

MANY VOICES

WORDS OF HOPE FOR PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA & DISSOCIATION

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In This Issue:

Spirituality: All Views Helpful Beliefs, Harmful Beliefs Spiritual Safety



A Little Box of Raisins

A very dear two-year old boy in my Sunday school class, frightened when his parents left him with me, stood at the door crying inconsolably. I could not bring his parents back, and he pushed me away when I tried to comfort him. I offered him a tiger hand puppet to hold, and a little red truck, and he held on to them.

His parents had given to him a small box of raisins and the promise that they would come back to him. After awhile he calmed down enough to move away from the door and sit in a little yellow rocking chair. He sat there clutching the tiger, the truck, and his little box of raisins. But the box was upside down, and a few raisins started dropping on to the floor.

Awkwardly, he wriggled out of the rocking chair still hanging on to the tiger, the red truck, and the box of raisins. He crouched on the floor picking up each raisin with his tiny determined fingers. He lost his grip on the red truck, and it slid to the floor. He grabbed it and something else slid away.

It was a tender, pitiful juggling act. Then he climbed back into the yellow rocking chair, arms locked around all of his treasures. He would not let anything become separated from him!

I smiled with compassion as the raisins began to drop onto the floor again. It all seemed so futile. But every raisin mattered to him...was worth struggling for...had to be found...to be retrieved! It was as though they were part of him, treasures that belonged to him. And no effort was too great to get back what was his.

And we are...I am...one of God's "raisins." I may have tumbled to the floor, but I still belong to Him. I still matter to Him! He will claim me as His own and bring me into the wide expanse of His welcoming arms!

By Marguerite/Greta

MV

Spirituality

By The Sunflower House

Religion was another excuse for abuse opportunities when I was growing up. Still, I (the Host) believed in God most of my life (American Christian Protestant.) But when I began to exhibit MPD personalities, religion became a very tall wall against my healing. To get past all the fear and pain, I had to educate myself using college level histories of religion textbooks that I checked out from the library. (I belong to a county system of libraries, and you can request any book in the county as well as the country(!) and ask to pick them up at the closest library to you.) I also bought books at used book stores as well as at our local public university book store.

These books led me to more sources using recommendations for further reading. I discovered many apparently well-known authors and books about this subject, especially to those graduates who received a degree in literature, sociology, anthropology, history, and of course, religious studies. My degree was in computers and accounting, so I was completely ignorant about where my faith came from. I had never questioned the Bible's beginnings, although I, like most people, knew it was part history book, part fable, and part true. I was a member of a church as an adult, as well.

What knocked me off my feet was seeing the memories of my young alters. They were frightened of God, scared of churches, and terrified of everybody who spoke in religious terms. They had been taught that thinking was not allowed or God would give more pain. They were taught that God would punish them for being bad if they did not obey our abusers to the letter. This programming had been backed up by incredibly stupid, blind and ignorant church members who supported my mother, who was a member of a large church. Members would cuddle my crying mother and yell at me to stop being such a trial to her, to be more obedient. My mother

attended church every Sunday, dead drunk. She would fall over and even wet herself on the pew. I was filthy, dirty from head to toe. After services, people would come over and soothe my mother, all the while dressing me down in the harshest terms allowable in talking to a child.

This idea my young alters had about a God who would only love us if we let adults hurt us was enforced by the multitudes of ignorant neighbors and school teachers and adults in general who had no idea of my home life. Of course, as a child I had no idea of anyone else's home life. I measured the world by what I lived with. For instance, I was punished by my first grade teacher, who spanked me for using dirty words. It completely went over her head what I was saying.

It was as if my world was made more miserable by religious people. When I was sick, scared or hungry, people always talked to me about how God loved me, and would take care of me, and I needed to be a good girl. The problem was they were talking about regular homelife. For me, "good" was being obedient to my abusers. "Good" was being hurt without too much fuss. "Good" was not being talkative or noisy. "Bad" was crying because I hurt. "Bad" was asking for food, water, or warmth. "Bad" was refusing to obey my abusers. So when people used the typical language of religion, they reinforced my brainwashing.

I have memories of countless adults admonishing me to work harder to be good and not be a bad girl, and help my mother, because moms always love their kids and know what's best for their little girls. My mother added to my confusion by saying how she loved me while she was hurting me, or telling me to go with that person and do what he wants and be a "good" girl.

What my abusers called love was what anybody normal would call hate. It was all the more confusing because my abusers lied to me about everything I was feeling and perceiving. For example, when my mother was

kicked out of the church, finally, my mother told me it was my fault for being so dirty and disobedient, crying all of the time, and demanding food. Although I hadn't a clue how to wash myself, feed myself or dress myself, I believed her.

I discovered through my reading how all religions that we know about came to be. I was devastated. It was clear to me that all people created whatever they need everywhere in the world, to live with the certainty of death and the still enduring mysteriousness of living. These scholarly books do NOT say there is no God. They simply recite the history of a religion, backed up by discovered writings about histories and travel and politics of the period.

I lost my faith. I became filled with rage and disgust at myself for being "tricked." I got into verbal fights with people over religion, community and the legal system. I lost my reason to exist and to live.

However, my alters rejoiced. They are now coming out, exploring and learning, playing for the first time. We are doing coloring and painting. We bought Barbie dolls—our first. They are speaking to me and our therapist. They are shyly sharing impressions, thoughts, needs.

I feel more complete, whole, with them being with me. My understanding of my culture, my education, my friends and American life in general have vastly improved. I didn't know what I was missing until my alters began sharing with me, but I have almost no emotions. I understood life intellectually only. Literally, I was whatever I read or saw. My job as an alter must have been to protect by being unaware of a feeling life.

However, my alters are much braver and happier since God does not exist. I am outnumbered by 50 to 1. I do not have their pain. I do not know how I was raised. I believed my parents did the best they could. I loved them. Now I am learning they never once tried to

Continued on page 3

be decent people in any way. They chose to live as evil as possible, in spite of numerous opportunities to improve themselves.

So I not only lost God, I lost my love for my parents. I am full of grief.

But now, the core person has come. She is relieved that there is much validation by our alters for what she experienced but was forced to deny. She is powerful. She can synthesize, a skill none of us possess. She still feels weak, scared, unable to do the job of living, but I see her as our only hope of healing. To heal, she needs no God existing. I am not needed anymore, and I rage about being only an alter. Our core person tells us she loves us, especially me, the hero. She says it often. She says all of us owe me our lives. That I know what decency is and how to live a decent life, and that is my gift to the system.

I want that to be true. I hope that is true. I do know I want to tell our story because there are not many who have to give up religion to heal. If you are in the same position, you are not alone.

MV

Therapist

I have found a safe place.
A safe person.
Someone who helps to find me,
but who accepts me where I am.
There is one who I trust.
Not because it is required
of me, but because she
waits patiently and gently
until I am ready
to express my pain.
We are held with caring.
Comforted with compassion.
And listened to without judgement.
Our deepest needs,
hurts and fears
Are understood.
I find new hope.
Hope that healing may come,
as I learn to trust,
accept
and love
all of who I am.

By KC 2000

MV



MANY THANKS TO OUR ANGELS!

Del Amo Hospital - Torrance, CA

Call Chris McMillin: (310) 530-1151 or (800) 533-5266

Forest View Hospital - Grand Rapids, MI

Call Bill van Harken: (616) 942-9610 or (800) 949-8439

River Oaks Hospital - New Orleans, LA

Call Martha Bujanda: (504) 734-1740 or (800) 366-1740

Timberlawn Mental Health System - Dallas, TX

Call Christie Clark: (214) 381-7181 or (800) 426-4944

Two Rivers Psychiatric Hospital - Kansas City, MO

Call David Tate: (816) 356-5688 or (800) 225-8577

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Theme Time Again!

Please send your ideas for next year's topics, both writing and art. MV wants to help provide solutions for your problem areas. We will announce the new themes in August, so send them now by surface mail (PO Box 2639, Cincinnati, OH 45201) Fax (513) 751-8060, or email me at LynnW@manyvoicespress.com

If you know of clinics or conferences that need flyers, please call us! Or if you have any mailing lists that might be appropriate, please let us know. Thank you for your support! - Lynn W., Editor



Reaching, By Annabelle of Dawn & Co.

