



I had to change, and I couldn't . . .

My Lifelong Quest for Freedom from Addiction

My Lifelong Quest for Freedom from Addiction

Collected essays on a certain theme

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NOTE to reader:

If you are queasy at the very thought of seriously working to tame your addictions, and by that I mean taking a good long look at yourself, and how you have lived so far, the missed opportunities, the shame, the fear, the desire to forget and just cover your ass, or your tracks, then don't read this collection of essays.

I wouldn't have read it. That's for sure. Not when I was still imprisoned by whatever was the latest bad habit that had lured me in and kept me there, trapped, unable to breathe..

BUT: if you *are* seriously willing to look at yourself, maybe even for the first time, then this collection is for you.

Instead of fully Being here, we Know, we Do. Instead of stopping, and listening, and truly feeling the ever-recurring subtle swell and subsidence of our own body's pain and joy, and that of our mother earth, we fend off those feelings, and treat ourselves as machines. Keeping a stiff upper lip, we pretend it's all okay. Yet secretly, in private, our mouths open to ingest more, more; we are distracting ourselves from a constant low level anxiety — a soul hunger — via an endless stream of additions.

— A Metaphysical Approach to Addiction

Prelude

In reading through old essays included in this collection, I notice that the same themes, the same experiences, the same stories, are reworked over and over again, seen through various lenses, including astrology, a symbolic language as familiar to me as breathing.

These familiar themes resonate through time and space, building upon each other's lessons, each of them reflecting my lifelong quest to be truly free. Fully, and finally, free — of “bad habits,” whether physical, psychological, mental or spiritual.

Am I there now? Is 83 the magic age?

Likely not. For my situation, at this point, is paradoxical. On the one hand, no oral habit still rules me. I no longer bow to cigarettes (the main boogeyman), or alcohol, sugar, marijuana, or even caffeine.

Moreover, I also seem to have freed myself from addiction to inappropriate relationships. This theme deserves an e-book of its own! Meanwhile, I concentrate here on oral fixations.

For nearly two years now, my so-called “freedom” from addictions has been encased within a very strict routine! Not that I meant to create a strict routine. In fact, it's only recently that I actually noticed it; and because I do now notice it, it starts to feel constricting!

This routine, BTW, does include a tiny exception for caffeine: Two ounces of coffee daily, diluted into two cups of my early morning elixir, composed otherwise of all sorts of herbs, plus dollops of local honey, black seed oil, raw coconut butter, and MCT oil.

That's it for "breakfast." I don't actually eat breakfast. For nearly two years now, I've practiced "intermittent fasting:" in my case, 18/6; two meals, the first 12 to 1 pm, and the other 5 to 6 pm. Both focused on protein first, with veggies, and a bit of fruit. Very few carbs.

No eating between meals. In fact, no sipping either! For the past four months I've also been adhering to a new, and very strict, dental regime (Dr. Ellie Phillips).

Of course, there are exceptions, like our twice-monthly Thursday Community Dinners at 7 pm. I *have* to eat something at 5 pm, just to get by. I've settled on one half of an avocado. And during the meal itself, I indulge in one glass of beer or wine.

Most surprising to me, is how I let go of marijuana. As a '60s hippie, *of course* I was addicted to marijuana. In fact, I still credit marijuana for helping me loosen, and ultimately shed, my carefully constructed persona as a very good, very smart girl, and instead, "let it all hang out." What started out as a shocking release from the past gradually loosened, into free-flowing expression of my own fiery nature. Likewise, my marijuana use gradually and naturally reduced over the decades to the point where, starting at about 60, I only needed two puffs a day, late afternoon, to help me relax. Then, several years ago, even that stopped. Not because I decided that it should. But because I simply didn't need marijuana anymore. I was free, uninhibited, always, and in all ways.

And yet, I wasn't.

Because, and this is really critical: in lieu of bad addictions, I had, over the decades, inserted good addictions. Not because I meant to; at least not at first. It's just "what happened to me."

My first good addiction: to yoga, back in 1972. I was surprised to find by the end of one summer practicing yoga, that I had reduced my smoking habit from two to one pack of cigarettes a day! That felt significant. And indeed, it proved prescient.

I'd call myself a lifelong addict. I can choose good addictions, or I can choose bad addictions. But in any case, once a daily habit is established, it tends to remain.

