



AUTUMN 1999

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*If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with success unexpected in common hours.—Henry David Thoreau*

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# Publisher's Note



Several weeks ago, I celebrated a rare afternoon away from work by attending a movie matinee. I had read reviews, heard interviews, and seen advertising touting the new movie. Although I had some doubts about the movie's merits, my curiosity grew in response to weeks of mass media hype and I developed an expectation

to see a wonderful movie. As I sat in the theater I realized that along with my doubts, I had put aside my intuition and let myself be seduced by the advertising. The movie was very disappointing.


Bright individuals work endless hours coming up with ingenious marketing strategies to convince us that certain products will bring us happiness. The brilliant marketers sell us on the notion that our deepest yearnings and desires can be bought. We are seduced into believing that a new car, a dream house, or a trip to France is the answer to our hearts' desires. While this marketing may be good for the corporate world's bottom line, it can derail an individual's quest for true fulfillment.

Not that there is anything wrong with material comforts. A pleasing home can be nurturing and travel can introduce us to different cultures and ways of relating to the world. But to define who we are by what we own or to seek life's meaning in the material world is misguided. The world's religions have been teaching this point for thousands of years, yet our society still struggles with it.

How do we stay on our path when societal forces encourage us to drop our quest for a life deeply lived and pursue a life of little meaning? It's by being grounded in our essence or inner self. One way of doing so is to learn to listen to what has been called the still small voice within, the voice that knows the true way. By learning to listen to our still small voice, our lives become guided and we are able to discern the true from the false, the nurturing from the waste of time.

Being seduced by the advertising and going to a disappointing movie reminds me how easy it is for me not to listen to the still small voice, and to be swept away from the nurturing. Instead of a valuable, rewarding experience that contributed to my growth and transformation, my afternoon was a waste of time—except as a wake-up call to listen.

Welcome to *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* magazine. I hope this issue reminds you to listen deeply.

  
Rick NurrieStearns  
Publisher

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RABBI ZALMAN M. SCHACHTER-SHALOMI



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PAUL SIBCY



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# Editor's Note

“**W**hat matters most?” and “Does my life reflect that which is most important?” are two questions that lead to transformation when they are contemplated and then acted upon. Somehow, no matter what the contents of this magazine are, it brings us face to face with these questions.

I know that *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* impacts me, but how it does is always a surprise. While working with this issue, particularly the material about courage and oneness with nature, I found myself wanting to be with my German shepherd more. Stargirl walked up our lane and into our lives eight years ago as a starving dog. She followed me around and found her way into my heart. Although she is still a good-looking dog, genetics and malnutrition have eroded her hips and for the past two years she has had to have daily pain medication. To the amazement of her veterinarian and myself, her mood is generally happy and her spirit sweet and gentle.

She takes daily excursions, although painful flare-ups limit her outings. During those times when she lays and moans, I wonder if she is ready to pass on from this life. The vet says, “Not yet, she will let you know when” and I know he is right.

The lessons she teaches me are many.

She gives me courage. If she can be optimistic about life, even when it is painful, I can also. We need mentors in our life to help sustain us through rough times, and we never know when one will appear in our driveway. We just have to stay open to the possibility. Courage mentors show us the way; they teach the way of the open heart—the joy of companionship and the pain of compassion.

Stargirl helps keep my heart open to love, even though I occasionally groan when her medical expenses pinch our purse or when I selfishly wish the inevitable would hurry up, just to ease my ache. Those moments reveal to me ways in which I could close my heart to what is truly important. Better to acknowledge and love even those responses and keep moving toward courage.

She teaches me about limitation and helplessness.

Although I do what I can to keep her comfortable, her life is not in my hands. That's where courage comes in again. All we can ever do is what we can, letting our actions be guided by what matters most, never knowing what lies ahead.

Stargirl reminds me how temporary life is and how each day matters. Stephen Levine said, “The acknowledgment of impermanence holds within it the key to life itself.” I never know if the next painful episode will result in her final trip to the vet's office. She doesn't fret though, she just takes what comes and enjoys what she can. The obvious uncertainty of her health insures that I don't take her for granted, and every hug feels special. The effect spills into other relationships, often making those hugs more dear as well.

She helps me to know how precious the gift of life is and that the way life is lived makes it precious. I don't know how she approaches death. I don't know if dogs confront death in a soul-searching way. I know that watching her physical deterioration causes me to examine death and life—what gives me a sense of meaning, what I value.

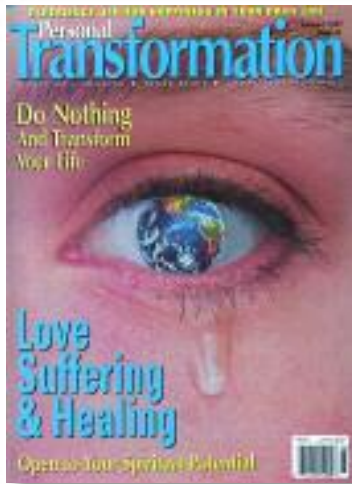
The impact this issue has on you will be forthcoming. You will discover words that touch you; how and when they work on you is as yet unknown. In some way, you will feel something and learn something that draws you closer to the heart of the matter of your life.

Blessings along the way.

*Mary NurrieStearns*  
Mary NurrieStearns  
Editor



# Letters From Readers



## ENRICHING

Thank you for your continued commitment to producing a high-quality magazine that provides stimulating and inspiring resources for our spiritual journeys.

Having subscribed to your magazine almost from the beginning, and having followed your struggles to continue publication, I truly appreciate the two of you and others—unknown to me—who have felt called, and are gifted for this form of service. For several years before I discovered *LOTUS/PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION*, I subscribed to other periodicals seeking the type and quality of publication you provide. I would like to share with you some of the ways *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* has enriched my life and the lives of friends and family.

This morning as I read Mary's interview with Basil Pennington, I thought of my Christian roots.

Human words and interpretations are not always the same, and I had difficulty accepting the religion of my childhood. However, my quest for Truth has taught me to see and appreciate the core truths that lie at the heart of that religion and the many others that we are exposed to in your magazine. And so, we thank you for your gift to your readers of a broad perspective.

At 59, I am the elder member of a three-generation household. Recently, during a vacation with family and friends, I read excerpts from Mary's interview with Wayne Muller, "A Time of Sacred Rest," during a time of group meditation. It seemed the perfect reminder at the beginning of our vacation.

I welcome the opportunity to share your magazine with inter-generational friends. A year ago I gave a subscription to one friend for her 65th birthday. At Christmas, I gave a subscription to a 17-year-old friend. Mary's interview, several years ago, with Judith Orloff had come to mind when this friend experienced psychic dreams. Reading Dr. Orloff's book, "Second Sight," was life transforming for this multi-talented young person. I believe it brought both her and her parents a sense of ease about what had initially been a startling experience.

And so, you see, we use and appreciate the work you do. While we recognize that it involves struggle, we trust that it also brings you joy. As you support us, we also seek

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## 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.

RELATIONSHIP AS TEACHER—HEALER, being with a loved one through crisis or death, an inspiring role model, or mentor, etc. Due September 13, 1999.

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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.)

LETTERS —

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# Have the Courage to Reach Out

MICHALE GABRIEL  
BY MELISSA WEST

**M**ichale Gabriel's life changed one night last summer. Gabriel, a professional storyteller, attended a colleague's presentation about her trip to Iraq. Gabriel, appalled at the slides of suffering caused by disease, starvation, and total infrastructure collapse stemming from the Gulf War sanctions, felt a strong bodily sensation, as if the Iraqi children were calling her to come.

Gabriel knew that going to Iraq placed her in much greater physical and legal danger than any of her previous citizen diplomacy trips. However, she was more concerned about whether she could witness the suffering in Iraq. "I kept asking myself, 'Is my heart going to be able to take this?' I had never seen children dying needlessly from malnutrition or lack of medication. I knew, though, that I had to go. My commitment for the last thirty years has been to advocate for the rights of children to tell their stories and have meaningful lives, and here were children who were not being allowed to do that."

Knowing she was committing felonious civil disobedience by traveling to a country embargoed by the United States, Gabriel left last fall for Iraq with a Chicago-based nonviolent activist group called Voices in the Wilderness, suitcases stuffed with medical supplies, clothing, and toys, crayons, and paper for the children.

Toxic smells assaulted Gabriel when she arrived in

MICHALE GABRIEL WITH YOUNG IRAQI GIRL



Baghdad. Serious pollution of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, thick smog from cars gone unrepaired for nine years, and raw sewage flowing in streets where children played shocked her. Gabriel spent the next two weeks touring hospitals, dispensing supplies, and going from bed to bed listening to people's stories with the aid of an interpreter. "One mother I talked to had such suffering on her face, sitting beside the bed of her four year old. The child was hooked up to an IV, getting a cancer treatment. The mother told me that when this bag was gone she was taking her child home to die because she had no means for procuring more platelets on the black market. Her family had already sold everything they owned to get the child this far."

Gabriel felt helpless to change the misery around her, but hoped that by being present and bearing witness to the children's suffering, and carrying the stories back to America, she could bring some degree of healing to the wards of brokenhearted people. "As a storyteller, I know the power of stories. We are all stories in process, touching each other's lives and becoming part of their stories as a result. My own prayer was, 'Let me be present for these people in such a way as to become part of their stories.' Not me personally, but me symbolically, because I know I represented other Americans in this. I wanted Iraqis to know that all Americans aren't oblivious to their incredible suffering."

The language barrier, she found, was really no bar-

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rier at all; much of the communication was nonverbal. In a maternity and pediatric hospital in Baghdad with 100 sheetless beds and 300 patients, Gabriel spent time with a mother who had just been told her seven-month-old fetus was dead from malnourishment. "I didn't know what else to do, so I just held her in my arms. When I began to stroke her face she told me in Arabic, 'When you touch me like that, you make the pain go away.' I know she will never forget this child that she's lost. All I can pray is that somehow in the midst of all that grief and devastation, she will remember that it was an American woman who held and caressed her."

Gabriel assisted in the birth of a child in another hospital. As she held the newborn baby, Hebe—"gift" in Arabic—she thought, "This baby invites us all to ask deep questions: Do we realize that our actions have worldwide implications? Do we know that if we diminish anyone in the world in any way, we are also diminishing ourselves?" She realized it didn't matter whether the child was from Baghdad or Littleton, Colorado; what was important was that children feel connected to those around them. "We are so disconnected, disconnected within ourselves and disconnected with those around us. I realized I was in Iraq to build connections, bridges between each other, through stories as a tool of transformation and healing."

"A child back in America once said that if there were no stories, there would be no world, because the world is made up of stories. It is our ability to speak our stories and deeply hear others' that allows us to create the common bonds between

us. When we skim through life and don't take the time to deeply listen to each other, we feel disoriented and lost. If we choose to look at the world as a human family, and there is one part of our family we're not listening to, what is that doing not only to them, but to us as well?"

The time spent in Iraq deeply affected Gabriel's spirituality. "I think God views us all as one; we're all part of creation. Going to Iraq was like claiming a part of myself. The gift of story is a God-given gift. When I tell stories, or listen to them, I feel this incredible connection with spirit. I am so grateful for the gift of being able to touch others' hearts through storytelling, and to help people reconnect with their own heart by telling their stories, and being deeply listened to. I kept thinking about Mother Teresa and how she saw Christ in every person. I could look at these children and think, you are making a sacrifice to help us wake up. I promised them in my heart that I would wake up for having been with them."

Gabriel found that returning to the United States was, in some ways, far more difficult than being in Iraq. "Even now, when I'm looking at well-fed children in a store or at a park I just start crying, remembering the starving children in Iraq. The Iraqis are a noble and generous people, and I sat in living rooms of little hovels with broken-down sofas as they served me tea. It breaks my heart to remember the laughter and smiles of those children and those brave mothers. It was such a reminder to me that it isn't what we have materially, it's what we have spiritually, and I witnessed the presence of spirit so strongly through those people.

"I've had to recognize that grief is part of life; it deepens us and

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 70



LEADERS IN THE TRANSFORMATIONAL FIELD ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS

# ASK THE EXPERTS

## Understanding Sibling Death

**My sister unexpectedly died a few years ago. My acute grief has subsided but I still wonder about what happened to her. Sometimes I sense her and feel a connection, as if she is still here. Other, older family members have died and I don't experience them, except in my memory and in my heart. I don't know what to make of this. How can I understand this?**

**SUKIE MILLER:** I am sorry to hear about your sister's death and not surprised that she may still be "with you." With the exception of the loss of a child, the loss of a sibling is a most difficult death from which to heal. That your sister's death was a sudden one, sadly, compounds the difficulty. According to other cultures and esoteric lore, the nature of your sister's death makes it an especially confusing time for her as well as for you. Your wondering is well founded. First some information and then some advice:

The death of a contemporary, unlike the death of a parent, uncle, aunt, or grandparent, is in no way expected. It is the natural order of life that other members of our original family will die before us. But not a sibling. We aren't prepared for the loss of a brother or sister.

Again, different from the case with other family members' deaths, the death of a contemporary evokes our own mortality. We are shaken by such a death like none other and we are affected by such a death as a mirror of ourselves and what is to come.

If we add to these facts the suddenness of your sister's death, then you are up against not only your grief, your own mortality, and your lack of preparedness

EXPLAINS THE STRONG CONNECTION FELT EVEN AFTER A SIBLING DIES.

**Sukie Miller Ph.D.,** founded and directs the Institute for the Study of the After-death, which conducts research on what may happen to us after we die.



DESCRIBES THE MANY FORMS PRAYER CAN TAKE.



**Rev. Ron Roth, Ph.D.** teaches modern mysticism and healing through prayer to people of all faiths, and conducts seminars, workshops, and spiritual healing retreats.

ADVICE ON HOW TO CHOOSE BETWEEN JOB AND A YEARNING FOR FULFILLMENT.



**Marsha Sinetar, Ph.D.** is an educator, corporate adviser, and best-selling author who lives in the Pacific Northwest.



**Elizabeth Harper Neeld, Ph.D.** teaches spiritual seminars and retreats and is the lay director of Women's Retreat Ministry at a church in Houston, Texas.

SURVIVING THOSE SPIRITUAL "DRY SPELLS."

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# Ask The Experts

for such a death, but also what is believed to be her experience as well. You are right when you say you don't know what to make of this. It is different from other deaths you have experienced.

According to lore, a sudden death is a most difficult death for the person who has died. They too have had no time to prepare. They too were not expecting the event. It is believed that those who suffer sudden death "hang around" those people and places familiar to them in their lives longer than others who die. They are said to do this because they are both getting accustomed to the fact that they are, in fact, dead, and because they are a little lost and not sure where to go. I think this lore may account for your sensing her. The experience, as you wisely delineate, is different than remembering.

I hope this helps you understand the differences between your experiences of those you love who have died.

Now for some advice and this is, if you will, "two-way" advice.

First, are you ready for your sister to move on? If you are, then I would suggest the following:

Find a quiet and peaceful place. Find a quiet and peaceful time. Speak to your sister. You may want to hold a recent photo of her or imagine her in your mind. Call her name and when you "sense her" or "feel connected" to her, explain to her that she has died and how she has died.

Tell her that it has been a few years since she died and that it is time now for her to make her journey. Tell her that it is said that people who love her and who are also dead are waiting to greet her and show her the way. Tell her she will be fine and that it is said that the

journey is an interesting one.

If there is unfinished business between you and your sister, resolve it with her in your imagination. Take time to say goodbye to her, especially if you had no opportunity to do this when she died. Then, direct your sister to head for the light that is there and tell her that the light will guide her.

If, after you do this, you continue to sense her, just visualize her and remind her to "go for the light." It is said that this will help her find her way.

If you are not ready for your sister to move on, find out why. Prolonging these feelings is not helpful for either of you.

Thank you for writing and thank you for allowing me to answer your important question.

## A Spiritual "Dry Spell"

**I continue with my daily prayer and meditation time, even though my inner life feels arid. For the past few months, I can find no peace or spiritual connection, whereas my spiritual practice usually centers and nourishes me. I go about my daily business, but something is missing and I don't know what it is. There have been no changes in my life, which until now, seems fulfilling. Any advice?**



**ELIZABETH  
HARPER  
NEEDL:**

One of the first images I think about when I hear that question is my grandfather, who was a farmer in middle Georgia. When I was a little girl, I spent much of the summer there. I would help him set out potato eyes, sweet potato slips, gather the corn from the cornfields, and check the progress of the cot-

ton as it was growing. I would think about the long growing season, after the seeds were put in the ground or the slip was put in the ground or the potato eye was planted. It looked as if nothing was happening, particularly when the seeds were underground and we couldn't see any growth. And yet, the exact right thing was happening during that period.

I believe out of my own experience that in those arid periods, in those times when it is dry and we experience no movement and no connection with the sacred that we have felt in the past, the right thing is happening. It's happening internally, at a very deep level. When that period—whether it's an inner growth period, a transformation period, a reshaping of some of our inner life—ends, then we enter the next phase, just as my grandfather's plants entered the next phase and there would be visible growth. This led to the harvest, and the great baked sweet potato that we would slather butter on, or the Irish potatoes my grandmother would whip up to make potatoes and gravy. As with the seeds we planted in the soil, we don't know what is happening during some of the growth times, yet what is happening is positive and appropriate for our own individual lives, our own growth, our own transformation, our own development.

I believe everyone who dedicates herself or himself to a spiritual practice has these "dry spells." I've never met anybody yet who does not go through these arid periods at some point in their journey.

A second thing I think of in regards to these dry periods also relates to my grandfather's farm. I think of how, even decades ago, long before we knew as much as we



know now about crop rotation and letting the field rest, my grandfather knew instinctively to let a field lie fallow during a planting cycle, or sometimes, for two or three years. I can remember asking him, "Grandpa, why don't you have something planted over here? You did last year when I was here." And he would say, "The land is resting." We know now how important it is to rotate the crops and feed the soil, so I also think about that in relation to the times that we don't feel anything, the times when we aren't stimulated to sparkling new growth, and we feel disconnected. It helps me to think that perhaps this is a fallow time in my spirit, a resting time, even though I don't feel restful internally.

Another way to think about this is that it is very pensive to measure the impact of our daily spiritual practice by feeling or by external happenings or by a feeling of flow or a feeling of being in sync. Of course, those are luscious times when we feel that, but no matter how dedicated we are to a spiritual practice, we don't always experience that.

I've been committed to a daily spiritual practice since 1980, and it truly has had ebbs and flows, times that were like a wonderful spring rain and times of dryness that were like a drought. I've learned over the years that the inner work is being done no matter how I experience things externally or how I experience things emotionally. The value of this daily spiritual practice, this quiet time and prayer, is there and is building, no matter what my experience of my external life or my emotional life might be. The way I know that for myself is that steadily, over the years, there has been a continuing increase in my having a

sense of certainty that no matter what happened to me in life, I would be sustained. We all have sad things that happen, tragedies, horrifying things, things we don't like to have happen. One of the long-term outcomes of my daily spiritual practice—through the ebbs and the flows, the ups and the downs, the feeling good about it and the not feeling good, the feeling connected and the not feeling connected—has been and continues to be an increased certainty that I will be guided, sustained, encouraged, and given wisdom on how to deal with whatever came my way in life.

## Confused About Prayer

**I'm confused. I read that true prayer is resting in silence, being with God, waiting for the word of God; however, I come from a tradition that petitions God for healing, protection, and wisdom. Am I imposing my ego and desires on God's will when I petition God for help? How should I pray?**



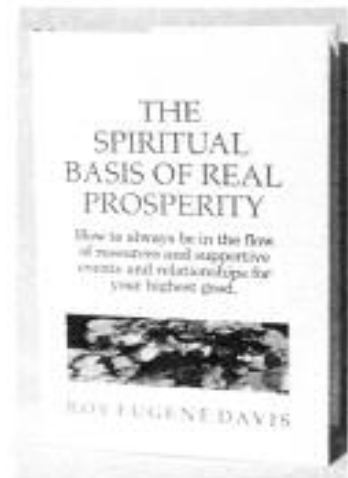
**RON ROTH:**

Basically, my discovery is that prayer is not a matter of doing as much as it's a matter of being.

For example, in some specific situation, if there is a real need to petition, then petition. But if you feel that in this moment of conscious communion with God, you'd like to just express your gratitude, then express gratitude. This is more a matter of heart than words. It's a matter of talking, listening, and sometimes just being receptive and open to the divine grace that fills the universe. Prayer is about being open. It's about being receptive to the light energy of God, which is love. To be filled with God, I have to first empty myself, and I can

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## Ask The Experts

begin to catch the wisdom of God, the counsel of God, the health, the provision of God, all that's needed in life. My intuition starts to open up. Pray whatever you're feeling at the moment. It's not the form that matters. It's the feelings of the heart, that conscious connection with the divine.

It is sometimes difficult to know if petitionary prayer is an expression of selfish desire. I tell people that if you don't get an answer, it's probably ego. Now, that may seem flippant, but there are times when you just don't know. If it's coming from the person's heart—you don't have money and need to eat—then it's not ego, that's coming from the heart. It's not praying for money just to be rich. I go back to the ancient sacred languages of Sanskrit and Aramaic. The word for prayer in Aramaic, slotcha, actually means setting a trap. What that means is setting your mind like a trap to catch the thoughts of God. In Sanskrit, the word is pal-al, and it means to see yourself as wondrously made. This is the essence of true prayer. If you're truly praying, moving through these forms of prayer, you begin to feel an energy rising that's enhancing your self-esteem, you're beginning to see yourself as worthy in the eyes of God. For most people, their difficulty with prayer comes because they don't feel God is going to answer because they're not worthy, perhaps because they've done something wrong in the past.

The intent of prayer is to have a conscious connection with the divine, the energy of God, the spirit of God, the love of God, that not only fills the whole universe, but is at the center of every individual's being. It is to make that conscious connection so that as you

encounter obstacles and traumas in life, you have a tool to combat the fears, anxieties, and worries that confront everyone, even the holiest person on earth.