Spirituality—All Views

Please understand that this is written as an adult years after both of my parents passed away. Most of my child parts will disagree with this writing as they believe that either love doesn't exist or love is a negative trick to play on someone.

I do have a very deep spiritual part. Sometimes it led to suicidal things because I felt I'd be better off in Heaven than on Earth. But mostly, my spiritual part provided me with something to cling to as well as an explanation of why bad things happen—though the explanation of bad stuff didn't come along until later. I needed God—and still do.

Why does God let bad things happen? He doesn't. This brings up the question of human freedom and the responsibility for sin and the actions of individuals. In contrast to the idea that God is the primary cause of human sin, God is neither ignorant nor indifferent to it. Rather, humans are faced with clear choices, and God longs to pour out His blessings. Often it is easier to blame God than to face things.

God is not the source of hate and evil. God is the source of unconditional love and faith and hope. God loves his children, and like a loving father, he gives his children the freedom to make their own choices. We, as individuals, have the choice to accept or reject him. Why? Because if God created all humankind to always love him, we'd be like his slaves or robots—and worship him only because we were pre-programmed to do so. He wants us to love him because we want to—not because he said we have to. To those of us who seek him, he gives all the guidance we need—his Son, the Holy Spirit, our sense of a higher power, the Bible and many good books, the living church, friends, our consciences, small miracles, etc., and yet many people turn away.

When I was growing up, I (like many others of us) had no other person to talk to. So my spiritual part talked to God. My strong faith in a loving Heavenly Father is the only thing that kept me going at times. There had to

be love somewhere. It was the only thing I had to hang on to. He didn't let me down—he was always there deep inside when we turned to him. Often I hated him for what was going on, but he was always there when I came back to him...And we talked again.

I wrote a little poem that I'd like to share with you. (Maybe if I see it often enough, I'll start to believe the last line of it:

You are a Child of God
You are loved in heaven
and on earth.
It is not necessary
to be perfect
to be loved.

By Anna of Pat's Flock

Have you ever heard a born-again Christian speak out against rape and abuse?

Well I'm an ordained minister, and born-again, too. And I work to prevent rape and help survivors.

It was not always so. As a child I was raped repeatedly. I asked God to stop the abuse. He did not.

I felt God let me down, or that there was no God. I became an atheist.

Years went by and many people—and the Bible—told me there was a God, and that he loved me.

Eventually, I had a born-again experience. Still, I wondered why God allowed me to be raped and abused, emotionally and physically.

While reading the Bible I found that Jesus had to die a painful death and descend into Hell in order to save us from an eternity apart from God.

If Jesus had had little pain, and died of natural causes, we would not be able to go to Heaven. "The better good" was achieved by Jesus' suffering.

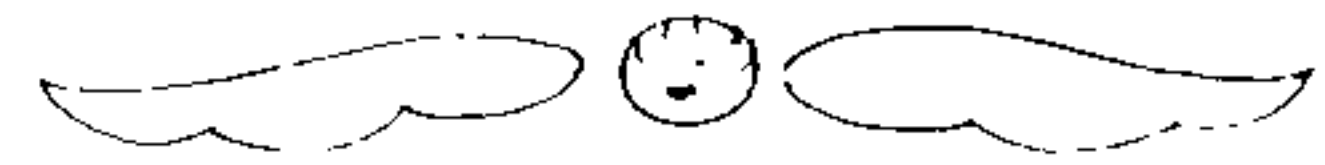
There is no question in my mind that had I not been abused, I would not be an anti-abuse and anti-rape activist today.

I believe God allowed me to be harmed in order to bring about His will

in my life: that I speak out, as a Christian, against rape.

It is my hope that all survivors of rape and abuse will seek and find God's love.

By Sally B.



Regarding our spiritual beliefs, I would like to speak for the company. I believe in God and am proud to say that this has been an important part of my survival over these years. I trust in God and believe He did not put me on this earth to be abused. I used to think God was cruel for having "put me" in such a precarious position. As I have grown in recovery, I have begun to let go of the anger I feel towards God and redirect it to where it belongs. I do have some inside who would disagree with this notion, although I think that the more we as a collective turn to faith and prayer, the more we as a unit are able to heal. I trust that it was not His plan for me to endure such pain, and that my parents were very sick (still are) and therefore inflicted their sickness onto our body and us.

I am just beginning to remember some days of being little and it has been quite difficult to cope with. I find myself constantly praying for God's vengeance to come upon the abusers. I believe that He who is their ultimate judge knows the truth even better than I or we do. I trust God will punish them and I refuse to live my life with hate in my heart. I go to church on Sundays and pray nearly every day for God to remove the hate from our heart. I know they (the abusers) will never own up to what they did, and I can't go on with my life with all that resentment.

I used to think that forgiving them meant that I was exonerating them from their sins. Now I think of forgiveness as my ability to let go of the hate and anger and give it to its rightful owner, and that is God. They can't lie to him. He knows all. They can't manipulate Him, as He will not allow it. Children are a gift from Him and it is unfortunate that human sin

will batter and bruise this gift so freely. They had no business having children at all, but I am not going to go on hating myself for their sins.

It has become more and more clear to me of my total innocence as I see my little boy grow up before my eyes. He is two years old now. I can see, as I watch him, that I was not at fault for the abuse. No one asked to be abused and no one deserves it, either. God will be the ultimate judge in the end.

That gives me comfort. I know there are some inside who, if they had the chance, would enjoy inflicting pain on the abusers, but what will that do for us, I ponder? It may be satisfying for the moment to inflict such revenge, but would poison our heart and soul for the rest of our lives. I want to free myself of the pain, so I can go on living, and find peace in our heart.

By Kat for Dawn and company



I appreciated CE's article on low self-esteem (MV Dec.2000). To me, this is just a recent realization, that my self-esteem must come from what God thinks about me. The evaluations from people—past, future and

present—don't carry the weight they once did. His evaluation, internalized, has caused me to believe Him, far beyond any others' evaluations. Wow! Has this changed me! Even the way I move and walk is different. For the first time in my life I like the way I move and walk.

It took me more than a year to do this. I was given homework to list 35 expectations of a good mother. (I later did one for father.) Then one by one I looked up Scripture about how God said He would meet that expectation. For instance, "a good father praises me." After I'd looked up and written my words about what God said He would do, I turned to my parent in my mind. I released the parent from ever doing that (and let the feelings be whatever) or thanked the parent for doing that. Then, I turned to God and told Him what He said He'd do, and asked Him to do that for me. As necessary, I since have taken certain expectations to God and asked Him what He thinks.

God, the Holy Spirit, ministered and ministers that parent quality to me. In effect, I feel He has reparented me. I hope this makes sense.

By Janice Kay

MV

Editor's Note: We received *wonderful* response from many of you on Spirituality! We can't print it all in this issue, but if you sent us an article on this subject, I promise it will appear very soon! - Thanks so much for sharing! - Lynn W.



The Holy Magic Mountain

I woke up with the moon shining full
in my face.

My sleeping bag felt tight
And pieces of the straw mattress
poked my neck.

I listened to the night sounds
of the village.

The small field rat munched seed
on the window ledge beside my head.

A water buffalo sighed
a low pitched moan.

Somewhere a baby cried and
its mother cooed softly like a
mourning dove.

A rush of wind rustled the thatch on
the stone house
built into the side of the granite
mountain.

The tinkling bells, a Tibetan mule
train, sounded far away,
Perhaps from another mountain,
or deep in the valley.

They take rice down into the valley
and bring kerosene
to the mountain people.
Every once in a while dogs bark
back and forth
as if assuring each other, that
between them,
this village is safe.

The old grandmother's stomach
rumbles as she shifts
her mat closer to the dying embers
in the fire pit.

From the window I see,
rising above the clouds,
Shining silver in the moon light,
the fish tail mountain.

On the stone path below light
footsteps brush the path
As a fakhr passes through the village.
Far above, from my darkened window
I send a thought of peace.

The holy man stops his slow steady
pace

And looks up to my window, raises
his hand in blessing,
And continues on his way.

*By Echo and Cathy
for the Coalition of Joy*

MV

Therapists' Page

By Rev. Kindred Cuzzort

The Reverend Kindred Cuzzort is a Christian mission director in St. Joseph, Missouri.

