But always, another moment followed that moment of bleakness and despair, and then another moment.

Always, there’s something more toward which Spirit is leading me, and you. Always. •

Basil Pennington

Continued from page 51

up violence in our own attitudes, feelings and spirit, and seeking peace, we can become an instrument of peace. We are just one among billions and that may seem little, but sometimes we have to be content with doing the very little that we can. There is always political action. We have to discern, in each case, the appropriate political action we need to take. Certainly we should try to move our own government toward a less violent attitude. It is extremely difficult, when the situation is occurring, to say what we can immediately do, apart from prayer to try to bring peace. We can do whatever is possible to provide relief for the people suffering. This kind of suffering brings us into strong and painful contact with our limitations.

PT: Is there anything that you want to add about suffering?

PENNINGTON: It is extremely important to have hope. The evolution of human consciousness has gone on for hundreds of thousands of years, and is a powerful movement. Divine Creative Energies, which are pure love, are at the base of this movement. Humanity, in its evolutionary course, has gone through terrible periods, yet has moved on and on. We are at a fairly high level of human consciousness in the rational period we live in. More and more people realize that we have to move to a more

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New World 1

Basil Pennington

Continued from page 74

integrated level. One of the enormous challenges lying ahead of us is the full equality of men and women and the full integration of the masculine and feminine dimensions of our being. This will make an enormous difference in the way the human family lives and functions. Hopefully, we will be much more peaceful. That integration is a coming together as a human family, a human community. We are most empowered and find the greatest possible security and the fullest happiness in community when we embrace each other as brothers and sisters, as children of the Father.

Each of us needs to live the hope, realizing that we are in this wonderful evolving course. Even if there is suffering and struggle in the course of it, the grain of wheat that falls on the ground comes forth with a hundred grains; it is in process. •

Spiritual Potential

Continued from page 31

is going. We must consider life's highest potential for development and look beyond our immediate goals to what we ultimately want to accomplish."

What do we want to accomplish during our sojourn on Planet Earth? Have we chosen to be victims of circumstances? Or are we intent upon learning how to live effectively so that we can experience the unfoldment and actualization of our innate potential as quickly as possible? We can easily determine the degree of our spiritual awareness by self-honestly examining how we view ourselves in relationship to life and our habitual behaviors. The seven stages of soul unfoldment have been

described as follows:

1. Unconsciousness. Awareness is almost completely identified with conditioned mental states, erroneous beliefs and opinions (delusions), and illusions (misperceptions of what is observed). Apathy, disinterest, and boredom are common characteristics. If one is religious, one may seek refuge in a system of beliefs to comfort the mind.

2. Dysfunctional self-consciousness. The self-conscious state is egocentric: mind-, body-, and personality-centered. Although awareness is somewhat clarified and curiosity about life and the possibilities it offers is compelling, delusions and illusions prevail. Psychological conflicts may be troublesome. Because intellectual powers are not yet highly developed, endeavors to comprehend higher realities (even though sincere) are not always fruitful. There may be a tendency to presume illusions and fantasies to be the truth.

3. Functional self-consciousness. Although still self-conscious, one has fewer psychological problems, is able to more easily exercise freedom of choice, is more goal oriented, and is able to efficiently accomplish purposes which are considered to be of value. Functional self-consciousness provides a firm foundation upon which to investigate higher realities and to nurture spiritual growth.

4. Superconsciousness. Purified intellectual powers and intuition enable one to clearly discern the difference between ordinary states of fragmented awareness and the essence of one's Being, the true Self. When superconsciousness is stable, Self-realization is permanent.

5. Cosmic consciousness. As superconscious influences further

purify the mind and refine the nervous system, episodes of cosmic awareness progressively unfold, providing clear perceptions of the wholeness of life.

6. God-consciousness. As cosmic consciousness matures, the reality of God, the one field of Consciousness, is directly apprehended and experienced.

7. Full enlightenment. Now completely spiritually awake, with all delusions (erroneous ideas) and illusions (misperceptions) absent, the totality of life is flawlessly comprehended. Soul awareness is liberated.

Is it possible to actually experience satisfying spiritual growth while attending to duties and responsibilities and relating to rapidly changing social conditions? Yes, it is possible. All that is required of us is aspiration to excellence, a clear sense of purpose, Self-(soul) confidence, willingness to learn how to live effectively reinforced by determination to do so, and compliant cooperation with the universal, impersonal processes of life that can and will produce the desired results.

Roy Eugene Davis is an internationally recognized teacher of spiritual growth processes, the author of many books, and the founder-director of Center for Spiritual Awareness with offices and a meditation retreat center in the northeast Georgia mountains. P.O. Box 7, Lakemont, Georgia 30552-0001; web site: www.csa-davis.org.

Readers Write

Continued from page 59

what I best like to describe as evolving to a higher place of consciousness, particularly over the past ten years.