There are many methods of prayer. Prayer can take various forms; with Catholics, it might be rosary beads; with Hindus, it might be mala (phonetic) beads; some may say the names of God out loud, or chant it or whisper it; some may read sacred writings. Prayer can be vocalization, or as simple as taking a deep breath and bringing an affirmation to mind, "I am breathing in the love of God, I am breathing out the fear." Or, "I am breathing in divine health, I am breathing out sickness." Many religions emphasize the meditative aspect of prayer because that's when you have to shut up and listen, and that's where the guidance comes. Finally, there is the prayer of service, epitomized by the prayer of Saint Francis, "Make me a channel of your peace."

## I Don't Love My Job

**My employer, a large corporation, provides ample income and benefits that provide well for my family. My family is my top priority, yet my job is unfulfilling. My heart yearns to be an educator with inner city youth, but the money is not there. Seems that I have to choose between two priorities, my family and my career. What do you advise?**



**MARSHA SINETAR:** As you mull over your best options, here are some considerations to

add to your stew of thoughts:

First, there's a hidden blessing in being faced with a dilemma such

*PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 73*



# Hoping to Live, Preparing to Die

ALIA KAZAN

**H**igh up here in my oak tree. Strong. Solid. So unlike me at this time... so small and frail... here in my sacred place I am nestled in giant branches. Held... like I am never held by anyone. High above them all, I am safe, without a care in the world... except perhaps I wish mom and I saw eye-to-eye more often. But here I am with my reverie. Free to dream and plan the life that lies ahead... the children I'll have, and how happy I'll be, and of course how healthy.

Twenty years fly by like the pages of a book turning... all the plans, schemes, hopes, dreams... loves and losses... I am happy with my life and have found joy

and creativity working in theater with disabled adults, and music therapy for children. But I have no children of my own.

Then things change. A lump in the breast, but I'm only 32! And I'm a vegetarian, and I meditate, and pray!

Two men in white coats enter the ward, looking at the ceiling. Wringing hands. Shuffling feet.

"I, er, don't know how to say this."

"It's okay," I tell him, "I think I know what you're trying to say" (always ready to comfort others.) "Am I going to die?" (My heart is pounding but I don't flinch.)

Silence.



ALIA KAZAN IN THE PARK

I live my life like a prayer, learning to let go of trivial concerns... each pain-free day a bonus. Focusing on quality, rather than quantity. One day at a time. I refused chemotherapy. Maybe it could have helped. Really, life has become a process of learning to trust my own decisions. Making choices from instinct, not out of fear. Honoring the “me” that is spirit, the part the doctors rarely address.

“It’s a tumor,” says the other man. A lump rises in my throat, thoughts compete for space in my head.

Tumor...? I don’t know this means cancer!

The night before surgery I dream. I fall over a cliff into a raging river fearful... but I am swept to safety.

“Well, I would plan three to six months at a time,” he speaks bluntly. “There are cells in the bloodstream.”

“Cells?” (Aren’t there meant to be cells there?)

Agonizing silence. They turn on their heels and leave. I think about yesterday. An eternity passes. I feel numb. A nurse arrives. She looks young. Embarrassed. She takes my hand and I collapse into tears. Tears of self pity, tears for every loss I’ve ever known. I fear that others may treat me differently, or tiptoe around me.

I’m told I have a two percent chance of living three more years without treatment. Perhaps five years with it! It’s too late for anything but chemotherapy.

Of course I ask, “Why me?” And a thousand other questions... I hear of miracle cures and think, well why not me?

I decide that cancer happened to a particular “me,” so I’ll simply change that “me” and it won’t be appropriate any more. Naivete,

perhaps, but the doctors could offer little optimism....

The days that follow are a blur. Domenic, my new partner, is calm. He’s my anchor. He’s only twenty-six. He doesn’t let me see that he’s terrified! His dad died of lung cancer a few years ago.

Would he still love me if I lost a breast? Other stresses were too much for a new relationship anyway, but our friendship continues to deepen.

Twelve long years pass... years of solitude and contemplation, then times of torment and pain. Days of stillness... nights of terror... until the breath was leaving my body and life slowed down enough for me to appreciate the simple turn of a leaf.

Do I still have cancer? Yes. Each new tumor stealing the future, finally robbing me of both breasts. Active in the bones now for seven years, betraying the part of me that still wants to be in control. So many questions without answers. So much gratitude for each new day.

I live my life like a prayer, learning to let go of trivial concerns... each pain-free day a bonus. Focusing on quality, rather than quantity. One day at a time. I refused chemotherapy. Maybe it could have helped. Really, life has become a process of learning to trust my own decisions. Making choices from instinct, not out of fear. Honoring

the “me” that is spirit, the part the doctors rarely address.

Now I endeavor to say “Yes.” To remain open... listening to my body’s signals, moment to moment... trusting in God’s plan, the unfolding of my destiny. Finding the faith and courage to continue to live with uncertainty. Asking “What really matters?”

I believe that a significant factor in my increased well-being and the unexpected long term survival could be attributed to several “transformational conferences” I have attended run by Richard Moss, MD. The energy generated in large groups of people cannot be underestimated when this is gathered and focused in sacred attention.

Gradually I have learned to see myself as far more than simply a physical body with a named set of medical symptoms. To be able to see oneself as larger than a structure limited by a very bounded and defined self-perception can be the most important tool in self-transformation.

Although I have not healed bodily, I can say that the degree of healing in my heart, relationships, and life in general has been far more than I could have imagined possible.

To me, a life well-lived embraces and accepts the gifts and challenges that life brings. I can



choose to live with dignity. Truly live, not just endure, rather than handing over responsibility for my decisions to family and doctors and becoming “the victim.”

Having cancer allows me the privilege to sit with others during their time of transition... able to relate to their suffering and help them feel less alone. Suffering teaches compassion, and while I hope to live, I prepare to die! For what is death but a process of letting go? One which we all face sooner or later.

My mother too has had cancer for many years—a form of leukemia. She’s a survivor like me. One of us might die soon. It could be me—her only daughter. I’ve been in a Palliative Care Unit for over five months now... strange how this illness can heal the wounds of our past. Like sisters now, we’re on the same journey. In a dream we look out of a huge window onto a shining sea which stretches to the horizon. A procession of boats sails toward the sunset. The masts and sails are black. Now I pray for a little more time, so that I may be there for her when her time comes. Perhaps then she will become the little girl and I the mother. I know I will speak to her the words that are left. The words that come from the place in me that holds the potential for the spirit of the oak....

In my heart I feel a tiny  
acorn gradually beginning to  
awaken slowly, steadily  
as the light starts to reach it!

*PUBLISHER’S NOTE: A couple of weeks before we went to press with this issue, we learned that Alia had died.*

# The Joy of Anger

BETH ADAMS  
CAMERON

Sometimes I blow up. Last time it happened because we ran out of ketchup. I teach second grade and I make lists, but I hadn’t written ketchup on the list. I reacted to my family’s criticism. “Both of you could have noticed and written ‘ketchup’ on the list,” I said accusingly. They sent me hostility and we settled down to eat mustard-pickle-lettuce burgers.

“Are you a little stressed?” my husband ventured after four minutes of silence. “Maybe you need a retreat.”

I stomped to the hall, checked the Spiritual Renewal Center flyer on the bulletin board and shouted, “There’s one called Dealing with Anger (as Anthony de Mello Saw It), but you two are the ones who need that.” I still resented their behavior. I listened to them muttering, returned to the kitchen and let them talk me into spending the weekend at my favorite place.

On Friday evening, I drove to Albuquerque’s south valley and checked into a cozy single room. From my window I watched Black Angus calves lazily grazing beside their mothers, while a pig rooted under a sprawling Cottonwood at the farm adjoining the dormitory.



Guinea hens keened their beckoning calls and a little girl in a pink dress pumped on a squeaky swing. As shafts of evening sun filtered through the doorway, I felt wrapped in peace and forgot I was capable of fits of rage.

I wandered across the meadow to the lecture hall. Sister Amada, one of four sisters who operate the center, warmly welcomed me. They pray for the retreatants during the week, and I felt the effect. Sister Amada explained that everything offered for the weekend was optional and we’d know what we needed to attend. If we needed sleep, we’d sleep. A large lady in her seventies sat next to me. She wore a flowered T-shirt and jeans. “If your mother isn’t living, this is the closest thing to her, if not better,” she whispered.

We introduced ourselves and told what we hoped to get out of the weekend, and Brother Joe, the presenter, took notes. One person appeared truly angry. She only revealed her first name, Ellie, and pulled her chair closest to the door where she sat with folded arms.

Brother Joe presented a method based on self-awareness. Questions were freely asked and his answers



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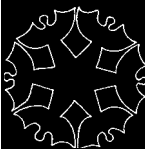
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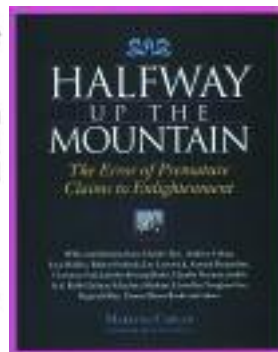
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were honest and simple. I realized that the process of seeing the primary feeling that originated before my anger would involve a personal search. The means was through journaling. Already I'd let go of some baggage and was preparing to view my irrational reactions, as in the ketchup incident, with honesty.

We walked to the tiny stone chapel for prayer. Evening blended into night while we sat in candlelight under the vigas and listened to Native American flute and related readings. Ellie was the first to leave.

Energized by the challenge of the weekend, I raced to the dormitory where coffee, tea, and snacks were provided. I'd much rather talk about the method than have to apply it. Like the cartoon showing two doors. The first door is labeled "Heaven" and the second "Talks about Heaven." No one is lined up behind the first door, but there's a long line behind the second. Seven of us talked for an hour before I took a night walk around the compound. I gazed at the nearly full moon and fell under the Center's hypnotic spell. My resentments paled while I watched clouds drift across the sky.

I woke gently to the sounds of classical guitar. On the lawn, Mark, who drove eighty miles to attend this retreat, sat cross-legged and strummed. I quickly dressed and noticed a note had been tucked under my door. "Call home." Grabbing coffee before morning prayer, I met Ellie and briefly talked. Her face reddened while describing three harassment suits she'd filed. She believed in revenge and intended to get a lawyer and return to court. Nervously shuffling from foot to foot, I avoided looking directly in her eyes, afraid I'd intimidate her. Her agitation

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# Oneness With Nature



## The Teachings of Manatees

The morning was cold and still, not what you would expect for Florida weather. Pelicans skimmed above the tranquil river, eyeing schools of Mullet and Jacks. The rising sun reflected beams of light dancing across the water, magnifying the steam drifting off the surface to meet the chilly morning air.

I come here every year to introduce college students to endangered West Indian manatees and also to learn something about manatee play and the strength found in their gentleness. Over the past ten years, the trips have become less of an introduction and more of a peaceful pilgrimage for me, although every trip feels as if it were my first.

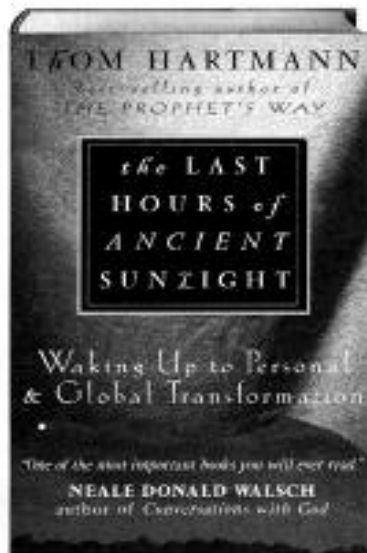
We gather our snorkeling gear, disposable waterproof cameras, and towels into the small Johnboat and proceed at a snail's pace down the river toward the manatee refuge. Anchoring in the soft river bottom, we all look at each other in silence as if to ask, "Who's going to be the brave one to jump in first?" As usual, it's me: not out of bravery but more from the excitement. The chilly river water gushes down the back of my wet suit as every muscle in my body tenses. A few kicks of my fins and I am off. Soon everyone is in, experiencing a baptism by cold water.

We lazily swim over to the refuge buoys, a roped-off safe zone to keep people and boats away from the manatees. This is where manatees know they are safe,



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somehow understanding that people cannot follow them into the area. We float at the edge of the refuge, inviting any and all manatees to come out and play with us.

The students are surprised when an infant manatee curiously approaches us. The baby is not yet a skilled swimmer. The mother manatee is not far away as the baby moves slowly toward us. When the infant knows it is safe, it swims up to my mask, displaying the white of its eye. It then looks me over, peering into me with brownish blue pupils signaling that it understands my intention to play. Within a moment, we slowly exchange touch. It reaches to me with a waving flipper, my hand outstretched, yearning for contact. The baby circles me and, in a gesture of trust, rolls onto its back as I scratch its gray, course belly. The baby then quietly swims to the students, who react with equal delight, enthusiasm, and respect at this gift of connection.

Several pops and whistles emanate from the mother manatee and the baby quickly swims to her and back into the refuge. All of us look at each other as if to question the reality of what just took place. A moment later, the infant darts back to the students, recognizing newfound friends like a child just moving into a new neighborhood.

We spend hours floating in the river, patiently watching for a manatee's invitation to play. On some days, the invitation does not come. We are left simply watching and waiting, guests in the home of another. On these days we often witness other visitors to the manatee sanctuary who do not understand the importance of patience, waiting and play. In one instance a man from another boat approaches a sleeping manatee, points his

expensive underwater camera in its face and takes a picture as the flash fires. The manatee slowly rises then swims away. The diver has his picture but at the cost of losing a precious connection with the manatee.

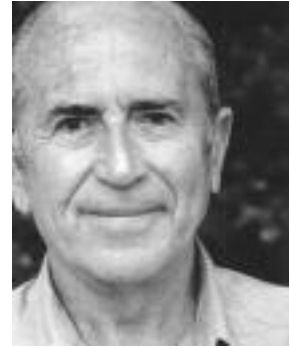
Manatees truly are "gracious creatures," as a friend of mine once put it. But what if they were not so peaceful? What would happen if manatees attacked or injured people? Would we be so quick to reach out to them then? Is it their peaceful nature that seems to draw us to them, admire them and so desperately want to touch them?

Swimming out by the river refuge, I pause and stand in the chest-deep water. A baby swims up to me and, with an uncoordinated swipe of its flipper, hits me in the shin, sending a shooting pain up my leg. I groan. Sometimes, play involves little aches and pains. There is always the possibility of getting hurt or rejected when reaching out to another in play. When this occurs, you learn to not dwell on the experience and simply continue playing, with those both smaller than you and those ten times your size.

Minutes later, again standing in the shallows, I am approached by a large adolescent manatee. He is a male, over eight feet long, weighing nearly one thousand pounds. Both of his flippers reach out to me as he grabs my thigh and begins to roll. The instinct that calls me to pull free quickly gives way to trust, and I relax my leg. He pulls me off my feet and rolls over me as I roll underneath him. Laughter streams out of my snorkel as he lets go of my leg, swims around me once more, and then disappears into the river depths. I feel privileged to be a participant in his playful frolic. Later that day, one of the students

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# Pathways to Wholeness



## Dare to Live

ARNAND DESJARDINS

One day, as I was answering a question on the subject of death, the following words came to me: “You are not afraid of death, you are afraid of life.” Thinking over that response, I realized how true it was. Our fear of death is all the greater when we have not dared to live. In fact, if you stop fearing life, you can no longer fear death because you will have discovered within yourself what *life* really is. (Not your own life, but the unique and universal *life* that nourishes us.) And it becomes obvious that such *life* is independent of birth and death.

Westerners commonly consider life to be the opposite of death, but Orientals consider birth to be the opposite of death. For them, life expresses itself through a movement of perpetual change: an uninterrupted play of death and birth. Many spiritual paths share this conviction. My own “guru,” Swami Prajnāpad, gave simple examples to illustrate this: the birth of the child is the death of the baby; the birth of the adolescent is the death of the child.

Daring to live means daring to die at each moment. But it also means daring to be born—daring to pass through important stages in life where the person you used to be dies, in order to make room for someone with a new view of the world (assuming that there are various levels before the ultimate level of Awakening). It is a case of being more and more aware that each moment you are born and you die... you die and you are reborn.

To put it simply, daring to live also means no longer having the slightest fear of what we feel. I am sure that many of you agree with me, especially those who have begun to discover what lies within their own unconscious. You are afraid of what you bear inside because you cannot fully count on yourself; you know from experience that you tend to get yourself into situations which you end up bitterly regretting. But you are also afraid of what you carry inside because each of you, as a child, has experienced situations where the way you expressed yourself was brutally contradicted. Your joy of living, high spirits or fervor led to catastrophe when you found yourself being severely reprimanded for something you had been so happily doing.

Perhaps through therapy you had the chance to re-experience how bewildered you were to see your parents overcome with anger, when you had been having so much fun cutting up the best curtains in the house with a big pair of scissors. I once used the shoes of everyone in my family for boats in the bathtub. My parents didn’t have much money at the time and there weren’t very many shoes in the closet, but there were enough for me to float. Although that sounds quite harmless, it was an incident I re-experienced with tragic intensity between my mother’s despair, my father’s severity, and my own shattered happiness. I couldn’t understand why something that had been such fun had upset my mother so much. She was convinced that all the shoes in the house were completely ruined.

It often turns out that something which was a small incident in the eyes of the parents was actually a terrible event in the eyes of the child we once were. A fear of what we are capable of very quickly takes hold of us. From then on, unless our parents are particularly careful, we ourselves start to smother our own life force. We start repressing our vital impulses. Then, as both psychology and self-observation show us, our discovery of the sexual world often takes place in an atmosphere of uneasiness, misunderstanding, and a certain guilt that accompanies childish masturbation. The urges which



arise in us during adolescence, which cannot always be satisfied as we would wish, leave us troubled and lost. We no longer completely accept the very powerful life force or libido within us. Hence, in a world of increasingly free moral standards, where there are enormous possibilities for self-expression and many opportunities to travel, the majority of you no longer dare to live fully. And once you no longer completely assume the life force within you, you begin to fear death. But the fear of death is an illusion; do not be bothered by the fear of dying. What is really important is to free yourself from the fear to live.

There are two faces to this fear of living: one is the fear of what is inside us; the other is the fear of concrete situations and of the consequences they can bring about. Very quickly, our fear of living turns into a fear of suffering. We feel that it is better to live less, so as to suffer less. Look inside yourself; see what is there; ask yourself if this is how you feel. Private interviews and group meetings with those who come here to our center have shown me how true this is. You are afraid to live because to live means to take the risk of suffering. This fear is rooted in past experience, which showed you that the more you lived, the more unhappy you became. Not only because your enthusiasm may have led you to put shoes into the bathtub but because when you fell in love at the age of eighteen, you ended up suffering so much. Consequently, a certain decision tends to surge up inside—sometimes unconsciously, sometimes quite consciously—I don't want to suffer like that any more." Now that is a very fine decision to make... but it leads to another one

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 79

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# Learning to Love Your Body

PAULA M. REEVES

Most of us yearn for an in-depth intimate relationship. Deep within each of us there is an undeniable longing to love and be loved. Scientists tell us this longing is inscribed in our DNA. We are, they say, social beings destined to seek community and relationship. Then why is it that all too often we turn a deaf ear and an indifferent heart toward a love relationship that is as close as breath and equally as life sustaining? Daily each and every one of us is being courted by a profoundly wise and protective lover. That lover is your body. Your body is not only communicative but you can learn to listen and understand the messages. Daily, awake or sleeping, your body's intelligence is speaking to you, coaxing you, urging you to listen to the cellular wisdom that has been lovingly guiding you since your conception. Moment by moment you are being led and taught in a myriad of ways through the somatic language of your matter—by your symptoms, your embodied intuitions, your gut instinct, your heart's yearning, your belly full or your cold chill, how intimately you are relating to others, and they, to you. Now on the cusp of a new millennium, filled with the anticipation of change and promise, we speak of soul, seek to be more soulful, retreat in order to awaken soul, while forgetting that our body is soul's finest emissary, capable of speaking more eloquently and honestly of soul's presence than any poet, teacher or scientist dare. To be consciously embodied

## Conscious Healing



begins with learning to love the state you are in, to love your body as deeply and respectfully as you wish to be loved, and to listen intuitively to each lesson this relationship offers.

Our brain does not govern who we are or what we become. There is an older and much wiser energy directing life and life's purposes known as the essential self, as the soul. Every cell in your body responds energetically to your relationship to your soul. If you wish to summon this precious ally take a moment and reflect upon your body's version of soul talk, your embodied intuition. These are the wise and bone honest on-going communiques you receive constantly from your viscera, your spontaneous movements, your inexplicable yet instinctual urges, and your symptoms. Body intuition is always metaphoric but never obscure. Embodied intuition gives us a clear assessment of the true state of our being. For example, take a moment and turn your attention toward the part of your body you most dislike. It may be a minor flaw or it may be a central feature. Now listen to what your body has to teach you about your relationship to yourself. Allow yourself to feel the indifference or intensity of feeling you have for this rejected part of your body. Intensify the feeling and then pretend you are nothing but this part of yourself. Become your heavy thighs or your aging chin or your sagging stomach. Feel the quality of this energy, the way your posture changes, your attitude toward yourself and even life shifts. This is a gateway to knowing your true nature more intimately than you have ever dared.

All that we yearn to be or suspect we are capable of gets hidden away, disguised by the limitations and self-criticism we imagine this terrible flaw represents. Unconsciously we ask the rejected part of our body to carry the illusion that we are less than we are truly capable of being. If you will ask yourself how your life might change if you love this part of your body instead, if you listen to what it can teach you, your life will change. All

the energy invested in this charade will be freed for you to use in behalf of self-love and self-confidence. Then, every time you find yourself thinking the old thoughts, assuming the old attitudes about your flaw, accept this as an invitation to embodied love—a signal from your essential self that you are using this diversion to avoid your destiny. Respect the reminder to love yourself and step into life, not away from it.