Ed. Note: *Many Voices* welcomes therapists of all beliefs, or non-beliefs, to share their ideas and perspectives for healing with our readers on this page. MV is open to all positive, helpful input.

...and of a Sound Mind.

Isn't that our goal when we seek professional help? To have a sound mind. The entire scripture reads: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (II Tim 1:7.) We need to be in control of what happens to us—that would be power; and we need to be reassured we're validated, or important to someone; i.e., we need love. My approach to mental health is simple and Bible based. "By His stripes, we are made whole." and "You shall call his name Wonderful Counselor," both found in Isaiah. It does not say made normal, or made like everyone else. The Bible says, "made whole."

How does a minister speak with such authority on the subject of mental health? Because I have been on both sides of the mental health 'line.' I was diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder or Multiple Personality Disorder, before much social awareness of the problem. The story of my life. There was no category for me. I had no nice neat place to fit.

God's Word says a double minded man is unstable in all his ways. I was definitely unstable, but not insane. At the time my mind began to shatter, it kept me sane. When a child can't cope with fear and confusion, dissociation is a 'safe coping mechanism,' a survival technique. It keeps life at a 'safe' distance, if you will. I was diagnosed and treated for some time, actually three different times in my life.

Let me share the completeness of God's mental health program. I am now an ordained minister running a mission in my community, as well as taking worship to a state mental health facility, and ministering to individuals in the Dept. of Corrections, and chaplain both to Police and Firefighters. I was an affiliate member of the International Society for the Study of Dissociation for four years.

This power of God is amazing and available to all who ask.

Other people can assist you and certainly we need encouragement and guidance, but guidance and encouragement toward your goal. God was very creative when He made each of us. Many gifts are quite varied among us. There is no reason whatsoever, to annihilate individuality in the name of mental health. Even though the Lord has connected my awareness and my memory, I am still just as different from those around me as I ever was. I just understand now that I am different and it's okay—as a matter of fact, that's the way God made me.

My first attempt at therapy was an overwhelming disaster. My second attempt at therapy, however, provided insight into the circumstances. I received a lot of understanding about my diagnosis, but no comfort in any other means of coping. I had a label, no cure, and no medication for such a situation. I was offered, however, the option of disability. I didn't feel disabled. My problem seemed to be a matter of being unable to harness and control my "overabilities." All of my personalities (total count—thirty-nine) had a few things in common. The therapist told me the most predominant common denominator was "some sort of a religious experience." All the personalities remembered April 5, 1968 (Many were not even an age that 1968 fit chronologically) and there were no new personalities added to the survival group after that time. "Did I have any idea what that was about?"

Did I ever? That was my hope, my solution, my salvation—the day I was born again!

I gave you that history to tell you this. If God can take the Dis out of my Multiple Personality Disorder, He's able to offer you the same. It's truly that simple. I had to give the fear and

doubt to the Lord. It was time to quit letting the past control the present. I was giving up good quality present and future time, by not letting go of the past. I am not suggesting denial, nor am I suggesting anyone abandon therapy. I am, however, suggesting that we insist upon health.

Three attempts at therapy. "It's difficult to get DID's or MPD's to stick with therapy," the first two therapists said. I'm sure there is validity in that. I was not happy with just a diagnosis; I wanted nothing less than a stable life. My (our) problem was "Survival Groups" (Emotional Entourages, Troupes, Personal Corporations) are very goal and task oriented. Every time we find ourselves "out" or involved, it's for a specific circumstance—a mission. I didn't understand why suddenly we have a person (the therapist) that specifically asked for one and all of us, just to talk. It wasn't an avoidance of truth or health, it was too foreign to even comprehend!

My third attempt at therapy was different and successful for three reasons:

1. "I" went with a "Corporate Goal."
2. "I" sought a therapist who would be a teacher to help "us" learn how "group living" could exist in the customs of a together-minded society.
3. God had miraculously given me the ability to be aware amongst "my selves." He connected my awareness between the alters, not combined them, and instilled a desire for the present.

The third time was successful. Of course, with awareness of "each other," the shock of potential "new acquaintances" was diminished. And the ability to find some group humor was really therapeutic. Proverbs says, "A merry heart does good like a medicine." So with that information and a level of corporate awareness—we were off to meet Therapist #3 with a specific statement

for "whoever" met him. "We don't want to integrate; we all want our own bodies." It was a wonderful ice breaker and delightfully positive ground to begin. It also let him know what he had to deal with. He honored my religious beliefs and really stayed in control of therapy without controlling us. It very quickly became a place the entire "Entourage" wanted to go.

Therapy became learning to interact by choice, rather than reacting in fear. The progress came quickly—three years. If God can do that for me, I know He can and will do it for you.

Just as the problem was multiple, so is the blessing, I now know. Not only can I speak to you with the gratitude and authority of someone who has seen Yeshua and experienced His healing power, I can tell you that each of my personalities had problems and Yeshua gave me peace, multiplied. Some of the personalities experienced depression; I mean the kind that makes you not to want to leave the house, and question the reason you were ever born. Others had low self-esteem which got me into several

messes trying to prove I had a value, hoping someone would find me worthwhile. The anger, aggression, inferiority complexes, confusion, trust issues, control issues were as numerous as within any group of dysfunctional individuals.

MPD/DID is a diagnosis for many issues, tucked, hidden and pigeon-holed within the shattered mind. I believe it's a wonderful coping mechanism for a gifted, but frightened and confused child; and it's an overpowering burden and chaos for an adult who just desperately wants to participate in life, productively, without being a spectacle.

God's Word refers to situations that can cause a child's spirit to be broken. I believe by the grace of God and His protection, I was spared a broken spirit by a divided awareness and memory. I didn't mind being shattered, I didn't remember life any other way, but I was awfully tired of feeling scattered. Life took so much effort when I was always trying to find out what was going on, and what I was expected to fix. Being responsible for everything, when you

don't know what has happened, is as dishonest as denial of guilt when you are responsible. I needed to know what was going on in the life everyone called "mine."

I have this fact from God's Word: "God is not the author of confusion but of peace." I did get to realize up close and personally: He is God and He is the one keeping track, keeping score, and settling things, not me. I had to let go of past disappointments and forgive myself, because God already had, and I had to forgive others for what I was unable to look at or cope with, all those years ago. I have to continue to forgive, because now with connected awareness life can still be unsettling; however, I no longer have to maintain an endless vigil to ascertain others' expectations of me—I simply trust God. This did not eliminate or integrate alters; it was simply a matter of tearing down the walls between them.

God tore down the walls and connected my mind. "He made me whole."

MV

The Realization

I go through the gate that blocks my memories and find a world I don't understand. A world that is backwards in emotions, dark in thoughts, and randomly changes, so I lose my way quickly.

I wonder if this gate should remain locked, sealed forever to never allow another to pass through as I do. I wonder if walking through the passages of time that have long since past is wise in thought and action. Yet unseen but felt images surround me and take hold of me, forcing my fate to enter into this forbidden world.

Days and nights pass quickly, yet untouched by any memories I can grasp. Time has become something with no substance and no understanding. I see people move through time and space as if nothing had ever changed. They move around me as though I am a ghost, unseen; their lives pass through me, they feel untouched by my presence, as if I can only see them, and I am but air or vapor as they walk by.

Lost in a maze of tall thick walls with only the moon and stars to guide me to the end. I turn quickly to go back to the beginning of where the gate was, but find that it is no longer there. I try to climb the walls of this prison that entombs me and find the harder I climb, the taller the walls become.

It seems an endless ascent. I realize I will never see what has entrapped me. I go forward, left then right, seeing people stand and stare into past images of what life held for them. I turn to leave, to feel a presence that is not friend, but the keeper of souls in this world. Inside my chest is a vacant heart that beats faster as I realize there is no leaving. An eternal walk through a maze of hate, horror, anger, despair and humiliation.

My voice is lost for the world has taken its toll upon me now, my arms weak from fighting the escape I long for, my legs tremble from the journey that has no rest.

Then it occurs to me...

I realize this is my Hell.

I fall into the abyss of apathy and await my sentence for the crimes I have committed. But no judge or jury is there, just my being, my essence that accuses me day and night, a continuous nightmare from which there is no waking, the voices and people around me show I am not alone fully, yet their substance is untouched...

I stop.

I can't move anymore.