My journals are the only place I

can honestly express myself and see my truth written there for me to read and not fear. I discovered the difference between ego and spirit, unloved inner child and loving adult. I wrote dialogue between loved and unloved inner child and unloving and loving adult. Once seen on the pages, I began to understand my own consciousness.

I attended a journal workshop by Christina Baldwin and began a journal with drawings and poetry, using Soul Cards to go deeper into myself. I had no idea so much spirituality was there!

Journaling helped me to see many sides of a situation, choices to feel, and helped me find productive options to many conflicts in my life with professional and personal relationships. It became my means of meditation and making conscious contact with the God of my understanding.

I cannot imagine how I could have gotten through so many dark nights of the soul without hours of journaling while listening to soft music (Nakai Native American flute) in the background. Journaling is my source for healing. It is what I do when tears begin to well. It is what I do when I buy into despair. Journaling is my way through the darkness. But it is also where I express joy and gratitude so that I do not forget they have also been mine. Reading entries I wrote when I was happy affirms that I am not always in darkness and has shown me that it was being in the darkness that brought me to the light of understanding through journaling.

When I am finished, I gently blow out the candle with a whisper, "Peace," for me and everyone. I never fail to feel peace in that moment.—*Alanna Eckert*•

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In our next issue Readers Write on: ONENESS WITH NATURE (a wilderness experience, gardening, relationship with a pet, etc.).

To contribute, please see Letters to the Editor on page 9 for information.

Mystery of Love

Continued from page 29

that the heart suffers because it has not forgotten its true love.

If we follow the path of any pain, any psychological wounding, it will lead us to this one primal pain: the pain of separation. Being born into this world, we experience being separate from oneness, from God, from our heart's Beloved. We are banished from paradise and carry the scars of this separation. But if we embrace the suffering, if we allow it to lead us deep within ourself, it will take us deeper than any psychological healing. Love and suffering are powerful transformative agents because they embrace the mystery of being human. Longing is love's call to "return to the root of the root of your own self," to the place within the core of our being where we are always whole.

We are conditioned to avoid pain, but for the mystic the pain of the heart is the thread that leads us, the song of the soul that uncovers us. Meister Eckhart said, "God is the sigh in the soul," and this sigh, this sorrow, is a most precious poison. How love heals us from the sufferings we inflict upon ourself is always a mystery. Love cannot be understood by the mind just as it cannot be contained by the ego. Love is the power that opens and transforms us, that intoxicates and bewilders us. Love leads us deeper, away from the prison of our limited self to the freedom and wholeness of our divine nature. In the words of the Sufi saint Jâ mî, "Never turn away from love, not even love in a human form, for love alone will free you from yourself."•

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, Ph.D., is a Sufi teacher and the author of several books on Sufism, including "Sufism,

The Transformation of the Heart," "The Face Before I was Born," "Sufism," "Dreamwork" and "Jungian Psychology." Sounds True has also published sets of his audio tapes, "Love is a Fire," "I am Wood," and "The Sufi Path of Love." He was born in London in 1953 and has followed the Naqshbandi Sufi path since he was nineteen. He can be contacted through The Golden Sufi Center, P.O. Box 428, Inverness, CA 94937; (415) 663-8773, e-mail: GoldenSufi@aol.com

Vissell

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BARRY: Our relationship has been a powerful teacher for both of us. We have been blessed so much by all the growth we've experienced in this relationship that it feels very natural for us to share that. It's our service; to be able to share what we've learned is what gives us joy and allows us to feel even more love together.

JOYCE: When we were twenty-four years old, we read a little book by John Powell that had a huge impact on us, "Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Really Am?" Powell wrote that when you tell a person who you really are, they will then feel safe to tell you who they really are. After reading the book we realized that's what we wanted to do. We didn't want to hide from each other; we wanted to be totally real. And it worked. When we're having a hard time and we're leading a workshop, we let people know what's happening with us. Because of our honesty about where we are, people feel safe to be honest with us and each other.

PT: Looking back on your rich thirty-five years together, what is the most important lesson each of you has learned in the laboratory of your own relationship?

BARRY: I've learned that after thirty-five years, I love Joyce more than ever before.

JOYCE: Awwwwwww.

BARRY: What I've learned is that love keeps growing. That each time Joyce and I go through something difficult and come out the other side, there's more love.


JOYCE: In the beginning of our relationship I felt that I needed to go off by myself and meditate to experience God. Over the years I have learned that it is just as deep to experience God's love coming through Barry, or the love that comes through both of us when we are joined together solidly in our hearts.•

A Way of Service

Continued from page 26

becomes profound self-love, which is my idea of engaged Buddhism.

"From 8 a.m. until I walk out the door at 4:30, my practice is about swimming in my kids' river. I'm a different kind of fish, but we all swim this stream together. The more we can all serve each other, the more we can say, 'This is the coolest river I've ever been in.' These students are all so awake in a Buddhist way; there's nothing so awake as a thirteen-year-old. I'm so grateful to open these doors, swim in their river, and wake up."•



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Groups

Continued from page 12

stayed at that level of sharing, even though Steve had asked if anyone had an issue they wanted to process with the group, and later offered to teach them a dream process. Fifteen minutes before the group ended, a woman said, "You know what, I am bored, because this is not the reason I came to this group. You are very nice people, but the truth is that I did not come here to chitchat with you. I have plenty of places to do that in my life."