Discovering that what you thought was a weakness is really an unexplored spiritual strength is profoundly freeing. There is an intuitive wisdom expressed by our body that is by its very existence healing because it turns us toward our truth. Listening to the rejected part of your body can be baffling at first. The insights and messages you receive come unbidden and often defy logical explanation. Yet you will feel the truth of each insight in your bones. The same thing will occur when you listen to what a symptom can teach you, or a spontaneous movement, or even a hunch.

In my book, "Women's Intuition: Unlocking the Wisdom of the Body," I give many examples of this. Evangeline hated her heavy thighs and large belly. Her sense of despair each time she looked in the mirror cast a pall over each day. Then Evangeline agreed to become nothing but this hated energy and let the energy move her as she reflected upon how she felt. What she discovered turned her life around. Embedded deep within her unconscious was her shame about her Polish ancestry. When she talked to her belly she learned she was overeating to avoid this pain. It was only with the tough work of learning to love her belly and

thighs that she began to appreciate the strength of her thighs and how they contribute to the fine athlete she has become. Today she speaks reverently about all the years she spent trying so hard to deny who she truly is and how much it means to her to love the body that ancestry has given her. What would it mean to you to believe, really believe, that your body expresses the wisdom hidden in your dreams, harbors your deepest desires and holds sacred your most profound yearnings always?

Who am I, really?, we ask. What is this life all about? Often, suppressed tears or an aching heart accompany the questions. Your body, your matter, which cannot lie, is constantly re-enacting the authentic undisguised conditions of your yearning to know your essential self. Your soul directs you toward answers and a deepening of consciousness about your personal relationship to the truths of your being. Stand perfectly still, go inward and ask, What truly matters most to me? For you see, when you do not ask this of yourself then that which matters most to you becomes the matter with you. So go ahead. Ask. Dare to listen to your answer. Learn to trust the wisdom and the rippling intuitions from your body. Fall in love with your own sweet matter. Resacralize your body, have a love affair with your soul. •

*Paula Reeves, Ph.D., is a workshop leader in the fields of psychology and psychoneuroimmunology, the study of the biochemical relationship between the mind and the body. She also is a therapist in private practice. She has given presentations to, among others, the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine.*

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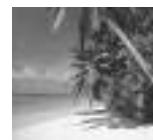
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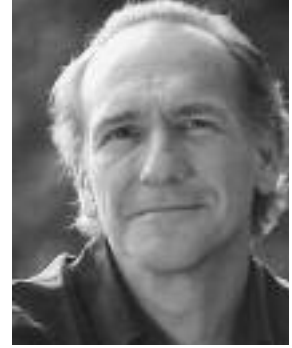
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# Love, the Greater God

RICHARD MOSS

**F**ear is a universal human phenomena; one we experience in mind, heart, and body. Fear in the mind takes the form of doubt: doubt of your capacity to meet the needs of a situation, doubt about what to put your trust in, and so forth. At the level of the heart, fear takes the form of anger and leads to withdrawal from relationships. We all experience self-protective anger. We express it passively, by withholding love and by ignoring the needs of others; and actively, through aggression, attack, and judgment of ourselves and others. The most universally-accepted notion of fear is fear at the level of the body, which has to do with fear of death, suffering, and pain. Basically, it's the sense that you are not in control of your body, that your body has betrayed you. There's also an element of fear in the aging process for many people, not only the loss of physical vitality, but the loss of mental capacity. The fear of dementia is great in our culture. Fear at the level of the body takes the form of dread. Dread is a paralyzing sense that the feeling will overwhelm you, that this feeling will dissolve your sense of self.

Fear is the deepest of our emotions, the most fundamental of our emotions. It's the most important emotion for us to consciously engage because it has so much power to rob us of our humanity: to make us cruel, to dehumanize us, to disengage us from a sense of participation with life. When fear takes hold of us at a deep level, we feel completely separated and isolated.

Although understanding fear intellectually helps us to approach fear, to truly understand fear, you have to face fear daily. Not just stand against it, but become its disciple and let it teach you about who you really are. That's where courage comes in. You have to relate directly with fear.

Many years ago, to tell an anecdote from my life, I made a decision to enter a room in my house, to pray ceaselessly, and to engage fear in every way that I could remember it, think of it, or anticipate it. I did this meditation for the better part of three days and at the end of it, I stepped out on my porch at my house, and suddenly, I had a vision of fear. I realized that fear is one of the greatest of all the gods. Fear is a god you can never defeat if you attempt to fight fear on fear's level. So, I looked at fear and got down on my knees. I put my forehead to the deck floor, and I bowed before fear, like you bow before a great master, and I said, "Fear, you are a great god, I know that I can never defeat you, but I know that there is another god that is greater to whom I give myself." While I didn't truly understand the implications of what I was doing or what it would mean, I did understand in some way that the principle of love was a greater god.

At that point, though I hadn't fully integrated the understanding, I made the decision to become intimate with fear, to look at fear directly, because in a loving universe, fear is just another relationship—another place to know. Of course, fear is, at times, an overwhelmingly difficult emotion, but it is not something that has to divide you from yourself, from a sense of your own deepest I am. To evolve in consciousness is to less and less be a victim of fear. At that point, I was only beginning to develop some mastery, but I had received an understanding of love as the foundation principle of our universe, not so much as human sentiment, but of connection and relationship between all things. Love is a greater god than fear, and therefore, if one stands with love, one can turn toward fear. In a loving universe, the principle that guides everything is

Relationships. In a universe in which fear is the principal god, we seek to avoid fear by sedating or diminishing ourselves. We close off relationships to things that frighten or disturb us deeply, but inevitably, they catch up to us to some extent. In a loving universe, we meet fear when fear is there. We don't go looking to conquer fear. I never presume I'm going to defeat fear, I just presume relationship, I turn toward fear. I open myself, I become alert, I sense how fear is arising in my body, in the activity of my mind. I try to relax into the fear. At times, it feels bigger than my center, but my center is bigger than the fear, because the center abides in the place I call love, the place where the universe is one great interconnected intelligence. Fear wants us to believe that we are separate, exclusively private psychic entities, but this is only a partial truth. We are also and primarily an expression of that vast wholeness.

When we are afraid, our fears seem so concrete and we believe that this frightened person is who we really are. In contrast, when we reach out to take the hand of love, the movement toward our real self seems much less concrete. That is a movement in faith. There isn't any obvious evidence until, as faith grows, fear becomes less a controlling force in our lives and joy becomes a more natural force in our lives. When you reach toward this deeper mystery called love or wholeness or source or Self, as the root from which all experience emerges, the movement can't be measured scientifically. It's only rational in the sense that the consequences of not having that relationship is to live continuously as the victim of fear, and therefore, to

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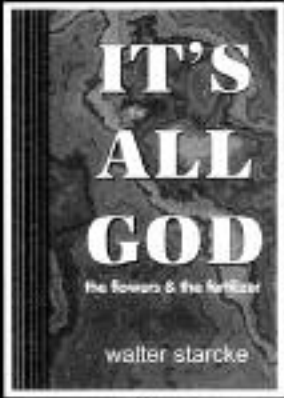
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always run from fear toward some imagined security or some imagined happiness.

Even while holding the hand of love, willpower is at times needed to deal with fear. I saw Steven Spielberg's film "Saving Private Ryan" and the recreation of the storming of the Normandy beaches. I thought about these men training for weeks, with bravado, building up this collective sense of will and determination, giving meaning to the sacrifice that they were going to make. But imagine being on those boats traveling in darkness, then getting onto the landing craft and coming toward those beaches. There's no way to escape fear in a situation like that. The courage to face those feelings takes willpower. It takes the ability to break the cycle of victimhood, of helplessness. It takes the capacity to say, "Maybe I will die, I have no power to stop that, I've surrendered to my choice to be here, to face what I have to face without the knowledge that I will be successful or that I will survive."

That kind of willpower comes from our sense of meaning. Real courage comes from a sense of participating in something larger than myself. Will is generated by realizing that I'm not alone, I, with others, stand for human rights, or I, with others, stand up to fight against injustice. It comes from our deepest instincts about what is truth; that relationship and connection is truer than the domination or the diminishing of others. It comes from answering the questions, who am I? what am I? why am I here in this world? The fundamental act of a free person is the ability to ask these kind of questions, to meditate, to make self-inquiry. Spiritual scriptures teach about compassion,

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## Attitudes for Achieving Inner Peace

D O N A L D W A L T E R S

A restful heart is essential to peace of mind. Merely to affirm restfulness, however, is like affirming fullness in a milk pail riddled with holes. We must take practical steps to achieve restfulness.

The yoga teachings list ten attitudes for achieving peace of mind. Five of them are proscriptive; the other five, prescriptive: the “don’ts,” or yamas as they are called in Sanskrit, and the “do’s,” or niyamas, of the spiritual path. The importance of these attitudes is that they prevent our energy from “leaking” out. This they accomplish first by plugging the holes in the pail, and next by helping us to accumulate the “milk” of inner peace.

The fact that these attitudes number ten invites comparison with the Ten Commandments of Moses. There is, however, a difference. For the yamas and niyamas are not commandments so much as recommendations. Their emphasis is not on what you will suffer if you break them, but on what your benefits will be from following them. They are directions of development. One can continue to perfect them indefinitely, until one attains spiritual perfection.

### THE YAMAS AHIMSA

The first rule of yama (control) was popularized by Mahatma Gandhi. It is ahimsa (non-violence). The reason for this negative emphasis (it could have been translated as “benevolence”) is that once a person succeeds

in banishing from his heart the impulse to strike out at others, or to hurt them in any way (including seeking personal benefit at their expense), benevolence stands self-revealed as a natural quality of the heart.

The desire to hurt another living being in any way—or even to harm our environment, which too, in varying degrees, is alive and conscious—alienates us from our soul-reality, and affirms the delusion of ego.

The important thing in all the attitudes of yama and niyama is not so much what we do outwardly, as our inner attitudes of the heart. It is not possible to live harmlessly, for example, in this world of relativities. Some harm is done, inevitably, by merely living. Every outing in the car inadvertently causes the death of numerous insects. Nature herself decrees the survival of life by the death of other life. It is a tiger’s nature to kill: Can its method of survival, then, be considered sinful? Murder is a sin for human beings for the primary reason that it degrades us, at our level of evolution, to kill other human beings.

Of course, there are times, such as in a defensive war, where killing is necessary. In every case, the essential rule of ahimsa, and that which removes it from relativity’s uncertainties, is that the spiritual seeker maintain at all times a non-violent attitude.

By wishing harm to no living creature, even if it becomes necessary to kill it, we find welling up within ourselves a consciousness of relaxed acceptance of others and of life, no matter how we ourselves are treated. When we perfect the quality of non-violence, hostility ceases in our presence.

### TRUTHFULNESS

There is in this quality a subtle as well as a gross application. For fact and truth are not always synonymous. A statement may be factual without bearing any relationship to higher truths. A person in the hospital, for example, may look quite as ill as he feels, but if you tell him, “You look terrible!” your statement might

actually worsen his condition. If, on the other hand, visualizing him in good health, you declare with deep conviction, "You look great!" your words may invigorate or even heal him.

Here is a guideline to practicing truthfulness. Bear in mind that the truth is always beneficial, but that a statement of fact may be either beneficial or harmful. If there is a chance that a statement will do harm, it must not be considered a truth in the highest sense. If you cannot speak sincerely without the risk of inflicting harm, the best alternative is to remain silent.

Perfection in truthfulness develops mental power to such an extent that one's mere word becomes binding on objective events. One has merely to declare a thing so for it actually to become so.

#### NON-AVARICE

"Avarice" is not really the *mot juste*, implying as it does a desire for worldly gain (money, usually, or something of monetary value). The yama of non-avarice implies something much deeper.

What the spiritual seeker must renounce is the desire for anything that he does not acquire by merit. The implication is that if he does merit it, he needn't fear that he won't attract it. Even if he must work hard to attract it, he should remain relaxed as to the outcome, leaving the results wholly in God's hands. "What comes of itself, let it come" is his motto. This is a prescription for peace of mind even during intense activity.

Things are not often achieved effortlessly. The attitude of non-avarice, then, is not to stop striving, but even in the process of striving to renounce attachment to the results.

The quality of non-avarice, developed to perfection, generates a subtle magnetism that enables a person to attract things to himself effortlessly. He is never anxious, then, that his needs, whatever they may be, won't be supplied. They will be, infallibly.

#### NON-ACCEPTANCE

A natural corollary to the yama of non-avarice is non-acceptance, which when brought to perfection, bestows the power to remember one's past incarnations. To accomplish this, we must withdraw our consciousness and energy from the body and enter a state of superconsciousness. It is only when the soul is not identified with its present body that it remembers its previous identities.

Non-acceptance, then, pairs naturally with non-avarice. Non-avarice signifies non-attachment to what is not our own; non-acceptance signifies non-attachment to what we would normally consider to be our own. The point is that nothing, truly, belongs to us. Everything—our bodies, our actions, our very thoughts—is the Lord's.

#### BRAHMACHARYA

The last yama is brahmacharya—self-control, or, more literally, "flowing with Brahma (the Supreme Spirit)." Usually, this teaching is applied to the practice of sexual abstinence. It has also, however, a broader application. For brahmacharya means control of every natural appetite, of which sexual desire is the strongest but not the only one.

The ideal behind this teaching is to live identified with the Spirit, realizing ourselves as the soul living through the body, and no longer as



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the ego centered in body-consciousness. We should live in such a way as to master our appetites, and not allow ourselves to be mastered by them. The important thing is to achieve self-control, first by moderation, directing our efforts only gradually toward perfect self-control.

The power that comes through perfect control of all our natural appetites is an accession of boundless energy. For our energy and, indeed, all that we can express of creativity and enthusiasm flow the more strongly, the more we can tap the wellsprings of life within ourselves.

**THE NIYAMAS**

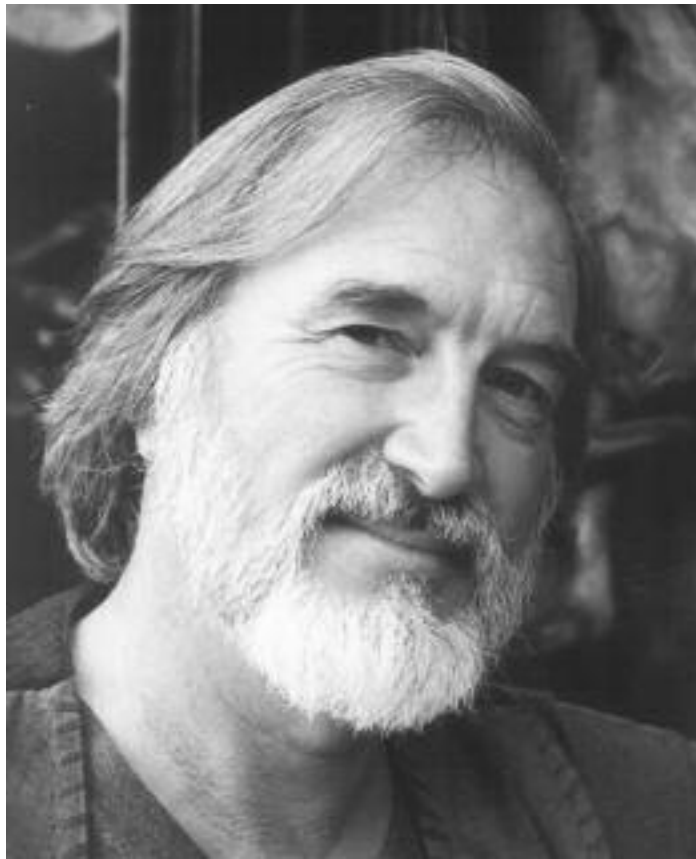
The niyamas, or "do's," are cleanliness, contentment, austerity, introspection (self-study, or self-awareness), and devotion to the Supreme Lord. Interestingly, there is a complementary relationship between the five niyamas and their opposite yamas. Contentment, for example, is complemented by non-avarice. Introspection (self-study) has a natural correlation to non-acceptance. Austerity ties in with brahmacharya; cleanliness, with ahimsa; and devotion to the Supreme Lord with truthfulness.

**CLEANLINESS**

Cleanliness applies to purity of the heart far more than to bodily cleanliness, though of course it includes the latter. It pairs naturally with ahimsa (non-violence), for only by renouncing the desire to do violence in any way to others do we develop that sweet innocence which is the surest sign of a heart inwardly pure and at peace. From cleanliness arises a disinterest in one's own body, and a loss of the need for contact with others. The need for

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# Healing Your Rift with God

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL SIBCY  
BY MELISSA WEST

**C**leaning a cow-fouled spring taught Paul Sibcy, author of “Healing Your Rift with God: A Guide to Spiritual Renewal and Ultimate Healing,” about the spiritual life. As a youth, every hot August Paul had to dig out the spring on his family’s farm, “wrangling out rocks and shoveling mud from the spring’s mouth so that clear water sprang forth again, forming a cool and inviting, rock-fringed pool from which (the cows) could drink their fill.”

Sibcy, who grew up to co-found a holistic health clinic, resented having to dig out the spring. He hated the cows for destroying their own paradise by wallowing in the spring and trudging through it on the way out to pasture.

Decades later, Sibcy remembered “spring cleaning” as a powerful metaphor for his life’s calling as a holistic counselor and meditation teacher. “We

humans have a clear, pure spring in the center of our beings, a spring of spirit that is our reason for being here,” he writes in “Healing Your Rift with God.” “We somehow lose it and befoul it just as those cows did, mindlessly in pursuit of our daily commerce...Taught from infancy that we must accomplish, earn, and ‘become somebody,’ we are essentially herded away from our inner spirit, which seems to have no place in life. We become ‘somebody’ and lose our souls.”

Sibcy writes from hard-won experience. Describing himself as a “creature in pain who kept moving,” he bottomed out one lonely winter in Ogden, Utah. A profound spiritual awakening there changed his life and livelihood, leading Sibcy to devote himself to clearing his own inner spring and helping others do the same. “Little did I suspect as a boy that I would be cleaning out that spring for the rest of my life, eter-

nally helping myself and others to roll away the stones from this pure fount of life so we might drink again the waters of our soul and be restored.”

Sibcy has found in his work over the years that all of us, faithful seekers or otherwise, have some area of confusion, hurt, or denial around our relationship with God which keeps us from full expression of our spirituality. This wound, or “rift with God,” is the focus of “Healing Your Rift with God.”

*PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* caught up with Paul at his home California, where he is also a co-founder of Pathways to Self-Healing, a non-profit spiritual community offering classes and programs for God-realization, and an adjunct faculty member at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology.

***PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION: Paul, what do you mean by a rift with God?***

PAUL SIBCY: A rift is that illusion of not being connected with the Self, not feeling a connection with the universe. That’s where our pain and suffering come from: when my mind gets busy trying to save me or fix me. All of that dissolves when I come back to myself and my connection with the Earth and the spirit of life.

***TRANSFORMATION: What if someone said, “I don’t believe in God in the first place, so what is there to heal?”***

SIBCY: They don’t have to believe in G-O-D; that’s not important at all. What is important is being in sync with life and spirit. I’ve known very spiritual people who don’t believe in God. Many of us think of God as the big daddy in the sky who’s tracking good and bad, a punishing, vicious childhood god. Well, I don’t believe in that god, either.

***TRANSFORMATION: How would you describe the god you do believe in?***

SIBCY: I call it life itself, that which lives and moves and breathes through me. It is this organic, unfolding unity of all being that is God. By quieting the mind and relaxing into the body, we find both ourselves and God, the consciousness and intelligence that’s beneath all existence.

***TRANSFORMATION: What causes a rift with God, this intelligence beneath all existence?***

SIBCY: In my own spiritual recovery, and in working with others, I found five types of spiritual wounds that call for healing: recovery from religion, recovery from rebellion against religion, recovery

from God-betrayal, recovery from scientific materialism, and recovery from nothingness.

The first group includes churchgoers who are very spiritual in nature, but have been wounded by religion. These people have been taught that they are unforgiven by a harsh god; they are wracked with guilt and shame, and yet still earnestly believe. I find that a real spiritual rift.

The second group, who are recovering from rebellion against religion, were taught in youth about the big punishing daddy in the sky. They then feel so unredeemable that they rebel against God. If we feel that God is who we are, then we’re obviously in rebellion against ourselves, and then the old adage that a house divided against itself cannot stand becomes very true.

Then there are those recovering from God betrayal. A child’s consciousness is so clear, when it perceives mommy and daddy or anybody else, it is perceiving God. If something happens that teaches a child that the universe isn’t friendly, then they find themselves feeling betrayed by God. For example, someone I know was molested by a teacher in first grade. She feels really betrayed by God. It doesn’t have to be that dramatic; it can be just not having your prayers answered or losing your dog.

Many of us are recovering from scientific materialism. Our educational institutions are all based on scientific materialism. The more we’re educated in that, the less we have a connection with the divine. Recovering from scientific materialism involves learning that scientific methodology as developed in the last couple of centuries is a wonderful tool for dealing with the material world, but next to useless in dealing with God.

And finally, recovering from nothingness. We are so conditioned in our marketing culture to project our desires outward into the external world. We are constantly bombarded by advertising that says you have to conform to a certain standard to be okay. We have the problem of nothingness because there are no higher values in the culture. It’s only what’s cool and fun, the values of materialism and popularity.