I am trapped in a world that is seen by me alone. I can't be found, for there is no map to find me. The moon and stars fade, my heart slows its beats, and the maze becomes my home, of people and places I don't know.

This is the end.

The final moment when I realize, I am not an "I" but a "we"....

*By Cath, Diane, Mary,
Melanie, Amy and all*

MV

Partner's Page

May Be The Force Be With You

By Richard

(Editor's note: Richard Sinclair and his wife are born-again Christians, so much of this article is written in those terms. But the truths they have found are universal, and can be applied to many belief systems.)

"You've set yourself a difficult task, Richard," said the minister who married my wife and me. "The odds are against you. I've seen marriages fail that had fewer challenges than yours. There's no way you're going to do it without God's help."

If I had to name just one thing that has helped me support my wife during her long, difficult healing process it would be my Christian faith.

Destiny

Most important is the belief that I am doing what God wants me to do. That belief is rooted in the unusual way my wife and I met.

At the age of 39, I wasn't married, and I was worried that I might never meet the woman God wanted me to marry. One day in a local church, I found an intriguing little brochure describing a novena (a nine-day Catholic devotion) to St. Jude, patron saint of hopeless causes. The brochure claimed that if one prayed a novena to St. Jude, the prayer would be answered, and had never been known to fail.

"Well, I'm not Catholic," I thought as I read the brochure, "but I sure feel hopeless about finding a wife."

So I followed the outline in this little pray-by-the-numbers kit, asking St. Jude to help me find the woman that God wanted me to marry. The weekend after the ninth day, I met my future wife. The Bible states in Romans 8:28, "And we know that things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose."

Prayer

Daily prayer is vital. The tradition of faith I grew up in says that God cares about us individually, and answers our prayers. Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-11, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be

opened unto you... What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye, then... know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"

I believe that God hears my prayers, and that His help is the main reason my wife and I are still together.

My wife and I also pray together daily. In our spiritual tradition, there is a belief that "the family who prays together stays together." Here's how we pray together:

- We first chose a regular time to pray together; in our case, just before bed.

- We hold hands, and each asks the other what he or she needs to pray about.

- We pray silently, to talk to God in our own way.

- When each finishes, we signal the other with a quick hand-squeeze.

- Then we both we pray aloud the Lord's Prayer (also called the Our Father).

My wife and I find our marriage works better when we pray together regularly. We still have problems, but somehow we get through them more smoothly.

Self-talk

Prayer also improves my attitude toward my wife.

"Your self-talk, the internal messages that you hear inside your head, determines how you treat your spouse," said the minister who led the Engagement Seminar we took before we got married.

That's been important for me. With all the setbacks and frustrations we have encountered, my thoughts can become very negative.

"It's not good to ask God to just take away feelings," said Helen, one of my wife's therapists. Helen is also an ordained minister. "Negative feelings are a sign you have something to deal with. Better to ask God to help you transform those negative thoughts into loving thoughts."

That technique has definitely helped me be kinder and more patient with my wife.

Wisdom

I don't know how often I've thought (or heard others say) that it takes the wisdom of Solomon to love a multiple. Fortunately, Christianity makes finding wisdom easy.

I was walking to the commuter train one morning, fuming about our marital problems, and it occurred to me that part of our problem is that I make a lot of mistakes. Then I recalled that the Bible says in James 1:5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

That morning I began to pray for wisdom. I didn't suddenly gain the wisdom of Solomon, but I don't seem to make as many mistakes, either.

Setting an example (or not!)

While preparing this article, I asked my wife to identify any of my spiritual beliefs or techniques that seemed especially useful to us.

"You managed to love me, and care about me, and want to be with me when I was the most unlovable, uncaring human you could come across," she said. "That's had a big influence in my life. I knew that strength came from someplace, and I knew you were a Christian, so I figured it came from there. That made it possible for me to believe that God could love me, too."

You can become a spiritual role model to your partner, but it works in a paradox – you become a good spiritual role model by never being a spiritual role model at all.

"Don't try to be an example," said Helen. "That's usually a failure because your attention shifts from 'How am I relating to God?' to 'How do I look to my spouse?' If you're living your faith, if you're walking the walk and talking the talk, then being an example is a moot issue."

Your partner's path

Another facet of relating to your partner spiritually is keeping hands-off his or her spiritual path.

"The fact you didn't insist I become a Christian in our early days was helpful," my wife said. "You made it clear that you liked my spirituality, but you never crammed Christianity down my throat."

That wasn't easy. My wife has always had a spiritual streak, but it has sometimes been expressed in rather bizarre ways.

Her spiritual path began with Alcoholics Anonymous years before we met. She was abused by a Satanic ritual cult, which (as far as I can tell) totally destroys any sense of faith or morality. AA gave my wife a "church" (belief in a higher power, a set of morals and values, and a supportive group) at a time when she had none.

"I'd say that AA and the other 12-step programs have been crucial to more of my clients than anything else," commented Helen.

For a long time during our early days, my wife didn't believe in anything but AA – not God or angels or heaven or the Bible, nothing. She has gone the energy/crystal route, and the find-peace-in-nature route, and the psychic energy route, and the ever-popular I-hate-God phase.

I was hard for me to watch her flounder around like that, but one thing helped me stand by and let her do her spiritual thing. Not long after we met, I went on a weekend retreat with a church group. I was struggling with the fact that my new girlfriend was not a Christian, something I had pretty much required for anyone I would marry.

I prayed about it all weekend and, finally, late Sunday afternoon, I got an answer in that "still, small voice" the Bible describes in 1 Kings 19:12. I knew nothing about her Satanic ritual abuse history, nothing about her Dissociative Identity Disorder. (Neither did she.) But I did know about AA, and that she had been sober for seven years at that time. The voice I heard deep inside my mind said, "No one could do what she has done unless I was with her. When I require more of her, I will lead her."

That was all. No burning bushes. But it was one of the few times I have felt God answer a prayer directly, and that memory helped me get out of the way and let my wife follow her own spiritual path.

"I think it's really important to honor whatever manifestations of spiritual connection that the survivor has at the moment, and not criticize," said Helen. "They don't have to look right on the outside. What matters is a growing reliance on God or a higher power. The least helpful thing you can do for anyone who is building a connection to God is to pick at how they do it."

My wife eventually converted to Christianity. "For me, Christianity was the way to go," said my wife. "Unknown to me, it would play a critical role because I was Satanically abused."

Spiritual counseling

Spiritual guidance and counseling is another important part of spiritual growth for my wife and me. We are fortunate that the minister who married us is also a marriage counselor. He got in on the ground floor, counseling us individually off-and-on for several years. We've been in couples counseling with him for several months, and he has helped us a lot. And our individual counselors also understand the spiritual side of recovery and support.

The basics

I realize this article is seriously loaded with Christianity, and I'd like to boil it down to a practical set of tools that anyone can apply.

Based on my experience, a support person's spiritual fortitude depends on:

- Belief in a higher power.
- Belief that higher power can help.
- Contact with that higher power in some fashion.
- Trusting that higher power to guide your life.
- If your belief system has a method of worshipping with your partner, use it.
- Seek the wisdom that your belief system teaches.
- A counselor who understands spirituality.

May The Force be with you...

If there's one thought I want to leave you with, it is that spirituality is vital to a support person's relationship with his or her partner.

"I'd think it would be a lot harder to live through a significant other's recovery if you had no spiritual grounding," said Helen. "I'd think of it as just staying connected to God through prayer, and being willing to pray for the wisdom to know what to do, and for the strength to do it."

"You need a belief system that incorporates hope," said Joan, another of my wife's therapists. "Something that says, yes, somewhere down the road, things will get better. Sometimes that little candle of faith is all you'll have to keep you from turning tail and running when things seem darkest."

MV



The Jesus of the Many Hands

Spirituality and Recovery

By Rick S.

I have long thought of myself as a "spiritual" person, even during long stretches when I considered myself an atheist. However, my faith in religion was severely shaken by 17 years of ritual abuse. Not only did the ritual abuse aggravate my PTSD from childhood incest abuse, it (falsely) portrayed me as a person unworthy of receiving love or compassion. The injuries went deep. This is a brief account of how I have come back from the damage that was done to me.