Steve asked her when she started to feel bored. She answered, "Oh, about three minutes after we stopped doing our formal check-in." Steve thanked her for speaking up and commented on how the energy in the group was now different. Everyone was highly attentive and present. Then he asked, "Why didn't you speak up earlier?" She replied, "I didn't want to rain on anybody's parade, everyone was having a good time."

Steve used this opportunity to teach about the function of leadership. Leadership moves around inside the group. When someone has something to say, she has a responsibility to the group and to herself to do so. This participant had given up leadership by not talking earlier. At that moment, when she felt bored, she had a choice to speak about her feelings and risk what others might say, or to sacrifice herself to what she thought was required of her. By choosing silence, she created a crisis because she was no longer emotionally present in the group. She reconnected when she did, in fact, risk admitting her boredom to the others.

Leadership moves around the

group like a hot potato. Everyone takes responsibility by making her inner voice the priority of the group. Leadership is about risking being present: this involves trusting that your inner voice is the voice of the group being expressed through you. Sometimes the group may not want to deal with a participant's energy and other times the group will ignite with the input of any one person in that moment.

Steve now trains group facilitators in his model, working with other experienced group leaders who respect and are adept at addressing the depth and complexities of group process. Group leaders comfortable with groups, committing to empowering others to pursue their own work of self-exploration, and who desire to assist and guide groups through the often uncomfortable, sometimes intense, crises can be taught these methodologies. They can then birth groups for personal transformation as part of their clinical practice, as the foundation for conscious community.

Training sessions for persons interested in becoming facilitators for leaderless, spiritually centered, and psychologically oriented transformation groups are now being formed through *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* magazine. Three weekend workshops—one each in Los Angeles, Kansas City and New York City—are scheduled. Please see the ad on page 12 for more information. To register, contact *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* magazine. Call toll free (800)775-6887.

Practices

Continued from page 34

ity and not use it as a home base for area sightseeing, i.e. retreat centers are not commercial motels.

A two-night minimum stay is recommended because it usually takes that long to settle in and become accustomed to the routine of the retreat community. Since retreat centers are gaining in popularity and many have limited accommodations, reservations should be made well in advance.

A valuable reference guide to retreats is *Sanctuaries: The Complete United States* by Jack and Marcia Kelly (Bell Tower, \$18). Of the 127 places listed, most are Christian, but some are Jewish, Buddhist, Sufi, and Hindu, and a few are without specific religious affiliation. Each two-page description features a line drawing and information on the retreat's history, location, religious affiliation, accommodations, prices, and facilities. An additional listing of more than 1,000 retreats in all 50 states that are recommended but have not been visited by the authors is located at the back of the book.

Take with you a candle and fresh flowers for atmosphere, and a Bible or other spiritual book for inspiration. But more important, take with you an open mind and an open heart so God can do His perfect work in and through you. •

Nancy Neal is an ordained Unity minister currently on sabbatical. She lives with her husband in Tulsa, Oklahoma.



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Not Doing

JOHN TARRANT

When we let drop the veils of our usual preconceptions, we are closer to our lives, sustained without knowing why. When we cannot see how healing or the next step in our lives will appear, and no longer know what we can expect, the step we must take just emerges, out of nothingness, like the grass. What rises to meet our need comes from a domain deeper than the realm of custom, more ancient, beneath our feet and our awareness, thousand armed, beyond our control. To live without veils, in modesty and unknowing, is to trust to the abyss, as a swimmer trusts to the ocean, and gently moves both hands and feet; it is to flow through the days like boys on a raft down the Mississippi. The old Chinese teachers called such activity “doing nothing,” or “not-doing.” This doing nothing is an inner event that can take place in strenuous action or utter stillness. To do nothing is always harder than we imagine.

Unlike ordinary laziness, in which we merely avoid something we think we ought to be doing, the laziness of not-doing has a refined and charged

quality. By comparison, ordinary laziness is hard work and requires distraction. When we truly do nothing, a fertile, widening silence appears. Close to the mystery, we drift along. There is no resistance to delusion, yet delusion can find no ground to cling to. In the midst of action we rely on the stillness that is everywhere present. If the world is imagining itself without our assistance, why then, we let it do so. When we truly do nothing, we allow that falling can be good, that arms might catch us when we do fall, that the world may sustain and surprise us at the same time. We respond naturally, witnessing the web of life of which we are a part, just as water runs downhill and the white clouds run before the breeze.

Not-doing, having no urgent plans, we dawdle in the intimate while, like a child jumping puddles on the way home from school. The world comes to us then, and we belong in it. •

From “*The Light Inside the Dark*,” by John Tarrant.
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