***TRANSFORMATION: If a reader recognized themselves in one of these descriptions, how might they start recovery?***

SIBCY: Become aware of how your rift feels in

your body, when it came and what purpose it serves in your life. Then do all you can to become friends with that part of you; learn to be lovingly gentle with it. We have to arrest the tendency to change it. This seems contradictory, I know; we were all reared to “fix” ourselves, to “get better.” But “fixing” doesn’t work; the minute we try to fix the rift, we are simply reinforcing our belief that we are not okay just as we are. In spirit—the only reality that really matters—we are perfect manifestations of the one light. There is no problem with us. That’s the great mystery of spiritual healing: as a child on the farm I was occasionally called upon to midwife the birth of a baby calf. I soon learned that pulling and prodding only hindered the birth. The real work in birthing is done by nature. All I could really do was relax and reassure the mother, and facilitate in whatever way I could. Love was the main ingredient, I have come to believe.

So I recommend that you treat yourself the way I learned to treat those cows and calves—with love, awareness, and the confidence that you’ll know what to do when the time is right to heal your rift and have your own birth.

**TRANSFORMATION: *I’m reminded of your motto at your holistic health center, Integrated Healing Arts: “All healing is self-healing.”***

SIBCY: The highest healing is when people begin the process of healing themselves, stepping out of what I call the magic fix phase, hoping we can get fixed immediately. It’s the wounds that cannot be easily healed that bring us into ourselves. By working with that wound as a koan or a mystical phrase that we don’t quite understand, whether it’s a body symptom or an emotional symptom, it begins to offer up treasures.

Whenever we find ourselves with pain that won’t go away by all the means we try, then we begin this journey inward to ourselves, and from our center we find our interconnectedness with all of life. From that interconnectedness we begin to discover our real relationship with God, and find the healing that comes with that.

**TRANSFORMATION: *What are some of the common obstacles to healing the rift with God?***

SIBCY: The most common is trying to be “good.” I used to teach writing and literature, and the first question students asked me was, “What do you

want?” I would answer, “I want you to learn how to think.” They didn’t like my response. They wanted a formula for pleasing me so they could get an A.

It’s the same problem that we have on the spiritual path. We try to follow the rules and be self-righteously good, which is just another form of separation from the divine. We’re not authentically engaging myself in the process; we’re really trying to strike a deal. We’re trying to do what we’ve been taught in our culture, to find out what the teacher wants, and give it to them. That isn’t an education, nor is it healing a rift with God.

Another obstacle is “spiritual bypass,” trying to find the fastest way to fix ourselves. There’s a Zen Buddhist story about the American asking the Zen master how long it will take to become enlightened and being told seven years or so. The American says, “I am a university graduate, I’m very good at this, I can work day and night.” The master replies, “Okay. For you, 50 years.” We want to get there fast by bypassing our problems and difficult feelings.

One of the most important obstacles is surrender: really letting go and trusting. All of us are trained to be responsible: hold down this job, make this amount of money, pay the insurance policies, plan for retirement, all of which takes our attention out into the world and away from ourselves. On a spiritual path, sooner or later, we have to have faith and trust that if we let go, that we’re going to be taken care of. That’s scary, because we have been trained in scientific materialism to think that the brain is our only friend and guide. As long as we rely totally on our own brain we do not surrender, or encounter the fruits of surrender.

**TRANSFORMATION: *What are the fruits of surrender?***

SIBCY: Well, I’ll speak from my own experience. I go through this every day because my mind gets really busy trying to control my life. Then I have to let go. When I release the fear I feel joy and a sense of adventure, of being carried benevolently along my path of life to my best and highest good. Our ego puts its faith in things rather than God and says, “I’m feeling insecure. Hmmm, let me add up my bank statements and look at my projections for the next 30 years and see if my insurance is paid up. Phew, now I’m okay.” And, of course, we’re not



okay in that way: somebody close to us suddenly dies, we get sick, or the company we've put our faith in goes down the tubes. When we let go of trying to control our lives, a deep sense of security arises, the sense of being a rightful person on a rightful path, that there's a power greater than ourselves that's guiding us and loving us.

That's what I call healing the rift. I do that just about every day. That's my spiritual practice, becoming aware of how I'm not surrendered, and letting go.

**TRANSFORMATION:** *What you seem to be saying, both in this interview and in Healing Your Rift with God, is that the rift with God goes hand in hand with rifts with our deeper, core selves. Is this so?*

SIBCY: Yes. I don't see how it could be otherwise, because my experience of life is we can't be separate from the whole. So, in short, any disconnection I have with my own heart and soul disconnects me from the whole. Any separation, anywhere, is separation from God.

**TRANSFORMATION:** *And working from that, it means that whenever we reconnect with our deepest selves, we are also reconnecting with spirit and vice versa.*

SIBCY: Yes. I find that when I'm suffering, if I can feel my wound and go into it deeply enough, then I go through it and reconnect with spirit. The other way I deal with my suffering is to just go directly to spirit, and when I reconnect with spirit in the big tent, then I find that when I turn back to my wound or hurt, it now has a larger context, and I have a different way of looking at it. The hurt may still be there, but I'm not all hurt; there's a bigger place.

**TRANSFORMATION:** *Given that healing the rift with God is a life-long journey, I'm curious what the growing edge is in your own healing process.*

SIBCY: I'm still learning how to be a single person in all senses of the word after being divorced for three years. I've been partnered with a woman during most of my "spiritually awake" life. Before my divorce I had no practical experience about the different spiritual doors available when one is single. In this three years I've experienced spiritual growth I couldn't have had in relationship. There was a way in partnership that I couldn't help but depend on that other person and their love. Now I have to depend on God, and so much of the love that went to a partner now goes to God. And so much of the love from God comes directly to me, rather than

going through retail, as I like to say.

**TRANSFORMATION:** *You're getting it wholesale! Direct from the manufacturer!*

SIBCY: Exactly! It's like going wholesale rather than retail for love and connection. Before, no matter how intense my spiritual practice, I relied on my partner for many of the love needs that I must now share with God. I had no idea how wonderful and euphoric that can be! And how painful, sorrowful, and lonely as well. I have found this new love experience with God very intense, much more so than when I was partnered. No one who has truly surrendered to God has any choice but to follow God's will, and that is where I am working on the rift just now: total, absolute surrender. My own father's suicide gave me a wound in terms of not trusting or having faith that people will be there, so being alone in this time in my life is really the cutting edge, I guess, and it's wonderful.

**TRANSFORMATION:** *Looking back over your whole journey, Paul, what's the most important thing you've learned?*

SIBCY: That I'm loved. When you're "in" love, you're in God, and God is within you. Once you know that you don't have to earn love or your place in the world, then all you really need to do is your job: What am I here for? It's a process I go through a lot, turning my life over to God first thing in the morning and saying, "Well, God, this is your life, so what would you like to do with it today?" There's a surrender and a peace because I know that the answer can only come from deep within myself. If there's something in me that says, "Oh, I can't do that," or I'm scared, then I know that I've got a rift to work with. So just knowing that I'm loved is the most important thing.

**TRANSFORMATION:** *What, in closing, would you most like to say to the readers of PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION?*

SIBCY: Begin the journey where you are, wherever you are suffering. Look into your own life, and begin investigating that suffering. Let your suffering lead you to wholeness. Not by giving in to the suffering and losing yourself in it, but treating it like a koan: what's this about? what's the cause of this suffering? And follow it, follow the path that leads you toward healing. Remember that you are loved and you're one with the whole; it is only illusion that we're separate and isolated. Just follow that path to healing. That's what my heart says. •



# Risking it All to Really Live

O R I A H M O U N T A I N D R E A M E R

*It doesn't interest me how old you are. I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool, for love, for your dream, for the adventure of being alive.*

**T**ell me about the times you have played the fool, risking it all to follow the flame of desire. I can ask and listen without judgment, for I too have been the fool.

I fell in love with a man who looked like everything I had ever imagined I wanted: tall with thick, dark hair and soft, brown, intelligent eyes, his open face and muscled body shining with strong, gentle masculinity. And how he made me laugh, at a time when I desperately needed the laughter. My days were filled with sitting at the bedside of a friend who was in a coma on the brink of death, and he filled my nights with tender lovemaking, wrapping his arms around me when I awoke crying out and reaching to pull my friend back

from the precipice in my dreams. All my usual cautions about how fast and how far to open my heart and my life to any man evaporated in the heat of desire that reached for him, both hands open, whispering, "Live." I held nothing back. I risked it all. I let myself love and be loved, deeply.

And eight months later I stood with empty arms, an ache like a shard of glass in the center of my chest, my bank account depleted, my pride shattered. I was the fool.

The hard part of feeling the fool is a little different for each of us. How would you finish the sentence "The worst thing anyone could say about me is..."? For me, the worst thing anyone could say is that I

have been stupid, easily duped, not savvy enough or quick enough to see things clearly. And I was: stupid enough to give him money, to talk of marriage and having more children, to let him move into my home close to my sons. It makes me cringe to admit it. It doesn't matter how it happened or why I didn't see the warning signs. The end, even though it was I who declared it, left me numb. But I was still here, breathing, though embarrassed and exposed. I had shown the depth of my hunger. I was revealed to the world as a woman of deep, untidy passions that could override my usual ability to be an astute judge of character and to make carefully thought-out decisions. I was the fool.

And I would do it all again.

I would not trade one moment of the loving for the assurance of a predictable outcome or protection of my pride. For I learned to discern between heat and the warmth of real intimacy, between power and passion, between intensity and love. I discovered the wholeness of my longing for a mate—the need for a friend, brother, and partner where I had sought only a lover.

I learned that being the fool will not kill me. Why, then, do we fear it so much?

Sitting on the subway one afternoon, I hear someone weeping and wailing softly, "Help me. Won't someone please help me?" It takes me a moment to locate the source of the sound—a tall woman leaning against one of the doors, tears streaming down her face. Everyone else on the train sits staring straight ahead. I approach the woman, lay my hand gently on her arm, and ask if there is anything I can do. Later, when I have gotten her the assistance she needs, fellow passengers crowd around me on the platform asking questions, anxious to know if she will be okay. I am surprised. It isn't that they didn't care. They were afraid—afraid of getting involved in something they could not control, something unpredictable that might call attention to or embarrass them. What if the woman had started screaming at me, or lashed out in some way when I had offered help? What if she had needed instant medical attention I could not provide, or someone to take her home and stay with her?

On this particular day I was not afraid. I was willing to do what I could, knowing what my limits

were. My desire to respond to the world around me, to simply do what I am able to do with what is right in front of me, was, for a moment, larger than my fear of making a mistake, of being the fool. Often this is not the case.

I don't want to know how old you are. Your age tells me how long you have lasted but not what you have made of the precious time you have been given. Lasting, enduring, is not enough. Tell me of the times you have taken a risk, and how you greet your fear. Do you bully or shame, cajole or argue reasonably, or simply seek numbness in overwork or alcohol or the chaos of emotional drama?

Fear is part of being alive. Sometimes, when we are in a dangerous situation, fear can be life-preserving. It is a natural response to the anticipation of pain and comes from the realization that if we live and love fully, we will feel the losses that are inevitably part of the constant cycle of change. There is a New Age workshop ad that offers a money-back promise to eliminate all fear in your life forever. I asked someone who had attended the workshop if you really could get a refund if you told the facilitators that you had experienced fear after the seminar. She told me that the participants had been warned that they might experience the "illusion of fear" after they took the course, but that it could not be real fear.

I do not think denial of fear will give us freedom from it.

Sitting in the marriage counselor's office with my husband, I clasp my hands together and squeeze hard. I have told him I am leaving. He sits, shoulders rounded as if by a great weight, silently begging me to stay. The counselor asks if I would be willing to postpone my decision to leave for three months. In the silence that follows, each moment stretches to infinity, every sense is sharpened. I can smell the leather of the sofa and my own sweat, hear the three of us breathing and the clock ticking softly on the table. I see my mouth open, lips dry, and hear the single syllable leave my mouth and echo around the room, bouncing off an emptiness inside my chest. This is what fear is like. "No."

Something inside me explodes in a great silence that eats all sound as the word settles over us like ash after the fire of devastation. What surprises me



The hard part of feeling the fool is a little different for each of us. How would you finish the sentence “The worst thing anyone could say about me is...”? For me, the worst thing anyone could say is that I have been stupid, easily duped, not savvy enough or quick enough to see things clearly.

And I was: stupid enough to give him money...

most in the moments that follow is that the world continues. We are still there, in the room, the walls standing, the sound of the traffic beginning to drift back through the terrible silence, the next breath being taken in the undeniable pull of life continuing. I have less than a thousand dollars. I need a job, an apartment, and good, affordable day care, and I need it all fast. The unknown yawns before me. I know only that I am leaving, that I will not leave my sons, nor will I take them away from their father. I do not know if the aloneness will be bearable, if I will fall flat on my face.

But the longing is larger than the fear, the desire more fierce than the pain. My second husband is a good man; we did not have a bad life. It was simply not *my* life. I had to leave the life I had built and go forward to meet the life for which I longed.

Each time I follow my deepest desires, fear is there wringing her hands, cautioning me with her litanies of what-ifs. I do not try to counter with reasonable arguments about acceptable risks. I no longer try to shame myself into action with admonishments to stop being the wimp, nor do I pretend to be unafraid. I simply move in the direction I have chosen to go, taking care to do the things I know will help me keep the fear at a level that allows me to continue to feel it and yet still keep moving. I put myself to bed early, eat well, sit with friends, take long walks by the lake. I have learned that doing things the hardest way provides no currency to be traded for greater future rewards.

Several years ago I ran a women’s retreat where each woman was given an opportunity, in ceremony, to surrender seven things she held as precious in her life, seven ways of seeing herself or being seen by others.

The intent of this ceremony was not to devalue those things we treasure. Many of the things surrendered have value: being a good mother, a loving friend, a diligent worker, a talented artist. But often we have inherited someone else’s view of who we are or should be. And sometimes, although we may ourselves hold these values, their dominance in our lives in a particular form does not allow us to live out other aspects of what we love and who we are. The deepest desires of the soul are rarely concerned with the practical details of mortgage payments, pension plans, prior commitments, past honors, or others’ opinions.

Minutes before this ceremony, one woman asked me if I could reassure her that she would not leave her marriage if she chose to surrender her attachment to material wealth and to being seen as the good and patient wife. “No,” I told her. “There is no such guarantee. If there were, there would be no point to doing the ceremony. I cannot tell you in advance what your choice will be, whether you will look at your husband and your marriage and know that it is a place you truly want to be. Your attachment to money and being the good wife may be all that’s keeping you there.”

The other women in the room sat uneasily in the silence. “Then why do this at all?” another woman asked. “Why would we risk the unknown changes that this knowledge could bring into our lives?”

I paused and considered it for myself. “For freedom,” I said. “I risk it for the freedom, to see what is true, what I really want in the deepest part of myself. I can make whatever choices I want in my life, and I will live with the consequences of those choices. But if I want to live a life close to my deepest desires, I have to risk knowing who I real-

We are not offered guarantees. What we are offered is knowledge of life and ourselves, and if we are awake, glimpses of the wisdom held in the story our life is telling the world.

ly am and have always been. Knowing this, then I can choose.”

You could taste the fear in the room.

The truth is that some days I feel I am ready for freedom and other days I am so tired I don't want the responsibility it brings into my life. I want a rest from choosing, from trying to increase my ability to choose wisely. And then, in a moment of grace, I am given a certainty: if I never did one more meditation, ceremony, workshop, therapy session, course, or cleansing diet, never attended one more meeting or participated in one more community cause, never wrote another line... it would be okay. It would truly be okay. For a moment, as I fully feel this revelation, I am free to move toward what I love.

Years ago, a student with chronic fatigue syndrome told me, “I am afraid that if I stop, if I slow down and rest, I'll never amount to anything.”

I smiled. “What if I told you that everything you are ever going to amount to, you are right now?”

I knew what she feared. I have done it a thousand times—confused work with accomplishment, frenetic activity with movement, growth, and learning. We are afraid that we will not be enough. All of our deepest desires are our soul's way of calling us back to simply being all of who we are.

Sometimes, when I see others follow their desires, I am surprised to find myself not only unsupportive but angry, threatened. If I have convinced myself that lack of money and the needs of those dependent upon me are the reasons why I cannot risk doing work that is more consistent with my soul's desires, the woman or man who makes such a change and finds ways to meet obligations similar to mine, without financial resources beyond mine, challenges my certainty that I have no choice. Ironically, I find myself, at moments, clinging to a belief in my own powerlessness, a belief that will let me off the hook of responding to my soul's desire. Those who chose a different response threaten the

seamlessness of my self-deception.

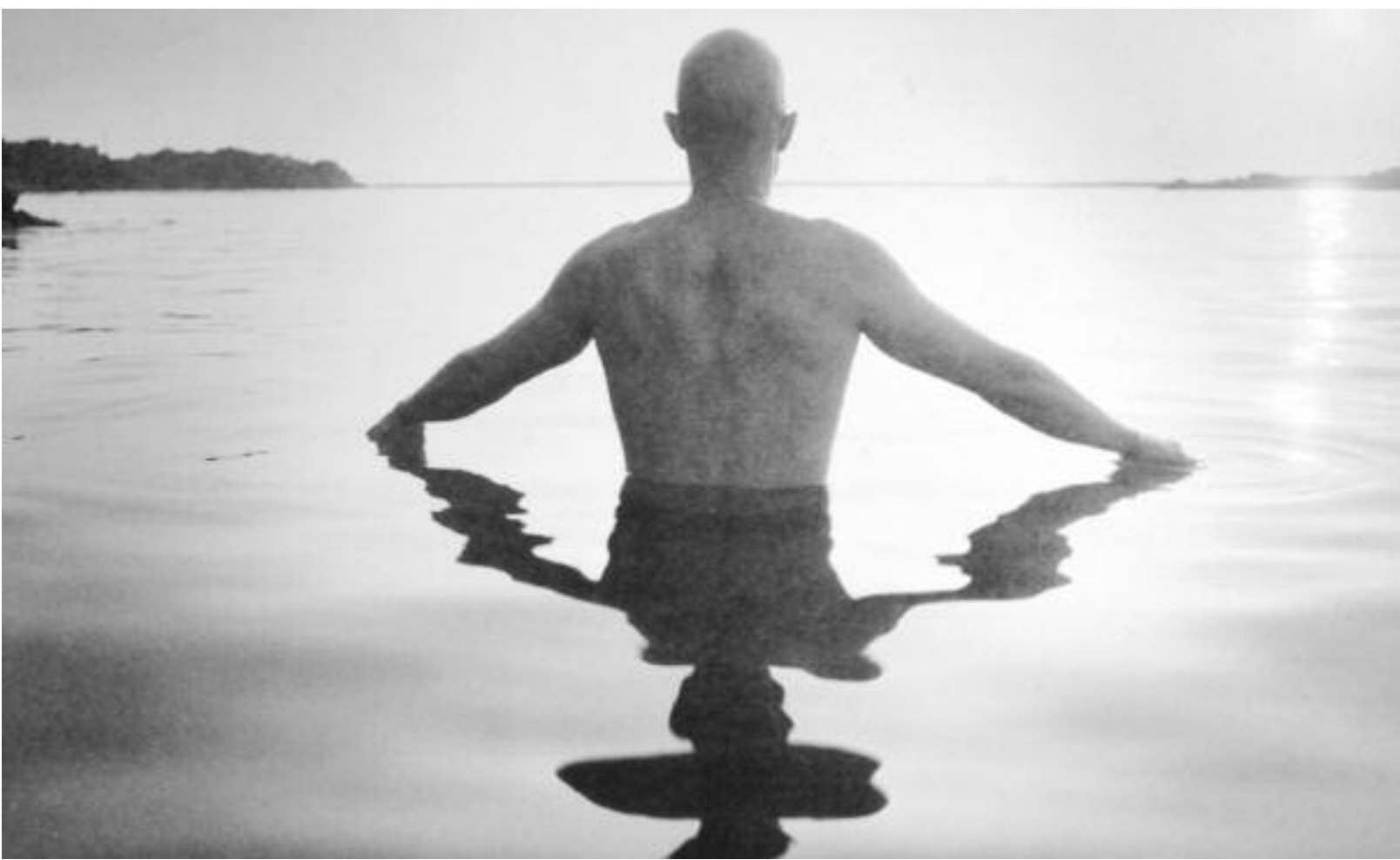
Desire seeks to push the edge in the places where we have drawn a line in the sand that says, “This is where I will not go, this is what I will not risk.” And what is easy for one may be hard for another. Wherever we have drawn the line, the risk of crossing it feels very real. We risk failing to fulfill our desires, being exposed for our deepest yearnings. We risk mistaking one desire for another, only to arrive at fulfillment held in the arms of disappointment. Certain that we ache for time apart, we may walk away from another only to find our yearning unmet in aloneness. Reaching for the other with whom we can share life, we may plunge into a relationship that brings us face-to-face with a loneliness we have never known in solitude. To move toward our desire we have to allow ourselves to be the fool, the one who does not know, who starts again and again at the beginning.

We are not offered guarantees. What we are offered is knowledge of life and ourselves, and if we are awake, glimpses of the wisdom held in the story our life is telling the world.

When I turn my face away from my longing because of my fear of being the fool, I must work to cover the cracks in my resolve, to abandon the heat of my desire. But my soul is too aligned with life to give up. Late at night when I am too weary to push away the longing, she comes looking for me, begging me to simply be with her and my fear of her. I can hear her, a small, insistent voice asking me to remember that desire lived brings the ecstasy of falling more deeply in love with my own life every day. And in the moment of this remembering, no risk seems too great. •

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# Healing Fear

M E L O D Y B E A T T I E

I never comprehended the amount of fear embedded in me until I truly began experiencing my feelings.

There are two kinds of fear. One is the impacted, hidden fear that keeps us locked away, unable to fully experience our lives because we are so entrenched in the fear we don't see it or feel it. We may call the feeling apathy, not caring, laziness, not being interested in something, not liking something, not liking ourselves, hating life, having disdain for something, not understanding it, not needing it, being removed from it. All these names allow us to hide behind our fears. We make fear a safe refuge that isn't really safe.