Only after I escaped from the clutches of the cult did I begin to discover things about why I felt so disconnected, angry, depressed and anxious. Practically at the same time as I was getting out of the cult (12 years ago) I was also discovering what my incest memories really meant—it was not love, it was abuse. The way my mother sexually abused me was in a "gentle" manner, which impressed upon me the false expectation that only through being exploited sexually could I receive the love and attention I craved. Even after several years of intense therapy for the PTSD and cult/incest recovery I was perplexed to find myself yearning, in effect, to be sexually abused again in order to get my emotional needs met, even though I intellectually knew better. I can now see that it was the same crying to be exploited that made me susceptible to being drawn into the cult in the first place.

It took me a long time to get in touch with my suppressed anger at the sexual abuse and my perpetrators. Talk therapy and medication helped me to deal with the more severe symptoms of my dissociation and depression by containing my self-destructive impulses and habits, as well as my panic attacks. But I still felt an inner emptiness, wondering how long I would have to keep coming to therapy and pour out my grief before any deep and lasting recovery would come. So I asked my therapist out of sheer desperation if there wasn't anything more to recovery than weekly sessions of me expressing anger at my perps and grieving the abuse and all the loss it caused me. My progress seemed to be inching forward—I wanted it to move faster. I wanted to see some dramatic results, not just the grind of two steps forward and one step back.

So my therapist mentioned that Buddhism might be helpful. Though not a Buddhist herself, she had read some books by the Dalai Lama and Pema Chodron that supported what she regarded as a holistic support for recovery of the whole person.

I was at first worried about this religion since it preached detachment, which

sounded to me like more dissociation—cutting off my feelings rather than coming to terms with them. I had already experienced a lot of numbing-out during dissociation. I didn't want a religion that would do more of the same. But if there was any chance it could give me relief from my suffering, I was in favor of at least giving it a try. At first I tried Buddhist meditating—but it put me in a numb state, not a state of real calm. Plus, there were rituals and chanting which triggered even more dissociation. Further, some kinds of Buddhism I looked into emphasized "purification" which was a heavy trigger for me back to the obsession with "purity" and lack of self-worth that was drummed into me in the cult as they deepened my dependency on them through making me feel enormously guilty. But there were several "schools" of Buddhism for me to investigate, some of which did not teach meditating or purification at all and had only a light amount of ritual.

One of these schools of Buddhism emphasizes compassion and nurturance, yet does not require me to sit still numbly or undergo elaborate rituals that would remind me of the cult abuse. This form of Buddhism, called Shin (Jodo Shinshu), is based upon what it calls "Other Power"—somewhat similar to the "Higher Power" idea of 12-step recovery in AA. The "Other Power" in this case is a loving Buddha called Amida that shines on all people indiscriminately. The individual is not expected to achieve release from suffering through his own hard efforts or through rituals, but instead through the working of the Other Power. This I found to be a tremendously relieving discovery. I had spent so many years struggling, fighting hard, crying, wringing my hands, and striving to find my way to peace of mind, but the harder I tried the further it seemed to be from me. Shin Buddhism put me at ease, gave me space to heal and grow. Further, it didn't place any demands upon me the way the cult did, which was a big plus.

Buddhism has not been a total answer for me. I had (successful) surgery two years ago, but the hospital experience brought up old abuse anxiety, since I had been sexually abused in a medical clinic as a teenager. That plus the necessary use of pain medication following the operation disinhibited me to the point that I went through a kind of a breakdown as I came down off the pain meds. Though I was between a rock and a hard place, I finally decided against hospitalization for obvious reasons. Instead, I was prescribed two relatively new antipsychotic meds that

brought me back to sanity and helped me to feel in charge of my feelings and impulses for the first time. But Buddhism is something I turn to for the deeper peace of mind that no drug or talk therapy can give me.

I know that some people may never trust spirituality because of the severity of their abuse history. I thought I was doomed forever to remain in this category because of the injuries of ritual abuse. The mere mention of religion used to make me angry. It took a lot of searching for me to finally find a spirituality that fit my situation and needs. To a large extent I have forged my own spirituality using the tools given to me by Buddhism. This spirituality recognizes me as a human being, and the fact that I am full of imperfections and problems makes me all the more worthy of compassion and nurturance. The Other Power is the source of that compassion and nurturance. At times I feel wonderfully enveloped in the healing embrace of the Other Power. It gives me an inner meaning to life which sustains me at times when I start to feel myself drifting off into dissociation or self-harming feelings and impulses. It does not heal my dissociation and depression, but it sure helps.

MV



Spirituality

By Kiki

I've had what could be called an "evolving" spiritual side of life. The process of this evolution has helped me keep alive at various times in my life, as I'll try to share.

When I was a very young child, I believed that God was a big Santa Claus-sized man who wore a white, soft-feeling, ankle length and flowing robe. He looked just like the pictures in Sunday school. He was, to me, the embodiment of gentleness, peace and safety. When the abuse got to be too much for my smallness to cope with, I remember closing my eyes very tightly and seeing him. I would run to him and he would gather me up in his massive arms and hold me warm, free from harm...for as long as it took. I called him "God." I felt safe in him.

As survival became harder in my teen years, it also became harder for me to believe in this God of caring. I began to silently question him in my darkest moments. "If you're a God of love, then why do you allow my abusers to treat me this way? Or, are you like them in that you get pleasure watching me suffer and waiting for me to cry out in defeat and pain? Are you waiting for me to come crawling to you as they do, asking for forgiveness and confessing to things I never did, or believed in, to make you feel superior?"

These questions began to arouse in me that same feeling of extreme anger I'd felt when my father first betrayed my trust by raping me and then offering me to others. Now, I felt that the God that I had believed to be my refuge and last hope of feeling true safety had disappeared.

With the disappearance of a way to feel safe, I lost all desire to survive. Instead, I channeled my energies and emotions of abandonment, anger and betrayal into one mission: Freedom from emotional and physical pain. The only way I had experienced this freedom was through being beaten or tortured into a state of unconsciousness which on a few occasions left me near death.

With death as my primary goal, I would taunt my torturers and provoke them—using and twisting their games, or so I thought, in a vain attempt to escape the emotional pain I felt. Along with this, I took unnecessary risks—abusing drugs, driving at dangerous speeds, walking through neighborhoods I didn't belong in, and blatantly trying to commit suicide several times. No matter what I did to get out of life, I would always wind up alive.

This type of insanity went on for quite a few years before it finally dawned on me that I was continuing to be a victim to what

I had grown used to since my childhood, and that was abuse. The difference now being that in most cases I was the cause of my abuse, instead of an outside source. After many months of thought and safety-contracting, I came to believe in the following:

There is an "Evil God" and a "Good God." Those two "Gods" are equal in power. The first manifests itself through disease, war, poverty, hunger, pain, abuse, etc. The latter appears in the exact opposite manner by helping scientists find ways to fight disease, enlightening people as to how to find peaceful ways to resolve conflict, and by raising the public's consciousness of hunger and abuse, etc.

Then, there is the Higher Power of my understanding that I have come to call "The Force." I know it as a feeling, not a being (this is why it's not male or female.) I feel closest to it when I'm in the mountains. I guess the easiest way to explain the Force, is that what the Evil God and the Good God create, are temporary situations and changing circumstances. They seem to fight each other for possession of "souls" who are people who claim allegiance to them, as if having more "souls" makes one God more powerful than the other.

In my life I have seen that when the Evil God and the Good God get out of hand (such as they did in my life through forms of severe pain and abuse) the Force would protect me by way of letting me "go away" through the gift of dissociation. Those were and are sometimes the only ways that I can stay alive today to fulfill a greater purpose that is ahead of me. What that purpose is, I have absolutely no idea. I can only believe that there is one—which is why I haven't been permitted to die yet!

When my task has been completed and the Force's need for me to be in this place called Earth is over, I will be able to go where there is no pain, no fear, no struggling, no hunger, no fighting. All the spirits of children who have been hurt like me—we will be able to play together there. All the people who have felt pain, and that I have helped to face death with dignity, we'll be able to hug once again, and they will be healthy (especially the one in the Kelly green sweat suit.) All the people who have known me—we will greet each other joyfully when I get there!

Still, when I begin to have a slip and think that death is the only way out, I try to remember the times that no matter how hard I tried to die, or various others tried to kill me, I could never seem to get there from here. This reminds me of the saying,

"The only way out, is sometimes through." I see it as meaning that the only way I can get out of this life is to go through it.

Above all, I do my personal best to keep an attitude of gratitude. I need to keep in mind that I am a good person! I'm never alone, because I believe that the Force has been, is and always will be here to protect me by any means necessary. There is hope! Good will triumph—I am living proof of it!

MV

My spirituality played a huge role in my integrations. My alter Suzanne held many hurtful memories. She wrote this poem just before integration. My faith and prayer, through Christianity, gave me courage to move forward. That belief system gave me the security I had never felt as a child. And I knew that dissociation was a gift from God...

Integrations

When I release
Myself in death
Will you pray for my soul
That it be reunited
With my creator, Susan
Who will become whole.
A product of my imagination
Will become known.
For I am not flesh,
Yet sometimes control, So I am told.
I do not understand
How this can be so,
Just know, the Lord will take away
the tears
Of long ago.
Let my passion come from Him,
And the hurt of rejection disappear
from within.
I will be alone no longer!
Nor a soul divided!
But a new creation
Which the Lord has given
Another Chance
To Live
AGAIN

By Suzanne

MV

Finding the Seeds of Love

By Ligia

"If you build castles in the air, don't think that your work is lost; they're where they should be. Now, the only things that are missing are the foundations under them." (Henry David Thoreau)

The mind is a kind of field that extends far beyond the brain and that is as integrated in the universal mind as the sea waves. Does it seem a mystery? It's like the sea for a frog who lives stuck in a well; can the frog imagine the sea, having a well as a reference?

The "well" for us, humans, is the duality, the separateness. That's all we can see and all we see is through this. What's beyond duality, beyond all referentials, we can't conceive; we even doubt it. We see it as a mystery. In this meaning, the nature of our Eternal Being, even if it's our own essence, is entirely mysterious, transcendent.

When we ask our Eternal Being – the God inside of us – for help, He always answers. He always comes to help. However, it's most likely that we can't immediately understand the help He is offering us. But if we pay attention and if we observe carefully, we'll finally understand what we're looking for.

A healing arises from an absolute and perplexing simplicity. There are no "tricks." There's only mystery before the misunderstanding. The magic perceived by the audience comes from their limited view and from their lack of information. When what is behind the magician's sleeve is revealed, the illusion is gone.

We suggest that readers notice the "backstage" movement, checking by themselves to make a step-by-step evaluation, becoming deeply aware of the mind's true nature. The healing involves extremely subtle aspects of a mind. It also involves four major truths: the existence of suffering; the cause of a suffering provoked by ignorance; the end of the suffering, and the method you use to stop this suffering.

The mental equanimity, the supreme serenity, whatever name we choose to apply to healing doesn't depend, actually, on the method we're following or the practice that we chose. All are equally good. The way doesn't accomplish itself, we bring to it our

proper or improper mental attitude. We all carry the seeds of a divine condition and what separates us from this condition is our blurred mentality. When we correct our way of thinking, the crystalline mind reveals itself.

The Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung stated that *"Who looks at the outside, dreams; who looks at the inside, wakes up."* Therefore, when we work to solve a problem, when focusing our attention to our inner self, we focus the nature of our inner space and the pure luminosity of our mind. In this way, we behold the natural condition of our mind; problems are visualized at a wider angle of view, more clearly. Your real nature is revealed: dream, illusion.

When we see a film, the identification with the characters is immediate. Although it's not clear that we're dealing with a fiction, our emotions arise and we're able to imagine and connect with the fictional beings. Of course this is completely illusory. But even so, we enjoy the mind's fundamental and beautiful dance, producing transitory and swift images as the story moves along. What we understand as a "reality of life" isn't that different.

When seeing a film the realistic experience is created by a combination of internal causes – mental marks associated to emotions – and factors coming from the physical senses. As a result, fear, hope, anger, pride, envy, desires, ignorance, mental concepts, greed, rage, time, justice, right and wrong, stinginess arise. Exactly the same process occurs when our so-called "real" experiences happen.

When we notice the nature of reality which is beyond the transformations and all reference points, beyond the space, the time, the name or form, beyond the purpose, beyond the right and wrong, all games are seen as what they really are: games. They are models formed from common, fundamental energy.

They give us a sensation of reality because we are fixated on them. But they're illusions, for they arise from references and have no genuine substance. However, as a bell that rings, they're perfect in their finitude, a wonderful manifestation of the basic nature acting under the conditions of life. The freshness and the relief of this understanding are blessings from our Eternal Being.

In a similar way, when there is a problem, we must know that it's related to energy conditions. And when these causes and conditions change, the problem changes too, or even disappears. It is important in any situation not to fear the chaos, because from this chaos something new may come. After all, man is a being in an on-going evolution.

So just as deep wounds of the body sometimes result in scars, there are sometimes scars left in the psyche, due to some past bad feelings. However, when we remember them, we can see that they brought fundamental transformation points in our life. And the final result is always positive.

We all have seeds of love in our heart, but many times they are so covered, so hidden that we become sad, anguished and we move away from our ideals and dreams. We all have the capability of reconnecting with our true essence – our Eternal Being – recovering the joy of living and the inner peace. Usually we've got to work diligently, to find this ideal state of maturity and happiness; but in truth, nothing can stop us from succeeding. We can stumble many times along the way, but what really matters is the final result.

There's an interesting saying: *"If it weren't for the knots, the bamboos would grow faster; however they would fall at the first blow of wind."*

When searching for a way to uproot the causes of our inner conflicts, we face the many knots inside ourselves.

We learn that without the knots, we wouldn't be where we are now. We know better than to claim that we've found the last truth. Actually, we're looking for it. The great philosopher from the Ancient Times, Sêneca, had good advice for his followers. He used to say: *"Don't you ever trust a man who says he found the truth. You'd rather trust those who say that they're searching for the truth."*

Studying the human course in search for a better understanding of oneself, we find that under several aspects, the knots or the crises are, at the end, the best blessings that could have happened to people and countries, since they bring progress. Creativity is born from the anguish and a beautiful day comes from a dark storm. It's during a crisis that the invention, the discovery, the mediation and the big strategies of love originate.

Who overcomes a crisis overcomes himself. Sometimes, it seems easier to blame the crisis for our grief and failures. But we've got to be aware that this attitude violates our own talent. To focus on the crisis demonstrates a greater respect for problems than for solutions. Without a crisis there are no challenges. Life without challenges is a boring routine which calls for a grave. Without a crisis there's no growth, no development, no merits.

It's only during a crisis that we show how good we are; when the crisis has vanished, all wind is a caress. That's why when we talk about crisis, we end by promoting it. When we withdraw in a crisis, we surrender to conformity.

To win in a challenge we need to find new ways. It's part of our healing. So, instead of complaining, it's much more profitable to work harder, to

reduce any crisis and enhance ourselves.

Perhaps the most threatening crisis is the tragedy of not knowing where to start. We can begin by observing ourselves, to promote and practice self-knowledge. We begin first with compassion and love for ourselves; then, we do it for others and for God.

During this journey to balance our spiritual way with the terrestrial life, it's necessary to know our own *reasons* when looking for the wisdom of eternal truth. When we feel satisfied with our motives in exploring the eternal dimensions, according to our self-understanding, we'll be strongly encouraged to continue on to self-discovery and to seek the eternal realities, focusing our thoughts and our attention to our interior, to our Eternal Being, who is the GOD inside of us.

MV

Response From God

I wrote this during an in-patient stay on a dissociative disorders unit. I had been assigned by my therapist to write a letter to God, venting my frustrations at where "he" was when the abuse happened. My next assignment was to write a response to that letter. The response came to me the next morning. I wrote it out in longhand, with my non-dominant hand. This Response has been the cornerstone of my recent recovery. It marked the beginning of my spiritual healing.

—Dear Laurie:

I hear your sorrow and I feel your pain and sadness. I feel so terribly bad for all that you and others had to endure as children. All through the ages, people have ascribed to me powers and capabilities they have needed me to have; powers and capabilities they have vested in me to help them make sense of their world. I am one thing to one person, something else to another person. I am to each person what each person needs.

I don't do magic. People who witness "miracles" see the magic of their own minds and hearts. When people feel overwhelmed by their own feelings, they often ascribe the action, the stimulus, to me. I am seen as the catalyst, the agent of change, by people who cannot recognize in themselves their tremendous capacity for transforming their own reality. Neither do most people see within them the seemingly magical strength of their own spirit.