There's another kind of fear that strikes our consciousness like an attack from a bat out of hell. It's the sweaty palms, hyperventilating, heart-palpitating, mind-twisting, emotion contorting, *I can't feel my body, I don't know who I am, I don't have a feeling, there is no*

*path, I have no purpose, I've been abandoned, dear God, I wish I could call a spiritual and emotional 911 emergency number but my throat is so choked I couldn't talk anyway* kind of fear.

The world feels like it's closing in on you. And it is. But it's the world that you've created in your mind.

My friend Kyle calls it *anxietying*. When I tell him that's not a word, he just shrugs his shoulders and says, "It is now."

Whether you call it a panic attack, dread, anxiety, fear, terror, free-floating anxiety, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), or borderline hysteria, whether it's fear of the known or fear of the nameless and unknown, whether it's the unconscious, embedded, implanted, unfelt kind of fear or the kind that hits so hard and fast you can't help but know it's there, this remedy is to help you feel, release, and heal fear so you can move on with your life—and



Ignoring our fears is like ignoring weeds. They grow until they gain control of the area they're overtaking. Whether our anxiety and panic is connected to finances, love, work, ourselves, or our safety, feeling and facing our fear is what helps it go away.

move on joyfully.

Fear comes seemingly from out of the blue and disrupts the whole of your life. You can't think, can't feel, can't find the next step, and can't connect with your soul and heart. It disrupts the flow, gets in the way, makes you feel crazy and disconnected from yourself, from God, and from the world around you. Answers seem just out of reach. They all feel wrong anyway, because all you can feel is your fear.

Give fear a name. Give it a face. Honor its presence by allowing yourself to feel and acknowledge it for what it is—fear. Let it do its job. Let it teach you something about yourself, life, or your beliefs. Maybe it's not *your* fear. Maybe you've picked it up from someone close to you—now or in the past—who was frightened, anxious, and afraid, and you've taken on their beliefs. Identify and feel your fear, then let it fade out of your field and into the ethers.

Let yourself clear from your fear.

Acknowledging and feeling your anxiety and fear means half the battle is won.

Feel yourself beginning to come back into balance the minute you recognize what's going on. That's the start of healing fear. You are now only a few short steps from being back on track, in alignment, and living, acting, working, loving, thinking, and feeling from your heart.

Fear blocks our connection to the world around us and to the magical, mysterious universe in which we live. That block is an illusion. See! It's already beginning to dissipate. The block wasn't real.

Neither was your fear.

It's only a feeling, a tiny burst of relatively hideous energy that passes through our center. The problem is, we feed it from our minds and make it so big it consumes us.

"Sometimes I think fear isn't my enemy. *I'm* my enemy," says one woman. "Something happens, or doesn't happen, that wasn't in the plan in my head I had for my life. I grab onto this event like a dog

with a bone, and I'm off to the races. My mind starts racing, my heart starts racing, my blood pressure rises. I take a bit of a feeling or a minor event, and I create a full-blown tragedy.

"'Oh, my God,' I tell myself. 'I'm never going to get this done. God has abandoned me. I'm entirely on the wrong track. I'm going to fail. This is going to happen, then the next thing will happen. My whole life is a house of cards, and it's all going to fall down on itself and me and then what? Public flogging? At least.'"

We take a whiff of fear and create a full-blown tornado of negativity, dread, and sometimes horror.

"I know it's important to feel and embrace my fear and panic," says another woman. "I'm having a lot of trouble with anxiety in my life right now. But I have to be careful not to hide behind it, use it as an excuse to be unique or to prevent me from being present for other people or myself. I need to embrace my terror and anxiety, but not relish and savor it."

What about all the things that exist to which fear is a legitimate reaction? The tragedies, the failures, the heartbreaks, and those things that can go wrong? What about when fear is a legitimate response trying to make us flee a harmful situation?

You'll know. The answer's in your heart. But you won't know what to do next until you honor and acknowledge your fear.

Let me tell you a little story. My dear friend Virginia is an Aikido master. And she holds a black belt in judo. She has whirled with the dervishes in India, trained under gurus, and gone many places our society said a woman couldn't go. Now in her late sixties, she is suffering from heart problems and the remnants of two strokes. Limited by her physical condition, she only occasionally rolls around on the mats at the dojo. But her practice of the spiritual side of Aikido is strong, healthy, and vibrant.

One day, when I was driving her around helping her accomplish her errands, she asked what she

could do for me in return. I told her I learned something important each time I was with her, and that was enough. She insisted that she wanted to give something back to me.

At that time, I was struggling to make sense out of what I should do about a particular living situation and a relationship. I was in the dark, disconnected from my truth. I felt foggy, confused, abandoned, and afraid.

“Pray for me,” I said to Virginia. “Pray that God will be with me in the situations I’m going through. That’s what you can do for me. It’s what I need from you.”

“Oh, my dear one,” she responded. “I’ll pray for God to surround you with light and protection and truth. I’ll pray that you be protected from darkness, evil, and fear. But I don’t have to pray for God to be with you, because God already is with you wherever you go. I’ll pray that you know and remember that you’re safe and protected wherever you are.”

We’re safe wherever we go—even when we wander into the heart of our fears.

Sometimes, our fear is trying to tell us something. Don’t go there, it says, you’ll find a problem that’s unnecessary for you to experience. You don’t need it. Stay away.

There’s a layer of fear wrapped around each new experience. Sometimes the fear is thick and deep, but I can’t see, feel, or recognize it as fear. Instead, I try to move into the experience, but I can’t. It’s because I’m filled with fear. I’m trying to move through a wall, but the wall is really inside me. Feeling and releasing our fears on a regular basis—sometimes before taking each step—is how we move forward and into the next dimension in our lives.

Sometimes our fears are bogeymen we’ve created in our minds. The message is to breathe deeply, take shaky steps, walk through our fear and anxiety, and do it anyway. Sometimes we create more anxiety for ourselves by not facing our fears. We become afraid to look at the truth—whether it’s the truth about how much money we’ve got in our checkbook, the truth about when our bills are due, or a truth about what’s really going on in a significant relationship or on the job. We’re afraid to look. We hide our head in the sand. Anxiety mounts because we’re ignoring the truth or the task that’s pulling at us. And the fears just build.

Sometimes what we call anxiety is just a particular event or task in life pulling on us, telling us it wants some attention.

Sometimes the fear isn’t even ours. We’ve absorbed it from someone else—a parent, a child, or a friend. Fear is contagious. Even if the fear we’re feeling isn’t ours, we still need to acknowledge and release it.

The solution is simple. Face, feel, and heal fear. “I don’t want to feel fear. I hate it,” says one woman. “I want to feel peaceful.”

A sense of peace built upon a foundation of fear isn’t peace. Denying our feelings isn’t the route to joy. When we try to maintain peace by denying fear, we may walk around with an underlying sense of free-floating anxiety. When you feel your way through fear, the peace you find at the end will be real.

Opening to your feelings means opening to and feeling all your feelings, including the one we call fear. It’s only a place we visit. We don’t have to live there, don’t have to make it home, don’t have to stay there all that long.

“What’s the best all-around antidote for fear?” I asked Lucinda Bassett, the author of “From Panic to Power.” She looked thoughtful, then answered this way:

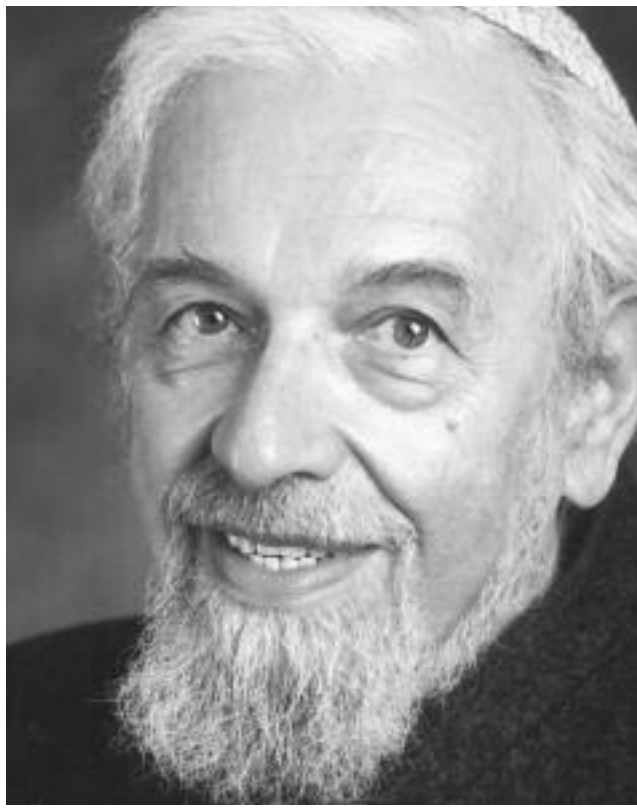
“There’s really no quick remedy for curing fear. Most people have spent a lifetime gathering, collecting, and storing up anxiety, panic, and fear. If there’s one thing I would tell anyone, anywhere, who was immersed in anxiety, panic, or fear, it would be this: know you’re creating it in your own mind.”

Feel your fear, then let it go. Breathe deeply. Walk around. Gather and hold a few objects that help you feel safe: a picture, a blanket, a treasure that reminds you of how safe and loved you are. Read a few verses from the Bible or the holy book that speaks to your soul. Remind yourself of what you know is true. You don’t have to frantically beg and plead for God to be with you. If you’re there, God is, too.

Ignoring our fears is like ignoring weeds. They grow until they gain control of the area they’re overtaking. Whether our anxiety and panic is connected to finances, love, work, ourselves, or our safety, feeling and facing our fear is what helps it go away. •

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# Fear, Courage & Sage-ing

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
RABBI ZALMAN M. SCHACHTER-SHALOMI  
BY MARY NURRIESTEARNS

**M**any of our readers are in the August and September of life. October is approaching as signs of aging are visible, older relatives are dying and thoughts are turning to old age. Therefore, for this issue's theme of courage, fear, and the unknown, we wanted to interview someone who could talk about the theme from a spiritual perspective and also as it relates to aging. Zalman M. Schachter-Shalomi, a 75-year-old rabbi, was a wonderful choice for the task. He is World Wisdom Chairman at Naropa Institute and President of Spiritual Eldering Institute. He is the co-author of "From Age-ing to Sage-ing" and a sage in his own right. His wisdom and spirituality shine throughout the interview as does his ease with the subject matter. I spoke with Rabbi by phone at his home in Boulder, Colorado, while he gazed out his window enjoying the wildlife.

**PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION:** *Let's start by discussing what fear is.*

**RABBI ZALMAN SCHACHTER-SHALOMI:** In Hebrew, there are three words that deal with the attitude/emo-

tion that fear is. They are Yir'ah (Yeer-ah), Aymah (A-mah), and Pachad (Pah-had). Let me begin with Pachad, because that's the simplest one. Pachad is the fear of danger. This fear warns us to "watch out, the sharp thing is coming." Like in Edgar Allen Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," Pachad is when something sharp descends on you and it gets worse and worse. We know to expect that we will be cut and we know exactly what will hurt us. Pachad is felt as terror and panic.

The second word, Aymah, translates into anxiety or angst. We know something is impending; what it is, we don't know. Where it comes from, we don't know. It is dark and it descends on you. You feel lost in it and know that you're totally vulnerable to something that could even cost you your life.

The third is a fear that is not really fear. Yir'ah is the sense that you are being seen, being scrutinized. Every nook and cranny of your personality is open for inspection. Yir'ah is what we experience in our relationship with God. Many people would like to have

## Elders are wisdom-keepers. What we downloaded in our youth as education, we have to upload into the civilizational pool when we are older, except that we don't upload it as information, we upload it as wisdom.

only that sweet, nurturing relationship with God, but there is also the great awe of being seen from all sides. It is both reassuring and threatening. The reassurance comes from knowing God is here. The threat comes from knowing God is here. Psalm 23 reads, "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." The rod is that with which God hits you; in other words, the pangs of your conscience. If you're seen doing something that you shouldn't be doing, then you feel the rod of God, the rod of reproof. Thy staff is a lot more like the crutch, the support. I get comfort out of that and, at the same time, I have the feeling that I'm not the boss of this universe.

Now, let me talk about brain physiology. The earliest brain part that we have, we inherited from the reptiles. The reptilian brain says, "Watch out, your turf is being invaded, your food is being taken from you, your female is going to be taken from you." This is a survival mechanism that we all experience. It cuts into our awareness even before we can discern what is happening because the reptilian brain is the fastest neural connection. Next we have the limbic brain that we share with all mammals. This is where we feel the excitement and pleasure from rhythm and doing things in groups. On top of that we have the neocortex. The cortex is slower still, cutting in after the limbic has cut in. About 85 percent of the brain capacity hasn't yet been formatted. This is where intuition resides. Hopefully we will format and make accessible more of that for our use. In our response pattern, fear cuts in first. The staff at the Heart Math Institute in Boulder Creek, California, teach people to do a "freeze frame." When you get into terror, when the reptilian brain overtakes you, sink your consciousness deeper into a level of awareness that has to do with heart, which is much wiser than the place where we are immediately into fight or flight.

Let's go back to what we learned from Jewish tradition. In dealing with fear, the most often used

response is denial, "I don't want not to know what's threatening me." Most of the time, we want to play possum and ignore that which threatens us. Imagine, though, if you know exactly what the threat is and, nevertheless, you don't flinch. That's where courage is situated. Otherwise, it's foolhardiness. Courage comes from that simultaneous awareness that you don't want to fool yourself, you don't want to have illusions about things, and at the same time, you look it straight in the face. How does it work that one shouldn't feel overwhelmed by that?

In prayer and in meditation, a sense comes to us, beyond ego, that has to do with us being, every moment, created by God. Scientifically speaking, there are 1,800 cycles per second that we go in and out of existence. So while I feel myself as a person, underneath, once I deeply understand that I am a creature and that God created me, then my ego can become transparent to that. Most of the time ego is opaque to that. It creates an opacity between me and the Creator, so I think that I am me, and that I am totally independent. Once I see that "underneath are the everlasting arms," what is the worst thing that can happen to me? One of our Hasidic masters says, in Yiddish, "So what if you die?" I'm not saying not to get palpitations when threatened, or not to freak, but with some discipline, and this is where courage comes in, to be able to say, "This is happening to me, but not outside of divine awareness." That's the kind of courage that people had walking the last few meters into the gas chambers.

**TRANSFORMATION: Say more about courage. Give us a working definition.**

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: Courage is when you feel that the right action or the thing that you are about to do is more important than the lack of safety you feel in the presence of the threat. Example: King David, who had the power of life and death over his subjects, did something he shouldn't have, he took Bath Sheba, the wife of another man. God said to



Nathan, the prophet, “You’ve got to confront him about that.” Can you imagine, standing in front of somebody who has the power of life and death, knowing that crossing him could bring about the loss of your life? Nevertheless, you have to tell what you have to tell. You have to witness what you have to witness. Therein lies courage.

If someone is in danger of life and you can’t guarantee that you will be able to save that person, if you don’t do what you can about it, you will not be able to face that moment of transparency when you are being seen through and through. People speak of this as the judgment of God, as if God was coming to put them down. I don’t think that’s what the experience is like. The experience comes out of the greater sense of deep truth that emerges when being in the presence of God; all excuses look like sham. It’s not that there is a vindictive God, but in the face of that truth, how could I not admit it?

**TRANSFORMATION: *Is it more about admitting, and experiencing what happens while admitting, than being damned?***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: Yes. Sometimes it comes accompanied with a great compassion that says, “I know what you’ve done and it’s such a pity that you had to descend to that level.”

**TRANSFORMATION: *One of the outcomes of courage is right action...***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: In right action, I don’t have the sense that I’m doing it, I have the sense that I am making myself available, that it is being done through me. In other words, the right action is there already, all I can do is serve it.

**TRANSFORMATION: *Is there some force that energizes us when we give ourselves to the righteousness of a cause?***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: Many people are disturbed by having to deal with the word God. No other word has been used to clobber people as hard as the word God. When some people hear the word God, they cringe. People are afraid of prayer in public schools because bibles and God are used to coerce people, instead of letting the word of God and of truth and justice present themselves to others in such a way that they, with the autonomy of their spirit, encounter it. Just now, you were looking for the right kind of word because you didn’t want to

use the word God. When I speak about God, I don’t mean omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, those things that great philosophers talk about, because I don’t know what they mean, except as ideas. I do know when I am in the flow of the will of the spirit of gaia; when I behave like a natural, healthy cell of the planet, there is a release of endorphins that gives a sense of deep happiness, a sense of rightness—I’m right where I have to be. When I’m in the zippity-doo-dah place, all through my body, my cells are totally transparent to that happiness. When I have a sense that I’m right with God, I mean, basically, that I’m right with the spirit of the planet.

**TRANSFORMATION: *What about will-power? Where does will-power come into play in dealing with fear?***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: Most of the time we make will-power something that is connected with being tight-assed. We say, “Use your will-power. Have intestinal fortitude.”

We talk about it as if we’re constipated. I think of that as won’t-power rather than will-power. I like to think of will-power in the sense of the runner in “Chariots of Fire.” When he runs, he doesn’t run with grimness, he soars. I think will-power is when we are in the flow. When we choose between options and have to invoke will-power to follow through, we are made smaller. When we align with the larger good, not because someone else wants us to do it, but in the fabric of this moment the right way is to go in this direction, we get filled with energy and we don’t feel like martyrs invoking will-power. Most of the time, people think of will-power as if it comes from the past, from the back, like when you pinch a frog to jump. I have a feeling that the best stuff comes from the future, it attracts us. I have a sense of the great vision of the peaceable kingdom, the way the planet ought to be, in exuberant ecstasy. When we hook onto that vision, we access its energy. It pulls us in and the vision is what becomes.

**TRANSFORMATION: *Will-power seems connected to integrity.***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: People who push conservative family values say, “Where’s your integrity?” often implying that *your* integrity doesn’t meet *their*

integrity. Let's talk about integrity in the sense of parts of our being giving agreement. There are many parts of us that rarely get a chance to speak. Most of the time, we censor them. Integrity is when *all* parts of me give permission. To use a metaphor: You can't have an orgasm unless every part of the body agrees. You get the sense of integrity there—somatic integrity. I have a sense of integrity, for instance, when I don't betray promises I make to people after all the people involved have had a say in my decision.

**TRANSFORMATION: *What's the relationship between integrity and courage?***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: Even though there are moments in which some parts seem to overwhelm the totality, you stand with integrity to all your promises, not selling out loyalty to people further away from the scene in order to get the momentary benefit of alleviating the stress of the threat of the moment. When you come back later and examine your conscience, you ask, "Did I betray any of my loyalties, any of my commitments?" And if the answer is, "thank God, no," that's integrity. The endorphins release at that point and there is a feeling of satisfaction. Martyrs are described as experiencing ecstasy in their last moments because they didn't betray.

Pictures of Joan of Arc, the French maid of Orleans, show a sense of her looking beyond the moment with ecstasy. Knowing that God is with her, she doesn't feel abandoned in her ordeal.

**TRANSFORMATION: *How important is community in sustaining courage and integrity?***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: The notion that we are bounded by our skin and that everything inside our skin is independent of others is an illusion the ego projects. We have to realize that we are not bounded by skin.

For instance, there are moments in our conversation that I feel a deep kinship with you, and in this sharing, we create a community. *Communitas*—together, we are one. When the "we" feeling grows, there is an expansion, an enlargement, what we call magnanimous, great soulness, "magna anima."

**TRANSFORMATION: *When we are communing and when we are in union with the whole of the parts, we access the same life flow that courage***

*rides in, in a sense.*

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: That's right. When we have separate words, we are reductionist, pulling apart. When the wholeness principle is at work, community, courage, integrity are dimensions of that totality.

**TRANSFORMATION: *We've discussed courage, integrity and community. Within this context, let's talk about the role of elders.***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: Ah, yes. Where do the elders fit in? If we have done our genetic job by producing another generation and helping them grow, by the time our offspring are on their own and we are 50 or 55, we should be able to die, like the salmon who dies right after it spawns. What keeps us alive? Elders are wisdom-keepers. What we downloaded in our youth as education, we have to upload into the civilizational pool when we are older, except that we don't upload it as information, we upload it as wisdom. A human lifetime distills through experience the information received in youth and gives it back to the world as wisdom. Information tells me what I might be able to do, but why I should do anything, wisdom has to teach me. At present, we don't have the natural transfer of wisdom there used to be when three or four generations lived in one household.

Grandparents and grandchildren are natural allies. Children can take family values from grandparents much easier than from parents, against whom they have to rebel. The natural role for elders is passing on wisdom to the next generation.

On the other hand, as we get older, an increasing degree of diminishment happens. Eyes don't see so well, ears don't hear so well, and the zest for living is gone. Moreover, the signs of approaching death can be repressed no more. I'm 75 years old. People who are my colleagues are dying. I know that my number is going to be up sooner or later. My courage is going to be in the way I look at that basic fact of my mortality. I had an operation two years ago and while on the gurney being rolled into the operating room, I wasn't coming to terms with my mortality, I was coming to terms with dying, which has a much more visceral feeling. If elders don't access a place of courage and if they can't give consent to the way in which they die, depression sets

in. Elders say, “I don’t want to, I don’t want to, I don’t want to,” and before long, they become shriveled “I don’t want to” balls. Many people being warehoused until they die are in that position. That’s the reason this work of spiritual eldering is important to me, and why we are building sage-ing centers all over.