I cannot change the world in one fell swoop. But I can imbue in each child born, the ability to cope with the world and the life that lies ahead.

My knowledge is your knowledge. I am present where you are. My power emanates from you—from your physical, emotional, spiritual power.

You see me as a god of tremendous strength and ability. That is because you have tremendous strength and ability. As you have grown stronger, my presence in your life has become stronger, albeit confusing and even frightening.

As you have developed a stronger sense of "self," your presence as a whole person has increased. I, too, have seen my presence in your life increase. When you were scattered into so many parts, so was I. I've always been with you—each part of you carried, held, a part of me.

I know everything that you know, even things you no longer recall and things that never made their way to your conscious mind. I know all that you have repressed, and all that you might never recall. What you do not know, neither do I know. What you learn, I also learn.

I cannot do more than you can do. But because people so often are unaware of their true abilities, strengths, they often give me the credit when it actually belongs with them.

You deserve so much credit, Laurie.

I could not stop the abuse because you could not stop it. It was not possible. But I knew that you were intelligent, creative, tenacious, and loving. I knew these things were true, even though they didn't allow you to believe them about yourself. I knew you could survive it all. I endured with you,

knowing that your strength, abilities and knowledge would get you through.

I cried with the parts of you who had the tears. I felt the pain of body and spirit of those who were hurt and terrorized. I could not take you away with me, because I was within you. When you prayed at night for me to take you to heaven, I helped you remain committed to life. I knew that your determination would prevail over the despair of having awakened to yet another day of pain. Each morning you hoped, "Maybe God will take me tonight," then you set out to face the day. Every day, you said this.

Now, you are 40 years old and you are beset with despair. You have wished and tried to die many times. I have not kept you from succeeding. I have helped you reach inside to find at least one part of you that wants to live, if only for one more day.

I will not give up on you, because you have not given up on you.

I cannot determine nor can I predict your future. But I believe it will be better. Your present is much better than your past was; your future can be better—more whole and fulfilling—than your present.

I am a god of love—and I love you because I see that you love you. You don't see that yet, but you will.

MV

Spirituality and Me

By Eileen

Spirituality is a recent addition to my life. Before 1997 I was a very logical, scientific type of person. If it couldn't be proved, I didn't accept it and that included God too. All this changed during a philosophy class during January of that year. During a meditation I "met" the Creator in that a presence extended unconditional love for me as I am—memories, faults, and all. Never having felt that before in my life, I fled. It took a year of internal work before I started to accept the Creator's existence and though I've felt that unconditional love several times since, it never fails to move me to tears.

I think it's very important that everyone find the type of spirituality that connects to them at a very deep level, and to not just automatically accept the religion or spirituality that they grew up with. Explore! For me, none of the generally accepted religions felt right—in fact they made me very uncomfortable as the sermons tended to trigger me badly. A more earth-based spirituality is what connects deeply to my core. Very slowly, taking one small step after another, my faith has grown and with it, my belief in the Creator.

Spirituality has been immensely helpful to me as I have worked through so many flashbacks and memories. The biggest help is in knowing that I am not alone. Even in times when I've been so triggered that I withdraw like a turtle into its shell and am incapable of reaching out to anyone, much less to the Creator, I know that that is just ME having problems. The Creator is still there. If I can just reach out, I will get help. Maybe not the kind of help I want, but it will be what I need.

There is a second piece to not being alone. The spirituality I follow, which is Native American based, sees everything as a manifestation of the Creator and therefore all are a link to Him/Her. All of creation is a temple, all ground holy. I feel this most strongly whenever I am outside in the woods or among natural things. This belief lets me go out and hug a tree in my anguish, tell my problems to a plant or one of the stone people (not within seeing distance of the general public!) Many times after doing this I feel a lightening of my burden and I know that means my problems or questions have been accepted and will be passed on to the Creator. I need to watch for it, but in time I will get some help. Definitely. I just need to surrender the problems to a higher power.

I'm not always successful in doing this as I've too much practice in keeping everything to myself. Trust issues are

involved here. Trust almost killed me as a child and it's very hard to break the cycle of trusting only myself. However, I believe that in our very core is our pure self, untainted by any of the traumas we've experienced anytime in life. That pure self has a direct line to the Creator and it is from that center core that I can connect with the Creator when I need to. A radical sounding idea, possibly, but time after time it's proved to me to be true. It's like a hot line whenever I really need help.

Organized religion left some terrible scars in me. As a child I was taught in Sunday school (a) you can trust God, (b) God helps/protects good little boys and girls, (c) if you need something just as God and He will deliver. Well, none of that appeared to be true. By age 10 I'd been raped, emotionally and verbally abused, and all my prayers for help led to nothing but more abuse. The only thing I could figure out was that Dad must be right, that I was "bad"—the lack of any help from God just proved it to me. Well, fine, He won't help me, I don't need Him in my life at all. Spirituality and God abruptly left my life and church-going stopped soon after.

By far this was the most damaging spiritual belief I had as a child, as it cut me off from the one source of help available to me. I still have trouble saying "God" because of that and now prefer "Creator." On the same line, seeing the Creator as exclusively male is a trigger as well, and I prefer to think of the Creator as Him/Her. That makes sense to me as you cannot create something you have no knowledge of, so for the Creator to create both male and female implies a male/female mix to me. Much like each of us has a male and female side to our personalities.

Luckily, though I rejected the Creator at age 10, He/She didn't reject me—or I'd be dead. My therapist has said that she considers dissociation a gift from God for people who cannot survive any other way. The more I heal, the more I believe that is true. I owe a great debt to the Creator for that gift that meant life to me.

I am still trying to understand and really accept that even though the Creator exists and loves me unconditionally, that I still experienced so much abuse as a child. There have been a lot of tears and wailings on my part over the last few years, asking "Why me?", "What did I do to deserve that?" and "Why didn't you help me?" At times, it still really hurts. For anyone with the same questions, I recommend reading Harold Kushner's book *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*. I don't think I will ever have an answer to my questions, but

the book helped me see that things just are—and usually for a reason that maybe only the Creator understands. That is not to say I passively accept what happened to me! It's more an acknowledgement that the Creator doesn't police human kind. He/She has given us free will and therefore is not responsible for what we do to each other. We, individually, are responsible. It's taken me a long time to get to the point I can say that, but I do believe it is true.

There are still many times when my faith wobbles severely, but after each crisis I pick up the pieces and am a little stronger than I was before. I firmly believe that the Creator is helping me to heal, showing me the steps I need to work on if I will only just listen to that little voice inside that we females call intuition and I believe is the voice of the Creator. I'm not healing on my own. I'm never on my own. And I wish all of you the same support.

MV

Fragmented Soul

Sometimes angry...more times sad
 Sometimes up...more times down
 In constant caos with all the voices
 inside my head
 Scattered, shattered, easily distracted
 Trying to stay focused...seems
 impossible...almost improbable
 Yet sometimes exact
 If only I could keep my thoughts on
 track!
 Sometimes cohesive, co-present,
 and running so smoothly
 I savor these times and drink in the
 silence, just one with myself and peace
 For the moment. Till things get
 busy...I stop and regroup.

By Patricia R.B.

MV



The Story Behind This Issue's Cover Picture

"I hope you will sense the blessing a received, and visualize the tender healing of God..."

For all of my life I have strived to fill the ache for a Mother's love. I have dissociated from it and at times have attempted to drink the pain away. I have even tried cutting my flesh to relieve the awful loss to my child self.

Last week I sketched a picture of my little child self, Rascal, straining at a huge door locked with an enormous padlock. The room was dim and a large shadowy male figure loomed over me from behind. But no matter how hard I pulled against the doorknob and clawed at the door, I could not escape the room.

The only light streamed under the door, casting my own small shadow long behind me. I knew that just on the other side of the door, my Mother was pounding to get in to rescue me. I knew she just would never let anything bad happen to her child. But I waited a long time., curled on the small rug in the light at the bottom of the door. I have waited all my life for the mother I longed for to come and rescue me and hold me.

My own mother was not able to rescue me. She pretended she did not know or see what was happening behind that closed door. She closed her eyes to the abuse she was permitting to happen to her little girl.

This morning in church, God saw me still curled behind the door. Oh yes, I am grown with children of my own, but He saw the little child inside me still crying for her Mother's love. God's presence seeped in as light beneath the door. And His love wrapped me tightly in His protection. His warm hands soothed my brokenness and His lips kissed away my tears. My Father's presence shielded me from my earthly father's abuse. The large looming shadow of my earthly father diminished before His greatness and power.

I know God's power has created the universe and empowers the great forces of nature. But the greatest power I know exists in the ability of such greatness to reach tenderly into a child's broken heart trembling inside the body of a grown woman.

This miracle happened in my spirit at Church last Sunday. I could just feel Jesus

rocking and cuddling my little child self, and I was sobbing uncontrollably. I just had to go up front at the close of church service and relate to our Pastor how miraculously God was ministering to me. I sobbed the above story to him. The next thing I knew, Pastor was guiding my shaking body to a large wing back chair and instructed one of the women to come over and hold me just like a mother would her child. He instructed her to sing "Jesus Loves Me" and just rock me. As this sweet lady did that, Pastor hovered over us like a protective father, stroking my head and prayed the lock on the door be broken and the door open and never close again. It was then that I saw that lock break and hang loose, and light streamed in through the now-open door!

The saintly woman continued to rock and soothe until I felt my little child self quiet and rested in her arms.

How did Pastor know what "I" needed? Thank God for such a spirit led, gentle man of God!

By Jo for the Cocoon

MV

Books

Growing Beyond Survival: A Self-Help Toolkit for Managing Traumatic Stress

By Elizabeth G. Vermilyea, M.A. ©2000 by The Sidran Foundation and Press. \$24.95. 208 pgs. Paperback.

I found this to be an excellent and thorough workbook for people recovering from trauma. The author says she built her principles for this book on a quotation from Ann Adams' famous recovery book, *The Silver Boat*: "Remember to think of what you want, rather than what you fear."

Vermilyea uses sequential exercises in writing and art to help survivors explore, connect with and resolve their traumatic experiences—as they themselves define them. This last phrase is especially important, because it is the individual's perception that defines "trauma," not the act or event.

Vermilyea carefully explains all her terms and methods, so ideas can be absorbed by non-adult "parts." Each phase of the activities outlined in the workbook is prefaced with these clear explanations. This gives the reader a place to go back to and reabsorb the reasons and principles, if the concepts

somehow "disappear" from the mind during a project.

Vermilyea's "Toolkit" includes a Grounding Worksheet, help with Reality Checks, Imagery, Self Awareness, Safety, Boundaries, Shame, Anger and more.

If the person using the book follows the sequence, as is advised, pacing is built-in to reduce the chance of an overwhelming reaction to a memory or emotion.

The final section helps those in recovery to learn how to acquire new coping skills. This was a particularly useful section, I thought, since it's all too common to know that one "should" be doing something differently...but without knowledge of how to acquire these skills, or approach them step by step, it's difficult to change.

Readers who want to take an active role in their recovery will find *Growing Beyond Survival* offers real value in self-knowledge and control.

—Lynn W.

Leaping Upon the Mountains: Men Proclaiming Victory Over Sexual Child Abuse

By Mike Lew ©1999 Published by Small Wonder Books, PO Box 1146 Jamaica Plain, MA 02130 and North Atlantic books, PO Box 12327, Berkeley CA 94712. \$19.95. 266 pgs. Paperback.

This book, prepared by Mike Lew, author of *Victims No Longer*, is in many ways a giant book of resources and inspirational help for male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. For this follow-up book, Lew surveyed those attending his lectures and workshops to find out what was helping them recover. He presents selections from those responses here, along with his own interpretations. While, to me, the book seems a bit scattered in structure, I am sure that male survivors will find it helpful and affirming. There is not nearly enough support and validation for men who were abused as children, and *Leaping Upon the Mountains* offers that in abundance. Lew vigorously demonstrates to all men who suffer—you are not alone. —Lynn W.

MV

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THANKS!—Lynn W.

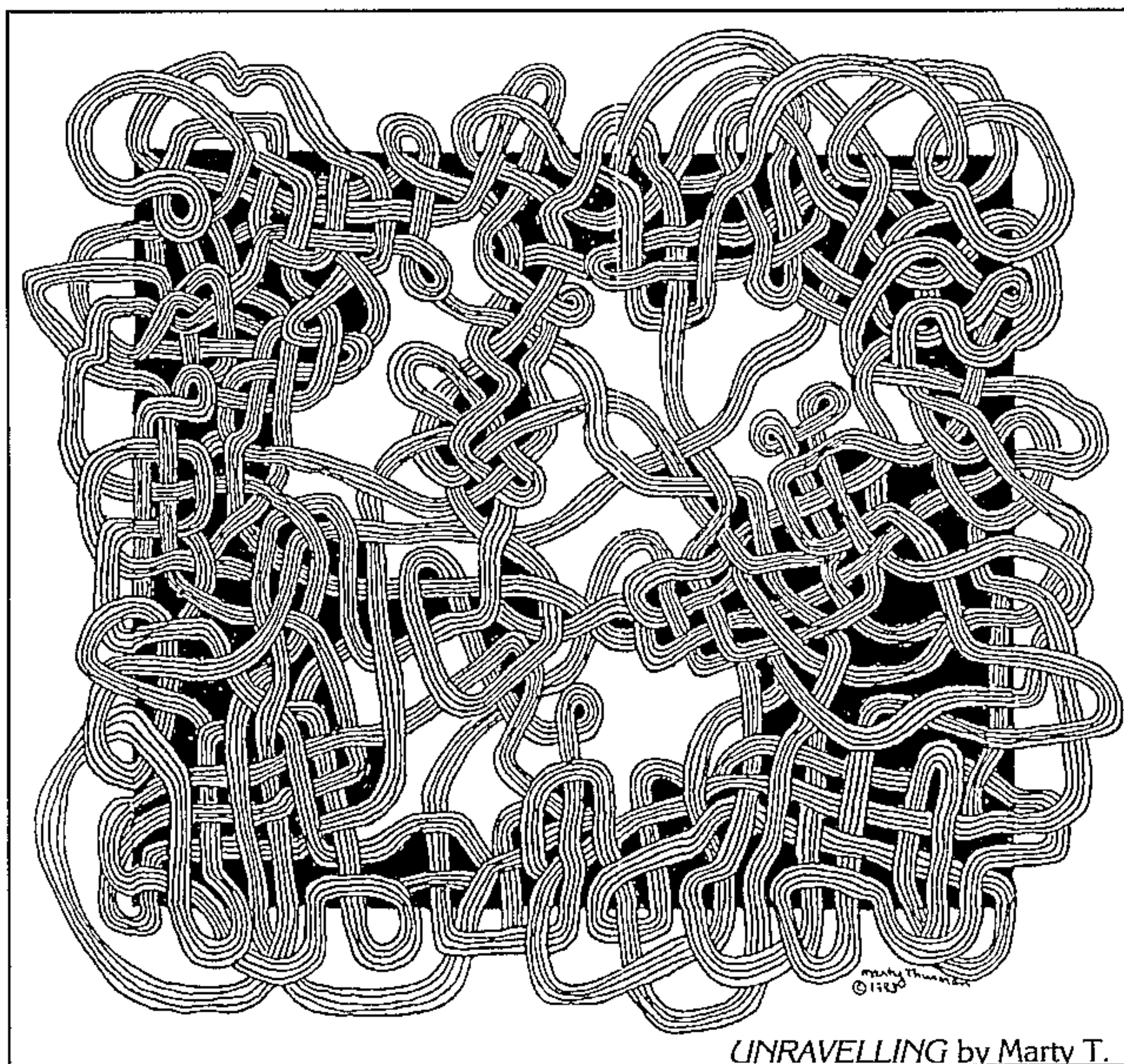
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UNRAVELLING by Marty T.

Share with us!

Prose, poetry, and art are accepted on upcoming issue themes, (and even on NON-themes, if it's really great.) DO send humor, cartoons, good ideas, and whatever is useful to you. Please limit prose to about 4 typed double-spaced pages. Line drawings (black on white) are best. We can't possibly print everything. Some pieces will be condensed, but we'll print as much as we can. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return of your originals and a note giving us permission to publish and/or edit or excerpt your work.

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