**TRANSFORMATION: Give a definition of spiritual eldering.**

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: Old is what happens to you. Eldering is what you participate in consciously and willingly. Spiritual means beyond sensory, beyond affect, beyond reason. Spiritual goes into the deep place of intuition, the place of right action. It’s not only that it has to be and I can’t help it, it is right that it should be so. There’s a phrase used in the old Roman mass, “Dignum et ustum est.” This is where the dignity is and this is where the rightness of it is. The physical organism is only one part of our total organism. We have an energy organism bigger than our physical organism. Our heart, or affect organism, and our mental organism spans the planet. Our spiritual organism is so vast that it goes beyond the solar system. Our physical organism dropping off doesn’t mean that the other organisms die. When people become aware of their non-physical organisms, then more and more, they take up residence, not so much in the world of sensation, but in the world of love, mind, and spirit that are much larger than the physical.

**TRANSFORMATION: Which kinds of fear are met during the work of sage-ing?**

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: There is anxiety over un-lived life, there is anxiety over bad karma we leave behind. There is real fear of a slow and painful demise.

**TRANSFORMATION: What role does courage play in the making of a sage?**

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: Without the courage to look the Angel of Death in the eye, one lacks a level of perception that makes for sage-ing.

**TRANSFORMATION: Talk about the process of becoming a sage.**

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: We have models in our culture of what to do when we are children, youth, and middle aged. We don’t have models of eldering in the youth culture in America, with the exception of Native Americans, who still have a sense of elder-

ing. Unfortunately, they’re not featured in the media. One wonderful model for aging was Jessica Tandy in “Fried Green Tomatoes.” She portrayed Towanda. “My Tuesdays with Morey,” a wonderful book on the best-seller list, shows how a good caring teacher continues to teach in his dying. Elizabeth Kubler Ross was a great pioneer and deserves much honor for what she taught us. This is the kind of wisdom that elders produce for our civilization, but its value isn’t recognized yet. If you open the pages of “Modern Maturity,” you see teenagers with gray hair enjoying what they couldn’t, and didn’t have the money for, when they were younger. Culturally, we have to make room for elders.

I call the work to become an elder the work of October. Eldering calls for a lot of contemplative inner work; straightening out the kinks of past situations, examining conscience, straightening up past relationships, and so on. I took a retreat and on each day of the retreat, I meditated on one of my children, and wrote him or her a letter. When I finished with the retreat I sent the letters out. The letters said what I felt was the meaning that these children had for me and how much I love them. Shortly afterward, I received calls from them asking if I was okay. They figured I was on my way out. I wasn’t. I just wanted to be in touch with them, and for them to enjoy what I had written while I was alive.

Then comes the work of November, which is where Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter are. They are giving back to the planet. We are sending young people to Kosovo as peacekeepers. I would rather have a corps of elders to talk with the Serb and Albanian grandparents who have lost grandchildren; sit together and try to figure out better ways of living together peacefully. An elder corps of people who have done the sage-ing work could be of such help locally and internationally. Many Middle East problems would be solved if an elder corps sat with the Palestinians and the Israeli people who have lost children and grandchildren. In this way, we would be able to overcome the dinosaur response of the younger people who have not been seasoned with wisdom.

Elders would be the intercultural, international glue for humanitarian solutions. Madeline Albright, God bless her for the work she does—I don’t know

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 75



# Finding Inner Peace By Not Doing

THICH NHAT HANH

**B**uddhist meditation has two aspects—*shamatha* and *vipashyana*. We tend to stress the importance of *vipashyana* (“looking deeply”) because it can bring us insight and liberate us from suffering and afflictions. But the practice of *shamatha* (“stopping”) is fundamental. If we cannot stop, we cannot have insight.

There is a story in Zen circles about a man and a horse. The horse is galloping quickly, and it appears that the man on the horse is going somewhere important. Another man, standing alongside the road, shouts, “Where are you going?” and the first man replies, “I don’t know! Ask the horse!” This is also our story. We are riding a horse, we don’t know where we are going, and we can’t stop. The horse is our habit energy pulling us along, and we are powerless. We are always running, and it has become a habit. We struggle all the time, even during our sleep. We are at war

within ourselves, and we can easily start a war with others.

We have to learn the art of stopping—stopping our thinking, our habit energies, our forgetfulness, the strong emotions that rule us. When an emotion rushes through us like a storm, we have no peace. We turn on the TV and then we turn it off. We pick up a book and then we put it down. How can we stop this state of agitation? How can we stop our fear, despair, anger, and craving? We can stop by practicing mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful smiling, and deep looking in order to understand. When we are mindful, touching deeply the present moment, the fruits are always understanding, acceptance, love, and the desire to relieve suffering and bring joy.

But our habit energies are often stronger than our volition. We say and do things we don’t want to and afterwards we regret it. We make ourselves and others



suffer, and we bring about a lot of damage. We may vow not to do it again, but we do it again. Why? Because our habit energies (*vashana*) push us.

We need the energy of mindfulness to recognize and be present with our habit energy in order to stop this course of destruction. With mindfulness, we have the capacity to recognize the habit energy every time it manifests. “Hello, my habit energy, I know you are there!” If we just smile to it, it will lose much of its strength. Mindfulness is the energy that allows us to recognize our habit energy and prevent it from dominating us.

Forgetfulness is the opposite. We drink a cup of tea, but we do not know we are drinking a cup of tea. We sit with the person we love, but we don’t know that she is there. We walk, but we are not really walking. We are someplace else, thinking about the past or the future. The horse of our habit energy is carrying us along, and we are its captive. We need to stop our horse and reclaim our liberty. We need to shine the light of mindfulness on everything we do, so the darkness of forgetfulness will disappear. The first function of meditation—shamatha—is to stop.

The second function of shamatha is calming. When we have a strong emotion, we know it can be dangerous to act, but we don’t have the strength or clarity to refrain. We have to learn the art of breathing in and out, stopping our activities, and calming our emotions. We have to learn to become solid and stable like an oak tree, and not be blown from side to side by the storm. The Buddha taught many techniques to help us calm our body and mind and look deeply at them. They can be summarized in five stages:

RECOGNITION—If we are angry, we say, “I know that anger is in me.”

ACCEPTANCE—When we are angry, we do not deny it. We accept what is present.

EMBRACING—We hold our anger in our two arms like a mother holding her crying baby. Our mindfulness embraces our emotion, and this alone can calm our anger and ourselves.

LOOKING DEEPLY—When we are calm enough, we can look deeply to understand what has brought this anger to be, what is causing our

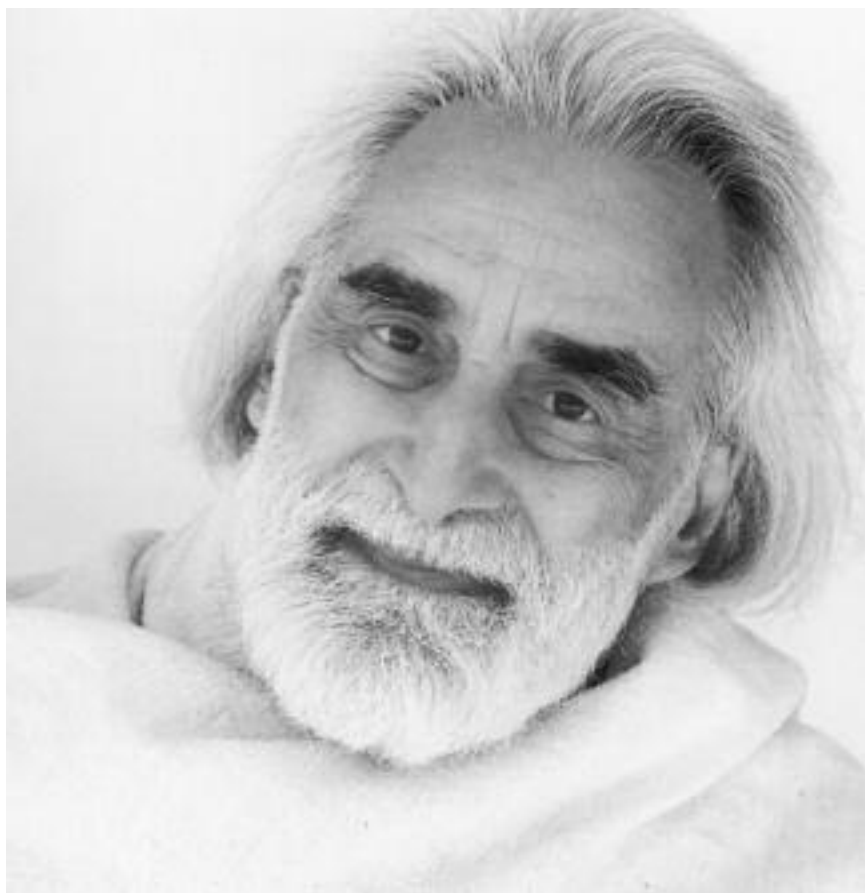
baby’s discomfort.

INSIGHT—The fruit of looking deeply is understanding the many causes and conditions, primary and secondary, that have brought about our anger, that are causing our baby to cry. Perhaps our baby is hungry. Perhaps his diaper pin is piercing his skin. Our anger was triggered when our friend spoke to us meanly, and suddenly we remember that he was not at his best today because his father is dying. We reflect like this until we have some insights into what has caused our suffering. With insight, we know what to do and what not to do to change the situation.

After calming, the third function of shamatha is resting. Suppose someone standing alongside a river throws a pebble in the air and it falls down into the river. The pebble allows itself to sink slowly and reach the riverbed without any effort. Once the pebble is at the bottom, it continues to rest, allowing the water to pass by. When we practice sitting meditation, we can allow ourselves to rest just like that pebble. We can allow ourselves to sink naturally into the position of sitting—resting, without effort. We have to learn the art of resting, allowing our body and mind to rest. If we have wounds in our body or our mind, we have to rest so they can heal themselves.

Calming allows us to rest, and resting is a precondition for healing. When animals in the forest get wounded, they find a place to lie down, and they rest completely for many days. They don’t think about food or anything else. They just rest, and they get the healing they need. When we humans get sick, we just worry! We look for doctors and medicine, but we don’t stop. Even when we go to the beach or the mountains for a vacation, we don’t rest, and we come back more tired than before. We have to learn to rest. Lying down is not the only position for resting. During sitting or walking meditation, we can rest very well. Meditation does not have to be hard labor. Just allow your body and mind to rest like an animal in the forest. Don’t struggle. There is no need to attain anything. I am writing a book, but I am not struggling. I am resting also. Please read in a joyful, yet restful way. The Buddha said, “My Dharma is the practice

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# Fear, Courage & Awakening

AN INTERVIEW WITH PIR VILAYAT INAYAT KHAN  
BY MARY NURRIESTEARN

**E**ssential to our investigation of fear, courage, and the unknown is an exploration of spiritual awakening. The respected Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan agreed to discuss this topic for us. He is the eldest son and spiritual successor to Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, who founded the Sufi Order in the West in 1910. He became head of the Sufi Order in 1956. His latest book, “Awakening: A Sufi Experience,” is a lively and practical resource for self-transformation drawing on the principals of Sufism. This book, from the wisdom of an 83-year-old Sufi master, defines awakening and offers a clear map for the journey.

The following quote from his book sets the stage for spiritual work and shows the connection between fear, courage, and awakening. “Conscious evolution is humankind’s final frontier, the ultimate freedom sought by humanity since the dawn of time. The challenge seems to be one of overcoming the fear of the unexplored territory that lies ahead, and finding the courage and optimism to illuminate the spiritual dimension hidden within our nature.”

We asked him to contribute his insights on fear and courage and how they relate to awakening. To accommodate his busy travel schedule, we e-mailed a list of questions to him at his home in France, and he responded via e-mail. Following is a thought-provoking discussion that will shine light on your path.

**PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION:** *What is fear and how are we to relate to fear that best serves our awakening?*

**PIR VILAYAT:** Fear is basically inbuilt in our genetic programming and serves as an alarm system to preserve us from venturing into life-threatening situations, or from taking unwise risks. The instinct of self-preservation can equally operate in the fear of all species facing the inevitability of the affliction of death or disease. This is where the realization fostered by views in the realms of religion or spirituality may aver themselves to be helpful. Placing unquestioned faith in a religious dogma or doctrine, belief in divine compassion, or lending oneself over to the feared passage over the threshold lured by the promise of resurrec-

tion, will provide one with a sometimes questionable consolation. Although having grown out of the seed-bed of religion, spirituality offers actual practices to prepare oneself for death. “The Tibetan Book of the Dead” is an example of a process prescribed by contemplatives. The meditations of the Sufis provide guidelines to ensure the passage over the threshold, from life to life after life.

**TRANSFORMATION: *How do you describe courage?***

PIR VILAYAT: Courage is taking a calculated risk which is difficult to evaluate, accepting the possibility of failure—and even the punishment of death—because one estimates that what one values is definitely worth taking that risk.

**TRANSFORMATION: *How do we recognize courage?***

PIR VILAYAT: You find courage mostly amongst people who have a very strong dedication to values that they place above personal needs.

**TRANSFORMATION: *How are we to relate to courage that best serves our awakening?***

PIR VILAYAT: Traditionally, in esoteric schools one pursues awakening, culminating in illumination, which is defined as a new way of looking at things—highlighting meaningfulness that is not obvious in the commonplace. Whereas there is a knowledge that is acquired by doing, (rather than assuming that one needs to know before doing) so courage is in the realm of doing, and in the course of doing one discovers a meaningfulness that one had not seen before. In this courageous action is inherent an act of faith, and it is the intuition of this meaningfulness that triggered off the action that sparks one’s faith.

**TRANSFORMATION: *What do you mean by “awakening?”***

PIR VILAYAT: Awakening is shifting the focus of one’s consciousness from the commonplace perspective to a more encompassing and meaningful grasp of what is enacted in life. It requires downplaying one perspective and highlighting another perspective that is either more encompassing (cosmic), or more internal (implied), and is of the nature of an archetype rather than an exemplar (transcendent). Also, it is opening one’s horizon to an overview where we see the way of the programming

of the universe is actuated in the existential state.

**TRANSFORMATION: *How does awakening relate to conscious evolution?***

PIR VILAYAT: As my father, Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan says, every atom, every plant, matter in general, every being is in the process of awakening and carries within itself a nostalgia to emerge out of the confines of the perspective of its limited consciousness. If you look at evolution, it is clear that consciousness awakens in the course of time, sometimes in a quantum leap.

For example, Schroedinger showed in inorganic matter the components of matter are rather like wallpaper, where there’s a lot of repetitiveness. Whereas in organic matter, items—for example molecules—are diversified from each other, and therefore offer the possibility of cooperating by completing each other. This therefore enlists a more sophisticated infrastructure for the awakening of consciousness.

**TRANSFORMATION: *What’s the connection between awakening and conscious evolution.***

PIR VILAYAT: This is the key question upon which I am very sensitive. I think it is preposterous to claim to be co-creators with God. The way I put it is that the whole purpose of the existential state is that the originating will of the Universe (I use the word Universe instead of God) is enriched by being diversified, (rather than fragmented) so there is a delegation of onus for the programming to each fragment of the totality. Consequently, the Universe gains a richness, which though latent could not have been actuated if it were not for the delegation of the total will of the Universe (within limits). The drawback is that from the time one grants a measure of freedom of incentive, to people for example, they can go as far as deciding things in a way that goes counter to their original assignment. This is obvious in our world. The advantage can be illustrated in variations on a theme in music where composers not only bring out latent potentialities within a theme, but even enrich a theme.

**TRANSFORMATION: *Discuss overcoming fear of the unexplored territory as it relates to courage.***

PIR VILAYAT: I quote a saying of the mathematician/physicist, Euler, “The pull of the future is stronger than the push of the past.” Conditioning

Awakening is shifting the focus of one's consciousness from the commonplace perspective to a more encompassing and meaningful grasp of what is enacted in life. It requires downplaying one perspective and highlighting another perspective that is either more encompassing...

is the most basic feature of the programming of the Universe, consequently we are conditioned, and ultimately we incur the constraint of our conditioning to a very large extent in our body functions, our thinking, our emotions, our intentions, and so on.

The objective of spirituality is to contrive to overcome conditioning as much as possible, which means finding a measure of freedom in our behavior, and thinking, and emoting, and incentive. This is particularly applied in our creativity, for creativity sparks our enthusiasm; it opens up perspectives we hadn't seen before, and points to how things would be if they would be as they could be, thus relieving us from the constraint of sclerosed situations, or thinking that has gelled into the commonplace. Our projections of how things could be is a feature of our freedom from conditioning, and is the power that has moved evolution in the course of time, and carries with it an emotion of enthusiasm and confidence. It is clear how very different this way of thinking is from the outdated Darwinian concept, according to which the future is determined by the past. These are the new perspectives in science, some pioneered by Dr. Prigogyne, which gives a place in science for the non-determined.

***TRANSFORMATION: Share with us your thoughts on Divine point of view.***

PIR VILAYAT: I consider what we commonly call the personal point of view and the Divine point of view as the two poles of our own thinking. This results from not envisioning God as other in ourselves. Paradoxically, one pole of our being is personal and the other is impersonal, one might call it the point of view of the Universe. One learns how to shift one's consciousness into the vantage point of another person. Eventually, as St. Francis said, instead of thinking that one is looking at the cos-

mos, one realizes that the cosmos is looking at one. This regards the cosmic dimension of consciousness. In the transcendent dimension, we may envision the universe as a total being, endowed with intelligence, consciousness, intention, emotion, bodyness. We have the possibility of shifting our consciousness into the vantage point of the Universe in infinite regress, that is, we can never reach it totally. I am paraphrasing the teachings of the Sufis, very adequately articulated by Ibn 'Arabi, in terms which may be appropriate for the spirituality for the millennium. I am also asking some questions:

Do you think that, the universe is a total being endowed with intelligence, consciousness, etc.?

Do you think that therefore, the universe is conscious of itself?

Could you define the cosmos as the body of this total being?

Do you think that the cosmos contributes toward the knowledge that it has of itself?

Do you think that whatever is our knowledge of the programming of the universe contributes towards the knowledge that the Universe has of its own programming?

Since our grasp of the meaningfulness of the universe is diversified in the vantage points of different people, does this diversity add to the knowledge that the Universe has of itself, because—by the fact of proliferation of the One into the many—each fragment of the One is interacting with each other fragment, and therefore the knowledge accrues by the knowledge it has of itself?

Last: Would you accept then that our individual way of thinking, incentive, and will exercises an impact on the overall programming of the Universe, and therefore we are participating in that programming?

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# Fear: The Voice in Our Heads

P E T E R   R U S S E L L

Looking to the material world for the satisfaction of our inner needs is the source of much fear. We fear any changes in our circumstances that suggest the world may not be the way we think it ought to be for us to be at peace.

We may fear losing our jobs because of the loss of income and the possibility that our lives may not be so comfortable. We may fear failure for the disapproval it might bring or for the loss of self-esteem. We may fear having nothing to do because we might get bored. We may fear telling the truth because others might not like us for it. We fear the unknown for the dangers it may contain. We fear uncertainty, not knowing whether or not we will find what we are after.

Here lies a sad irony. In the final analysis, what we are all after is a more satisfying state of mind. We want to be happy, at peace within ourselves. Our fears stem from the possibility that the future may bring us greater suffering rather than happiness. Yet the very

nature of fear makes us more anxious in the present. And a mind that is anxious cannot, by definition, be a mind that is at peace.

Our concern to avoid suffering in the future keeps us suffering in the present. We have lost the very thing we seek.

## SELF-TALK

Many of our fears are not so strong that we would label them fears. They may just be concerns, little niggling feelings we have about the way things might turn out. They may not even be conscious concerns; in many cases they surface only in our dreams, in conversation with a friend, or after a couple of drinks.

Nevertheless, however intense or mild they may be, they fill our minds with thoughts. This is our self-talk, the mental chatter we carry on with ourselves. This is the voice inside our heads that comments, often critically, on everything we do. It thinks, "I did

TSU/JOSIE PELLMAN

Yet, much as we may resist change, we cannot prevent it. If the patterns of the past hold up (and there is every reason to expect that they will), change is going to come faster and faster. We will need to become more flexible, more free in ourselves, to accept change. To do this, we must learn to let go of our many unnecessary fears.

that well; people will approve of me.” Or it admonishes us, saying, “If only that had not happened, if only I had said it differently, things would have turned out better.”

It is the voice that speculates on the future. It thinks, “What if such-and-such were to happen? Would it be good for me?” Or, “What if I buy this? Will it make my life more comfortable?” Or, “Should I make that phone call... just in case?”

It wonders what other people are thinking and how they will react. It wonders what might happen to the economy, to housing prices, to our partner, to our lifestyle, to our image, to our car. It worries: “Have I made the right decision?” “Will I have enough money?” “Will I be able to cope?”

This is the voice of fear.

The voice in our heads believes its function is to guide us toward greater happiness. But it is the voice of the ego-mind, the part of us that believes that only through what happens to us in the world around us can we be at peace within. And since the world around us seldom brings any lasting satisfaction, the ego-mind is always finding possibilities to fear, new reasons to be anxious.

This is not to imply that we should not think about the future and should not make plans. Our ability to look ahead and gauge the outcome of our actions is one of our most valuable assets. What we do not need is to fill our minds with worry over what may or may not happen. This is not the most constructive use of our imagination or our intelligence.

#### NOT NOW

Besides giving rise to much unnecessary fear, this mental chatter keeps us trapped in time. For as long

as we are listening to our internal dialogue, our attention is caught in the past or the future. If half our attention is taken up with the voice in our head, that half is not available for experiencing things as they are, in the present. We don’t notice what is going on around us. We don’t hear the sounds of birds, the wind, the creaking trees; we don’t perceive the mood of our spouse. We don’t notice our emotions, or the way our body feels. We are, in effect, only half-conscious.

We have lost the present moment. Lost the *now*.

#### SAVING TIME

Similar fears underlie our concern for saving time. We fear that we will not have time to do all the things we think we must do if we are to be content.

So we try to do everything as quickly and efficiently as possible, reducing “unproductive” times such as traveling and shopping to a minimum. Then, we tell ourselves, we will have more time to spend—to spend, that is, on chasing after fulfillment. Time to experience the world in new ways. Time to explore new interests. Time to earn more money—and buy more of the things we think we need.

Little wonder, then, that time is so often equated with money. We apply the same materialist mindset to both. We tell ourselves that the more time we have at our disposal, the greater will be our opportunities to find more happiness. But again we are looking to the future, to the surplus time we will create. Again we miss the enjoyment of the present moment.

#### FEAR OF EACH OTHER

Fear also plays havoc with our relationships:

- We fear that our partners may cease to like us.

- We fear that they will not understand us.
- We fear being criticized and judged.
- We fear that others will react in ways we do not like.
- We fear rejection.
- We fear that people will not listen.
- We fear that they will not be there when we need them.
- We fear that they will prevent us from doing what we want.
- We fear that if they knew what we were really like inside, they would not want to be with us.
- We fear that they might threaten our sense of identity.

And how do we react?

- We may not express how we really feel.
- We may not tell the truth.
- We may manipulate others into behaving in the way we want.
- We may think them wrong, blaming them for our fears.
- We may be more concerned with proving that we are right than with hearing their point of view.
- We may attack them in various subtle, or not-so-subtle, ways, looking for ways to make them fear us.
- We may not listen fully. (As soon as we hear something that goes against a cherished belief, the voice in our head tells us where they are wrong and how we should respond—and as long as we are listening to our own self-talk, we are not really listening to them.)

Then we wonder why our relationships can be so full of tensions and problems.

Nor is it just our intimate relationships that suffer. We find things to fear in our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers, and our bosses. We even find things to fear in people we have never met, or may meet once and never again. Will they make me look foolish? Will I be respected and valued? Will they impose on me? Will they ignore me?

Fear also disturbs our relationships with people far away, in other countries. We are afraid of different political systems. We are alarmed by other nations' economic power. We are frightened by their instability. We dread their military might.

Then, as if there were not sufficient fear in the

world, we try to diminish our own fear by causing them to fear us. And so the vicious circle grows.

## RESISTING CHANGE

Not only is fear the root of many of our problems, it also leads us to resist the changes that would help solve our existing problems. Change can threaten our careers, threaten our relationships, threaten our positions, threaten our sense of control, threaten our feelings of security, or threaten our freedom. If this is the way we see change, then it is quite natural for us to resist it. We resist new technologies, new working practices, new customs, new ways of thinking. We resist changes to our plans, changes in our circumstances, and changes in our lifestyles.

Tragically, we also resist the very changes that we most need to make if we are to survive. We resist giving up our cars, reducing our energy consumption, saving water, recycling our waste, and doing without some of the luxuries to which many of us have become accustomed. Stuck with our material addictions, we anticipate that in one way or another, the inconveniences of such changes will cause us some discomfort.

The same pattern underlies our resistance to change on a global level. This is why farmers continue to degrade the soil, why corporations continue to buy hardwood from the rain forest, why industries continue to pollute the air and water.

This is why the world continues to spend \$750 billion per year on armaments rather than on food, sanitation, housing, and education. Someone, somewhere, believes the change would not be in their own best interest.

Yet much as we may resist change, we cannot prevent it. If the patterns of the past hold up (and there is every reason to expect that they will), change is going to come faster and faster. We will need to become more flexible, more free in ourselves, to accept change. To do this, we must learn to let go of our many unnecessary fears. •

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*From "Waking Up in Time, Finding Inner Peace in Times of Accelerating Change," by Peter Russell. Copyright 1998 by Peter Russell. Printed with permission from Origin Press.*

# Briefly Noted

*Empowering your Soul through Meditation, by Rajinder Singh. Element Books, Inc., 1999, 180 pages.*

Rajinder Singh offers readers a guidebook for those interested in exploring the power, the energy, the riches, and the limitless potential of the soul. Singh's book guides readers in using the soul's power and energy to enrich and transform their own lives. While the soul's power is immense, it can be clouded by the mind, the environment, and the physical senses.



Singh's book offers techniques for removing blockages and tapping the qualities of an empowered soul: unlimited wisdom, fearlessness, immortality, unconditional love, bliss, and connectedness.

Once tapped, Singh contends, those riches can enhance all aspects of life, from personal relationships to physical, mental, and emotional health, to work, spiritual growth, and the attainment of life's goals. Such transformation can help bring peace into each of our lives and thereby contribute to a more peaceful world.

*The Heart of the Mind, How to Experience God without Belief, by Jane Kutra, Ph.D., and Russell Targ. New World Library, 1999, 195 pages.*

Healer and scientist team up to describe and expand the realm of mystical experience, and to pro-

claim that God—minus the dogma, ritual or religious belief—is always available if we will simply calm our minds of internal chatter and open our hearts. The authors focus on two specific areas—science and spirituality—applying scientific observation to the realms of spirit, and offer musings on issues of faith.

The book considers ancient wisdom teachings as well as modern scientific exploration of parapsychological phenomena. In doing so, the authors offer spirituality as the new scientific frontier, joining two traditions that have long been locked in separate quarters. The goal is the same: an expanded, more unified world, one great Truth, an underlying oneness, spirit, and love. The two roads, the authors say, lead to the same place, regardless of what we call it: God, satori, unity consciousness.

*Against the Pollution of the I: Selected Writings, by Jacques Lusseyran. Parabola Books, 1999, 180 pages.*

For those unfamiliar with him, Jacques Lusseyran was a Frenchman blinded at age eight who went on to lead a resistance movement during the Nazi occupation of Paris. He spent more than a year in Buchenwald and later, against great odds, became a professor and lecturer.



This book is a compilation of six little-known essays filled with the inner light that Lusseyran found after losing his sight. It was this light—this universal source of faith and hope—that sustained him in Buchenwald. Lusseyran felt and passes on to readers the notion that our disabilities, whatever they are,

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What then do people experience during transition from life in form to life without form? Is it possible to gain control of the process? Answers can be found in a 34-page compilation of the writings of Alice A. Bailey, *Death: Entrance into Fuller Life*, available free from:

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also can be our gifts; our obstacles are our opportunities.

Three of the essays in this book are about being blind in a seeing society. His blindness, he writes, made him pay more attention, enabling him to discover the divinity of the world. In this book, he offers us a way to access our own light-filled inner self to help us transform our lives.

### *Pilgrim Souls: A Collection of Spiritual Autobiographies, Edited by Amy Mandelker and Elizabeth Powers Touchstone Publications 544 pages*

For those who live out the story of the inner life as a spiritual quest, it is illuminating to read words from those who have gone before us and who have asked many of the questions we ask. "Pilgrim Souls: An Anthology of Spiritual Autobiographies" is an intellectually stimulating and inspiring anthology that brings together fifty-eight writers whose search for truth and understanding has spanned over two millennia and several continents. Although separated culturally, historically, and linguistically, they are united by their efforts to respond to Socrates' challenge to "know thyself."

Spiritual autobiographies focus on events and experiences that shape the inner person in relationship to God. There are four major types of spiritual quests and personal histories in "Pilgrim Souls" wanderers and seekers, pilgrims and missionaries, mystics and visionaries, and philosophers and scholars. The writers within these sections are as diverse as they are



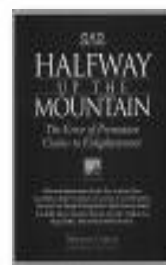
inspired. The major works of Western spiritual autobiography are included in Pilgrim Souls as well as works written from an outsider's perspective, such as Jewish, colonial, and slave narratives.

### *Halfway Up the Mountain, The Error of Premature Claims to Enlightenment, by Mariana Caplan. Hobm Press, 1999, 568 pages.*

Ancient "secret" sacred texts are available with click of a mouse on the World Wide Web. "Spiritual" teachers—from charlatans to the shallow to the true masters—hawk their wares in a multitude of spirituality journals and magazines. Spiritual teachers have become celebrities showing up on talk shows and celebrities are taking on the role of spiritual teachers.

The result of all this is distortion, confusion, fraud, and lack of education—conditions that plague contemporary spirituality in the West in the 1990s. In interviews with more than 30 spiritual masters, lifelong spiritual practitioners and esteemed scholars and psychologists, as well as research from the writings of dozens of other spiritual masters, ancient and contemporary, Mariana Caplan examines the path of enlightenment and the pitfalls, dead ends, and precipices where seekers can become lost in self-deception, or lead others into deception and corruption.

Caplan says those asked to participate in the book were selected in part based on their integrity and dedication of their lives wholly to the Truth. Among them: Andrew



PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 64

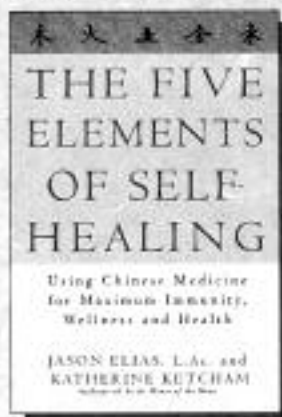
## At last, a book that shows traditional Chinese medicine doesn't have to be "alternative."

*The Five Elements of Self-Healing* is the most accessible explanation of the Chinese Five Element System—the basis of traditional Chinese medicine—and the first to show how Chinese and Western medicine are complementary. Jason Elias, herbalist and acupuncturist, and Katherine Ketcham show how to use preventive strategies and gentle, supportive remedies to heal contemporary chronic illnesses and bolster immunity, wellness, and mind-body harmony.

"A valuable guide to integrating the best of both Western and Oriental medicine, written by a rarity—a healer knowledgeable in both."—Peter D'Adamo, M.D., author of *Eat Right 4 Your Type*



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Cohen, Joan Halifax, Robert Svoboda, Lee Lozowick, Arnaud Desjardins, Christina Grof, Jakusho Kwong Roshi, Claudio Naranjo, Judith Leif, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, Reginald Ray, Danan Henry Roshi, Charles Tart, and others.

Of course, if you ask some of the former followers and students of a number of these experts Caplan has chosen, they might argue that the spiritual teachers Caplan selected are only "halfway up the mountain" themselves. Perhaps this gives them a bit of authority and perspective on the subject.

*Essential Spirituality, Exercises from the World's Religions to Cultivate Kindness, Love, Joy, Peace, Vision, Wisdom and Generosity*, by Roger Walsh, M.D., Ph.D. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999, 302 pages.

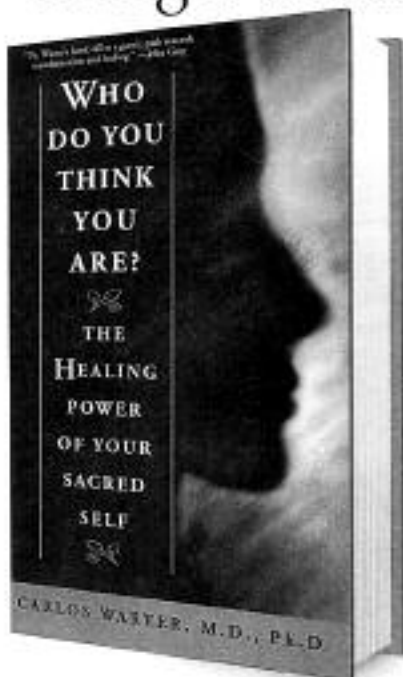
Psychiatrist, philosopher, and former long-time skeptic Roger Walsh examines the seven practices he says are common to the world's major religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.

The practices he discovered, based on twenty-five years of research, study, and spiritual practice, include: discovering the soul's true desire, cultivating emotional wisdom, living ethically, focusing the mind, recognizing the sacred, developing wisdom, and embracing generosity. Each involves an examination of self, beliefs, and values.

These practices, he says, help seekers to achieve a higher level of



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consciousness and to develop the self-awareness that is part of a spiritual existence. The author takes a practical approach to spiritual development: his book offers wisdom from great spiritual leaders and philosophers, as well as exercises that will help readers apply each of the practices to their daily lives while exploring other opportunities for growth and self-development.

Essential spirituality acts as a guidebook on how to live more wisely and love more fully as you continue on your spiritual journey.

*Everything Belongs, The Gift of Contemplative Prayer, by Richard Rohr. The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999, 155 pages.*

Retreat leader Richard Rohr takes readers on a personal retreat,



but this is one they can experience in the comfort of their own homes. Rohr's book is written for those who hunger for a deeper prayer life

but don't know what contemplation is or how to let it happen.

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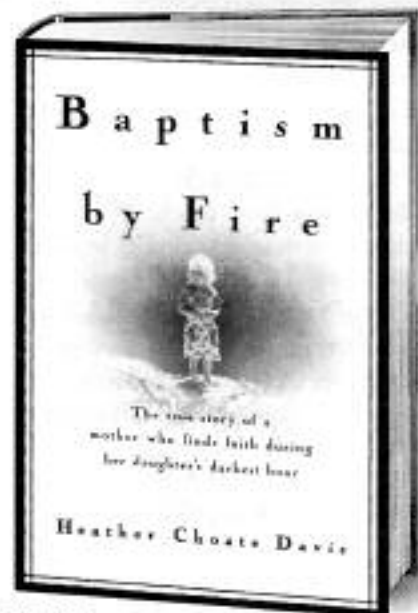
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## Letters From Readers

Continued from page 8

to support you by holding a loving space for you to receive the resources, the personal vitality, and the renewal you need. Your service is valuable and valued!—*Marilyn Branscum, Centreville, Virginia*

### HEARTENING

I recently had the pleasure of reading the Spring 1999 issue of *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION*. I loved the thoughtful articles with their theme of humility—something we rarely hear about these days. It's heartening to discover that even in this largely deteriorating world there are those striving to increase understanding and move ever upward.—*Ellen Dickstein, Grants Pass, Oregon.*

### TO LIE OR NOT

Thank you for yet another vantage point in the "From the Experts" column on whether we must always tell the truth, or if it's okay to tell a little white lie now and then. I've struggled with this dilemma and can see both points. My co-workers and I used to listen to radio talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger, who seems to follow Mr. Millman's philosophy and has often said that telling the truth is not always the best path to follow. We've had numerous debates and discussions about this, and I appreciated another view on the topic. I have long felt that I could overlook a lot of human foibles, but I had to draw the line at lying because once someone has lied to me, I can no longer trust them, and a relationship cannot grow without trust. Mr. Millman's take on the issue tips the balance. The key to "acceptable lying" seems to be judiciousness. Of course, therein lies the danger.

Mr. Millman was right when he noted that the bigger question is: Do we lie to ourselves? Again, enough food for thought to overflow a dinner plate! Thank you!—*Sally Brown, Baltimore, Maryland.*

### A DAY OF REST

Amazing. I never knew a day of rest could be such hard work. I guess that proves just how needed it is. I've been thinking about a "day of rest" for a while, and after reading Wayne Muller's comments in your magazine, I decided it was time to act. So as of recently, Sunday is a day of rest at our house. We do no laundry, no grocery shopping, no lawnmowing, no projects, no anything that is seen as a chore. Some Sundays, that's been quite an adjustment—and a challenge—because there are a dozen things that "need to be done." But we're looking forward to discovering what life has to offer if we just take a moment and stop.—*Patrick Richards, Salt Lake City, Utah.*

### WORK & BLESSING

A friend visited recently and while she was at my house, picked up my *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* Summer 1999 issue. She's been going through some difficulties with the man she is involved with and when she came to the Vissells' article on relationships, I couldn't get her to put down the magazine! She finished the article before she left, then called a week later and asked if I could fax her a copy of it so she could share it with her boyfriend and another girlfriend. I did that, and one better: I bought her a subscription as a belated birthday present. I'm sure she will come to treasure the magazine as much as I do! By the way, the Vissells are a refreshing example of commitment in a seemingly

uncommitted society. Thanks for sharing their story, and their wisdom.—*Jamie Alexander, Hollywood, Florida.*

### VALUABLE LESSON

Bravo to Elizabeth Chinment, in the "Compassion in Action" feature in the Summer 1999 issue for trying to make a difference in her young students' lives. Teachers have their hands full these days, and their efforts often go unrecognized. She won't keep all of them out of trouble, but if she helps just one through the challenges of youth, she can call her career a success.—*Susie Williams, Columbus, Ohio.*

### SIGN ME UP

Enclosed is payment for a two-year subscription to *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION*. For some time now I have been reading and greatly appreciating a friend's recycled copies of your magazine. I have been impressed with the quality of each article, and often grateful to receive something I need on my journey. So I want to support you economically too. Thanks!—*Nancy Leone, Orchard Park, New York*•

### NEXT ISSUE READERS ON:

RELATIONSHIP AS TEACHER—HEALER, being with a loved one through crisis or death, an inspiring role model, or mentor, etc. Due September 13, 1999.

FORGIVENESS—being forgiven by another, forgiving someone, the process of forgiving yourself, etc. Due November 5, 1999.

To contribute, please see Letters to the Editor on page 8 for information.

## Readers On Nature

Continued from page 22

tells me that she witnessed the experience, reminding me that it really was not a dream, that it actually did happen.

In my play experiences with abused children, adults, and animals, there are few play moments as powerful as those shared with manatees, animals that can reach up to fourteen feet in length and weigh two thousand pounds. They offer even the most cautious student lessons in trust, graciousness and gentleness. Their teachings remind me that I am always a beginner and perpetually connected to all of life. I simply need to trust with an open heart and extend my hand in an invitation to play.

One student, in writing about the experience afterward, said it best: "What a wonderful example, what a fantastic lesson we could all learn from them! For years all that humans have done is hurt these beautiful creatures, yet they repay us with patience, gentleness, and quiet. It was so humbling."

And each year, when I return to visit my manatee friends in the cold river waters of western Florida, the lessons remain a humbling experience.—*Daniel Caron, Wheeling, West Virginia. Please see editor's note at end of this feature.*

### Long John Cardinal

One of my mother's greatest gifts to me was a love for bird-watching. My greatest experience in bird-watching was meeting Long John Cardinal.

One day after I had filled all the feeders and was enjoying the birds coming in to dine, I saw a male Cardinal frantically trying to cling

to a feeder. I got out my binoculars and discovered he only had one leg.

Seeing his dilemma, I placed seeds all along the 2x4 top of my patio fence. He quickly found them and went right down the fence mowing them down. Clearly, he was very hungry.

Next morning I looked out and he was waiting in a pine tree near the fence for me to bring his breakfast. Twice each day I placed his seeds atop that fence and twice a day he waited for me in that same pine tree.

Cardinals are among the more skittish birds. They seldom come in close to a house or come in at all when humans are present. I guess Long John hadn't read his Cardinal Behavior Manual because from the start he would come in and start eating while I was still on the patio filling all the feeders.

Knowing the Cardinal lifespan is only eight years, I began to worry that he might die alone in the woods behind my place. The thought that he would fail to show up one morning filled me with distress. I had bonded with him and if something happened to him, I wanted to know it.

So I told him how I felt. Many times. After placing his seeds atop the fence, I would talk to him as I filled the other feeders. Something like, "Listen, Pal. If the books are right, you have three years at most to be with me. I don't know how old you were when you came here but you've been with me many years now.

"Please do me a favor, Long John. If you know you're going to die, come here and die on my patio so I won't be left wondering what happened to you."

I told him I loved him and how much I had enjoyed having him in

my life and what it would mean to me to know what happened to him at the end of his earthly journey. I told him I would like to give him a decent burial like any other member of my family.

One rainy morning I went out to place his seeds on the fence. It was too foggy to see the pine tree where he always waited but when I got to the fence, I looked down at my feet and there he was.

I took one feather for my meditation area and buried him in the rain under his pine tree. With tears running down my face, I said a little prayer of gratitude for the pleasure of our five-year companionship.

Some might think this a fluke but I had an inner witness all along that we were communicating. It will never be possible for me to question that we have a spiritual connection with any being we love.—*Dalton Roberts, Chattanooga, Tennessee.*

### Gardening is an Act of Love

With no goal, no plan, or thought in my mind, I enter the contentment of ordinary garden work as a time to cultivate inner peace. I let my reverence for nature guide me to and from areas that require attention. Soon, I am suspended in the freedom of "at-one-ment" and beyond all thought, time, and space. The gardening activity and I become one. I am the garden, the gardener, and the gardened. A brief taste of the mystical is revealed as I well up with gratitude. Frequently, I am stirred by hushing breezes, and as my gaze lifts to the radiant dance of swirling leaves above me, I become part of the interplay of nature's presence.



Suddenly, the ordinary becomes an extraordinary glimpse of unity and harmony and my world is full and whole.

Whenever I need a change in my routine, when I need to pray, when I want to honor my self in a way only the solitude of gardening creates, I enter the solace of nature's beauty. As I move about in the comfort of my gardens, I am infused with life. I am a vessel filling infinitely. I am the flowers, the trees, the sun, the sky, the earth. I am what simply is. When I pick up my gardening tools and step outside, I am moved by the music of the birds, the sun's rippling shadows on the gardens, and the cool breezes at the pond's edge. I'm in "the kingdom of heaven" I used to think was "up there."

As I migrated the complex paths that appeared before me over many years, I began to see that the harder I tried to make things fit and work, the less anything worked at all. When I discovered how to communicate with nature and understood that life is nature in action, my own authentic nature began to grow on its own terms, no longer forced to fit others' expectations. I began to thrive when I weeded my garden regularly.

I often survey "my kingdom," breathe in the light of my landscape, and stand in reverence to life's deeper meaning that shows up. In the act of love that gardening is about, I am in love, and as I stand on the living earth beneath my feet, I feel privileged to be here, knowing that nature's comforting companionship is only a few steps away, welcoming me.—*Bev Rosen, via e-mail.*

*Editor's note: Daniel Caron, director of Wellness and Drug Education at Wheeling Jesuit University recently started an organization, that focuses*

*on helping people be gentle with animals so that they will be gentle with each other. Anyone interested in swimming with the manatees may call Mr. Caron at: (304)547-1332, or e-mail him at: daniel2264@aol.com.*

**NEXT ISSUE READERS ON:**

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## *A Way of Service*

*Continued from page 12*

opens us. I would not have given up the witnessing and all the grief that went with it for anything because there's more depth to my understanding of life. I feel more vulnerable, more open. Now that much of the grief has worked its way through me, I'm asking, 'Okay, God, now what? What do you want from me? How can I serve?'"

The first thing she would tell people who see suffering, but don't know where to start serving, is to pray. "Each of us has within us our own story to unfold. Seek spirit in prayer and meditation, and ask, 'What can I do? Guide me.' From that place, we will be shown. Take a look around your family and your community and ask where you can be of service right there. Then, on a global scale, look around and see how things affect you. Write to our legislators, our decision-makers, and let them know your heartfelt thoughts. There is great power in telling our stories. Call five friends and say, 'I just heard about this and I want to tell you about what is going on. Let's create a time of prayer together.' There is great power in people holding an intention for a better world. Out of that, if you get ideas of what to do, step out and do them.

"We also need to pay attention to the stereotyping we do of others we perceive as different, becoming more aware of how the media portrays others. Any time we think of Arabs, what do we think of? Terrorists. When we stereotype anyone, we are saying yes to a terrible separateness which, to me, is a profound spiritual issue. Paying attention, and creating connection, is our deepest, most responsible work on the planet." Gabriel spent one evening in Iraq listening to an

artist's story of devastation and loss. They talked about his journey and how tremendous obstacles change people. Gabriel asked him if there was anything that he would consider a blessing out of his experience.

"He had to think about that for quite a while," Gabriel recalls, "but finally answered. 'You know, before the Gulf War and the sanctions started,' he told me, 'I pretty much lived for myself and my own needs and concerns, like most of the people I knew. When we first experienced losing power and not getting food, everyone hoarded what they had for themselves. We discovered, though, that we were not going to be able to survive that way; we could only survive the deepening hardships by taking care of each other. So, you would keep some figs from your fig tree for yourself and your family, but you would share the rest with neighbors, and they would share what they had with you. What has happened to me is that now I cannot go to bed at night without having done something for someone else. A day does not go by that I do not look for opportunities to give to someone else. That was not said about me before this suffering started.'"

Gabriel says of her life now back in the United States, "I can't let a day go by that I don't fully see another human being and acknowledge their presence, whether it's a homeless person that I can look square in the face and greet as part of my family, or the checker in the grocery store line. I'm realizing that the most important thing in my life now is to reach out and create connections with others. When you see all the pain in the world today, it's because we stopped taking time for each other. It took going to Iraq to see on a global

scale how important it is that we just have the courage to reach out to one another."•

*Michale Gabriel is a speaker, storytelling performer for adults and children, adjunct instructor of storytelling, author, and recording artist. She founded the Storytelling Residency Program at Children's Hospital in Seattle, Wash., and the U.S./U.S.S.R. Story Banner Exchange. Her Young Storytellers for Peace, U.S./U.S.S.R. Exchange Program, was featured on PBS. She has won several awards for her work with children. She may be reached via e-mail at: [michalegabriel@bigplanet.com](mailto:michalegabriel@bigplanet.com)*

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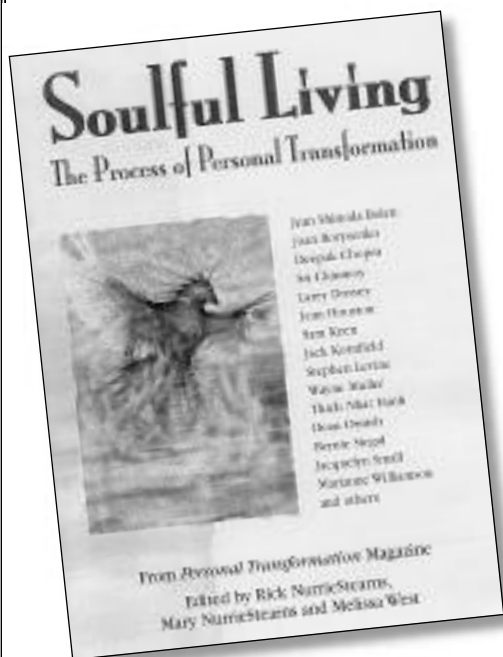
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## *Transformations*

*Continued from page 20*

increased with the storytelling. Silently I predicted this retreat couldn't fix her problems. Fearful of her anger, I suggested we walk to chapel.

We were led in a guided meditation followed by "Amazing Grace" and then breakfast served by cheerful volunteers. I learned about two books by de Mello and borrowed one of them. Whenever people with similar interests gather, they help each other, share information and exchange ideas. I thrive on this synergy.

I called home and vented over the phone when my son asked where the house keys were. Whoops! Lost it again. Breathing deeply, I told him, even though he should have looked before calling.

We laughed a lot during the lectures. We also journaled. I experienced one "a ha" moment when I recognized defensiveness provoked my anger. I journaled about feeling accused and wishing to let that feeling go.

"What do you mean by that?" Ellie challenged several times, obviously uncomfortable with teachers. But Brother Joe, a former principal, author, and psychotherapist, wasn't an ordinary teacher. He poked fun at human nature, shared cartoons, and told us we'd all die with our anger as well as all our other feelings. "The task is not to let it own you. It's to be free to act, not to react," he said.

After lunch I walked along the ditch. I noticed a twisted trail left by a snake scooting across the hot, white sand into the bushes. A road-runner allowed me to get just close enough to see him, then flew to a fence post. Returning to the Center, I passed horses, orderly gar-

We were no longer individuals looking for answers only for ourselves, cloistering in our rooms and struggling alone with our raging demons. We'd become a group willing to listen and share with each other. Anger and all our other negative attributes didn't carry such a sting.

dens, and llamas in the pastures bordering the ditch.

After a swim, a very practical guided journaling lecture, and dinner, I sat with new acquaintances and watched the sinking sun. Something palpable had taken place. Our chairs that peppered the lawn Friday evening were now clustered together. We were no longer individuals looking for answers only for ourselves, cloistering in our rooms and struggling alone with our raging demons. We'd become a group willing to listen and share with each other. Anger and all our other negative attributes didn't carry such a sting.

I called home and learned I'd driven over a bolt and my husband had to change the tire. He wasn't pleased. This was my third flat in

five months. "I'm sorry to cause extra work," I responded. But I didn't feel blamed.

At evening prayer, I sat across from Ellie and listened to evocative music. Sister Margaret Mary explained a Membres symbol that represented going to the center of oneself. We were invited to write something about ourselves we'd like healed and place it in a dish at the altar. Ellie didn't participate. I was afraid she might stand up and challenge Sister's service. Instead, at the last minute, she grabbed a pencil and scribbled for a long time. She took her paper to the dish and let it slide from her hand. I lowered my head, pretending not to notice. As the papers burned and music filled the chapel, her shoulders heaved. She was the last to leave.

Sunday, our last morning together, I awoke early, feeling really rested. On the lawn, retreatants were reading, meditating, doing Tai Chi, doing yoga, or talking quietly. I felt blanketed in the belief that everything was truly okay, and even if the worst misfortune imaginable happened this morning, it would still be okay. The Dominican Sisters encourage participants to engage in the practices that help them grow spiritually. They create an atmosphere free from the noise and clutter of ordinary life, and they also offer private spiritual direction sessions. So they're really more than a mother, although my friend was partially correct, because they do nurture and attend to their guests, but they do it with unconditional acceptance and love—a standard most mothers hold for themselves but cannot attain.

I changed the sheets and blessed the room for the next guest. When

I carried my trash to the bin, I tripped and almost fell. For a split second I had a choice to be annoyed or shake it off. I know my usual reaction would have been anger. Fortunately the weekend of journaling brought positive results.

Ellie and I met at the coffee counter. She was smiling and sang a good morning. This wasn't the same person I'd met two days ago. "I don't know if it will ever come back, but for now, it's gone," she laughed. I smiled, telling her I wouldn't stamp my feet like Rumpelstiltskin and spew rage because my son asks where the keys are either. And when I occasionally slip, at least I'll be forced to examine what happened so it won't recur. Together we walked to the cherry tree and listened while Mark played guitar before morning prayer.

*The Dominican Sisters host a variety of retreats during the year. Topics range from Tai Chi, Holistic, Adult Children, and Enneagram to Mystics, Centering Prayer, and Silence and Fasting. For information, call (505) 877-4211 or check their website at [www.christdesert.org/dominican/retr eat\\_info.html](http://www.christdesert.org/dominican/retr eat_info.html)•*

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## Ask The Experts

*Continued from page 16*

as this. Existential questions force us to re-examine what we truly value. The call for conscious choices wakes us up to the consequences of what we choose. You've acknowledged that there's a lot riding on your decision to stay or leave the corporate environment.

Second, by your own admission, you've already begun to set your house of diverse priorities in order since you say, "My family is my top priority." That's helpful. That tidbit of data clarifies a fuzzy issue, but I'm not sure an all-or-nothing choice is warranted yet. More about that in a second.

Third, perhaps most critical to your sorting-out process: Feeling torn in two by a conflict is not all negative. It's somehow purifying not to know—not knowing offers us a high mode of being from which to reflect on things. It may be the Zen Buddhists who suggest that the "don't know" mind is freeing—unattached, not rooted in this or that. In our Western tradition, when we don't know what to do we "cast our cares" in prayer: we turn the matter over to God who then, according to a divine timetable, handles the matter. This isn't as passive as one might imagine. Strong faith that answers will come plays a mighty role in our solutions. Here's where all-or-nothing thinking needs to be observed.

I tend to avoid either/or thinking—if I make such choices at all, it's at a snail's pace. I prefer not to polarize my thinking—not to fixate on one way as the "good" way and another as the unfulfilling. So often, deeper insight reveals a middle ground, a blended path, that leads to something tremendous—better than we ever dreamed of.

Here's more of what I mean as it relates to your inquiry:

Perhaps your corporation has a Public Affairs program wherein employees are volunteered to certain inner city projects. In my corporate development practice, some years ago an old, long-time corporate client (a Fortune 500-type firm) "donated" a few days of my time to a huge not-for-profit outfit. Most companies budget funds annually to support the United Way, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts and other non-profit agencies. They use those monies to "loan" out executives or give scholarships or whatever. If it won't endanger how you're perceived by your management—that is, if it won't make you seem disloyal, disinterested in your career, the corporate vision and so on (and only you can figure that out)—consider investigating the existence of such programs.

To become an educator of any sort requires credentials, practice teaching and other professional preparations. Perhaps you can make a time-line with the input and help of your family so that, for the next few years, as you ready yourself for the career you want—saving money, fulfilling educational requirements—you fulfill family obligations.

No "expert" can tell you precisely what to do: For one thing, no "expert" knows your heart (in this case, you don't mention your age, your educational background, the age of your children, whether your spouse works, etc.) and no "expert" will have to live with the consequences of your ultimate decision. Sometimes we look to others to advise us because it sort of takes the heat off of us. However, each individual is responsible. Sorting

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## Ask The Experts

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through the subtle shadings of this issue could be one of your life's most growthful processes. For example, consider taking a spiritual retreat, or several. (A long weekend? Vacation time?) Use stillness, meditation, and other purifying disciplines to ponder your inquiry. In deep, silent meditation, you can contemplate the matter, remaining totally open to your "small still voice." Our tugs-of-war are teaching. If we can rid our mind of our preset models of how we imagine life ought to be, our "teacher" will show us what to do. For that lesson, we have to stay open—receive—our finest, spiritual insights.

Further research is in order: Who do you know that's made a similar transition and done it successfully? Might you get some tips from them? If you have a spiritual director, now's the time to enter a dialogue with him or her. How about journal work? (Read Proggoff's "Journal Workshop," if you haven't already.) How about arranging a few sessions with a trusted, competent counselor to chew over the downside and the upside of either route?

We all know what free advice is worth. Nonetheless, here's mine: Your commitment to your family came first. Honor that first. Think of your "top priority"—your family obligations—as a course in school, like law school or medical school. You'll eventually graduate. Whatever you decide, I say, keep your day job while you pray, ponder, and fine-tune your intuitive antennae for life's answer. Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it.'" (Is. 30:21)

We've each got to be pretty still and grounded to hear that guiding word. Much success to you as you listen inwardly and as you choose.

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## Love the Greater God

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the temporary nature of our lives, and the legacy that we can leave by growing more God in our hearts. Becoming more capable of love and more capable of intimacy in relationships is the sign of real freedom. From that place in ourselves, we draw the will to stand

against fear.

Community is essential to growing courage and meeting fear. To remember that the legacy of your life has to do with how much God you make in your heart, you have to assert and demonstrate your faith within your community. Such sharing creates a collective energy which is far greater than the energy any individual can muster alone. Now, if you over-identify with community, then in a certain sense, community becomes a shelter from fear. If you belong to a religious group or cult that feels itself elite, that discourages respectful relationship to all other people, then such a community becomes a form of protection or defense, a mutual comfort organization. Those are communities of fear. They are not communities of love, and definitely not communities of spirit.

Communities of love intrinsically go beyond human relationships. They are communities that relate to the earth, that are concerned for the welfare of future generations of human beings and all other creatures. They are communities in which personal self-interest is constantly balanced with a compassion for the good of the whole. •

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*Richard Moss, M.D. After a short general practice, he experienced life-changing realizations that led him to his true calling: the exploration of spiritual awakening and its integration into daily life. His books include "The I That Is We," "The Black Butterfly," and "The Second Miracle." For over twenty years, Richard has worked with groups, helping people throughout the world to transform their lives. He lives in Oakhurst, California with his wife and children.*

## Sage-ing

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how she, at her age, is able to travel and be of sane mind meeting all of those people—but at the same time, her thinking is still in that reptilian mode, which is a pity. Look at how much NATO has invested in saving face. Elders don't feel that way.

**TRANSFORMATION: *What's the work of December?***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: December is an entirely different phase. Most people are so afraid of death that we have created an industry about saving life at any cost, which is a good policy for the emergency room. When someone is brought in from an accident, we want to do anything that we can to save life. But an elderly person who has gotten the friend of pneumonia to come, one of the easiest ways of dying, is pumped full of antibiotics, and his life is saved, as it were. The next time, dying is more painful. So don't "prolong life." In reality, it prolongs dying. What I call the December place is preparing our solitude with God.

**TRANSFORMATION: *You just celebrated your 75th birthday. You wrote the book "From Age-ing to Sage-ing" in 1993, six years ago. In the years since, how has your understanding of sage-ing deepened?***

SCHACHTER-SHALOMI: Before I wrote the book, I got the glimpse of the possibility of sage-ing, and after that glimpse, there was mining of that idea. Then came applying that idea, teaching seminars and so on. Now, a large number of people have trained to bring this work to people in the world, and there are sage-ing centers springing up. I have a feeling that I've done that job and I'm planning to conclude the service part, the

November phase, in another few years, and then it's going to be time to work on my own inner way of releasing myself from this life. I experience great joy to see that an idea in which I served as a conduit is beginning to take root. I have given the mantle of leadership to some wonderful people because I don't believe that people should die in the saddle. I look at the Pope, dragging himself around when his body barely carries him. It isn't fitting for him to retire, but I wish it were so that he could enjoy the last years of his life, looking over his work and spending time as a contemplative. •

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## Pir Vilayat

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**TRANSFORMATION: *Does doing so take courage or give courage?***

PIR VILAYAT: Both.

**TRANSFORMATION: *Does doing so have an impact on fear?***

PIR VILAYAT: Yes, because fear is based on a concern about being in the hands of unknown destiny, whereas if we know we have influence upon our destiny we are no more totally delivered into the cryptic, and possibly capricious, will of fate.

**TRANSFORMATION: *It eliminates the "What if..."***

PIR VILAYAT: We are grappling with what we think are our problems, rather than dealing with what is at stake in our problems. The question "What if?" then applies to "What if my interpretation of my problems is wrong, and I have been acting in consequence of this assumption, and entertaining fear that things might turn out to be unfavorable to my well being?" Frequently people worry about the hazard of something that never happened. To prepare for the hazard is justifiable, but the

fear of hazard can be counter-productive. There are cases where people have been afraid of a situation, and when it occurred found that they were able to cope with it, it even found their self-confidence strengthened. Sometimes the situation averred itself to be the best thing that could have happened to them. If that which one was afraid of could never happen—whether or not that reduces fear—does not seem to be dealing with the issue. The issue is to be able to find in oneself the ability to deal with a challenge and thereby gain self-confidence, and even come to appreciate the value of challenges for the unfoldment of one's potential. Jung once said, "If you do not meet your shadow it will come to you recurrently in the form of your fate." This is not always true, but does give us some clues about why things happen the way they do in our lives. •

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## Thich Nhat Hanh

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of nonpractice." Practice in a way that does not tire you out, but gives your body, emotions, and consciousness a chance to rest. Our body and mind have the capacity to heal themselves if we allow them to rest.

Stopping, calming, and resting are preconditions for healing. If we cannot stop, the course of our destruction will just continue. The world needs healing. Individuals, communities, and nations need healing. •

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*From "The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching, Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation," by Thich Nhat Hanh. Copyright 1998 by Thich Nhat Hanh. Printed with permission from Parallax Press.*

## *Practices*

*Continued from page 36*

human contact arises from a consciousness of separateness from others. Mental acceptance of separateness is, in its own way, an act of violence, for it offends against the realization of life's underlying unity. With perfection in non-violence we achieve that absolute inner purity which is recommended by the niyama of cleanliness.

### CONTENTMENT

Contentment is not smugness, but an attitude that one should hold courageously in the face of the greatest vicissitudes. The positive aspect of non-avarice, and the way to perfect oneself in this quality, is to live with an attitude of contentment regardless of any circumstance.

### AUSTERITY

Austerity is not the performance of outward penances, but an attitude of dis-involvement with outwardness. Austerity is the natural corollary to brahmacharya (self-control), for it means an attitude of taking energy that was formerly directed outwardly, and rechanneling it with ever increasing fervor into the spiritual search.

### INTROSPECTION

Introspection (self-study, or self-awareness) would seem to be directed more obviously inward, but it implies much more than self-analysis. For self-analysis keeps the mind tied to the ego, whereas what is meant, primarily, is to hold the mind up for guidance by the silent whispers of intuition.

Non-acceptance, its counterpart, means not accepting the thought that we own anything. It has as its positive aspect the contemplation of what we are, rather than what we are not. Since all the yama-niyamas refer more to mental qualities than to outer practices,

swadhyaya has a deeper meaning than intellectual self-analysis. It is a reference, rather, to ever deeper self-awareness—a process that transcends mental introspection and requires us to see ourselves and everything around us in relation to the higher, divine Self. "Dwell always," it tells us, "in the consciousness of the Self within."

### DEVOTION

Devotion to the Supreme Lord, finally, is a reference to devotion that is directed inward, not scattered outwardly in religious ceremonies and rituals. It pairs with truthfulness for perfect truthfulness means facing unconditionally that there is only one reality in existence: God. Outside of Him (or Her), we have no existence. To give up the temptation to put off that moment when we must face the ultimate truth about ourselves—this fundamental and utter self-honesty permits of only one conclusion, summed up in the final niyama: "Devotion to the Supreme Lord."

The yama-niyamas are essential for anyone who would find peace of mind. Be restful in your heart, even as you work to perfect yourself in right spiritual attitudes. Only by inner restfulness during outer activity will you achieve that supreme restfulness which lies beyond all activity. •

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*Donald Walters is an author, lecturer, and composer, and is respected as a teacher of meditation and higher consciousness. Walters is author of more than sixty books on a variety of topics, from leadership, to education. A few of these titles include "The Path," "Affirmations for Self-Healing," and "Education for Life." His most recent book, "Superconsciousness, A Guide to Meditation," which this article was adapted from, was published by Warner. Superconsciousness will be re-released in the coming months from Crystal Clarity Publishers.*

## *Dare To Live*

*Continued from page 25*

which is totally false, "so I will never love again" or "so I will never put myself into dangerous situations again." The fact is you must realize that if you commit yourself to the path of knowledge, if you want to gradually pierce the secret of suffering, it is essential to take the risk of living and of suffering.

Your childhood vitality and perhaps even your exuberance often brought about rebuke. You heard statements like, "You shouldn't do that!" or "How dare you do that!" And so this vitality or exuberance became associated with value judgments. Spiritual teachings also seem to greatly condemn the richness of life; they recommend asceticism, austerity, renouncing the world, going into monasteries or hermits' caves and to top it all off, "death to oneself" or "the death of the ego." I personally was quite surprised to see an austere man like Swami Prajnanpad insist so strongly on the importance of daring to live, laying oneself open and rolling with the punches. It did not seem to go along with my understanding of Hindu spirituality. Yet there is a real risk here, one that I barely escaped on numerous occasions. It consists in trying to camouflage one's fear of living behind noble but untrue words. And so you fight against a feeling of suffocation in relation to your desire to lead a vast and full life, one rich in experience. We run the risk of deluding ourselves by turning our spiritual ideals into an excuse for our fear to live. •

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*Arnand Desjardins, formerly a well known film-maker, is an eminent French spiritual teacher, widely respected in his own country as the author of numerous books on spiritual life.*



# Seasons of Life

CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA

*There are seasons in life in the same way as there are seasons in nature. There are times to cultivate and create, when you nurture your world and give birth to new ideas and ventures. There are times of flourishing and abundance, when life feels in full bloom, energized and expanding. And there are times of fruition, when things come to an end. They have reached their climax and must be harvested before they begin to fade. And finally, of course, there are times that are cold and cutting and empty, times when the spring of new beginnings seems like a distant dream. Those rhythms in life are natural events. They weave into one another as day follows night, bringing, not messages of hope and fear, but messages of how things are. If you realize that each phase of your life is a natural occurrence, then you need not be swayed, pushed up and down by the changes in circumstance and mood that life brings.*

TS/JERRY GAY