This can be good and bad, of course. For circumstances change. And as they do, there are times when I have to wrench myself from whatever daily pattern has been structuring my life to another.

Times of uncertainty, when I'm not sure what's next, when I'm twixt and between, with old, now tired, patterns worn out and new ones not yet formed, are difficult. Now what? What "to make" of myself? Why do I need regular daily patterns, routines, in the first place? Couldn't I do without them?

Probably not. My double Sagittarian nature is so very fiery that I had to learn to bridle it, harness it, direct it. Without strong internal discipline my life would have come to an early, catastrophic end.

Over the past two decades or so, I've included two hours daily of what I call "physical culture." These include a fast, one-hour, four-mile early morning walk plus another hour in late afternoon for yoga, chikung and taichi.

I discovered the therapeutic benefits of walking way back as a teenager, tied to a boring summer job. "Is this what adults do?" I thought to myself, furious. "If so, I will never become an adult!"

My rage at the meaningless boredom of my job (reformatting and retyping a nurses' manual for the local hospital where my dad was a doctor) yielded results. Every afternoon I would walk home, two miles. And by the time I got home, the internal fury was spent. From then on, I have always, no matter what the season, temperature, or daily schedule, made sure I got in my daily walk, and quickly doubled it as even better for my mental health.

It took a while before I realized that my root addiction, the one that predates any of the others, the one shown clearly in my astrological birthchart, is to intensity. Indeed, once I allowed my bottled up energy to begin to express (in my mid-20s, with marijuana), I found I had so much energy that my main problem has been learning how to channel this intensity constructively.

As a child, and into my twenties, on awakening in the morning, I could not help but spring up out of bed, immediately!

No longer. Now I have to re-ignite my energy — first, by bouncing 100 times on a mini-trampoline — and then make sure my energy sustains until nap in afternoon, and ten p.m. bedtime — and it does, thanks to my two hours of “physical culture” daily.

Today, while doing yoga, lying on the mat, I instinctively stopped to kiss my arm!

What?!?

Yes. I stopped and kissed my arm. Thanked my nearly 84-year old body for its resilience, its lifelong co-evolving partnership with mind and spirit.

Column

FOOD AND THE GODDESS: A Typical Tale

Sagewoman #52, Winter 2000-2001 Essays

Theme: Food and the Goddess

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High school, sophomore year. My body *finally* beginning to bulge and curve. Boys leer at me, turning me into an object. I try to make myself small, holding my body straight and tight as a board. Nothing works. My breasts jiggle; my bottom sways. My form is changing from tomboy to female and I am terrified. I want it to change back — back to the slim, lithe carefree form of childhood.

That was one current within me. Another, pointing me in the same direction, and yet to opposite effect, was the conditioned need to be reed-thin. Not tomboy-thin, but waif-thin, like the models in *Seventeen*. That “look,” my culture insisted, was attractive to boys.

On the one hand, I didn’t want to be attractive to boys, didn’t want to grow up, didn’t want breasts or hips. On the other hand, I was brainwashed to think being thin and childlike was what would make me attractive to boys. I felt confused. Boys seemed to like girls whose bodies jiggled and swayed. Yet girls competed to be thin — for boys. I

was full of questions. “What is real?” “Who am I supposed to be?” “Am I supposed to grow up or not?” “What does it mean to grow up?”

Wanting to be both not noticed (by boys) and noticeably attractive (for boys? girls? for the culture? for this culture’s version of what boys wanted?) I went on a diet. Grapefruit, cottage cheese, coffee. Did it for two weeks one time before my heart started racing. Ten days another time. My best girlfriend stopped eating almost entirely, went down to 90 pounds and took to her bed. “Anorexia nervosa,” my doctor father told me, a phrase I had never heard before. This was in 1958, many years before such phrases and the “conditions” behind them became common.

She and I never talked about our battles with food, about why she was so thin — I sensed that her “condition” was somehow shameful. Secrecy joined confusion and both dropped into the unconscious, where they festered and fostered new symptoms later on.

That was my initiation into the connection between food and the Goddess. Or, more precisely, between lack of nourishment and the absence of the Goddess — though of course I didn’t know it then.

During young adult years my weight fluctuated from “just right” to 10 pounds over. Over time, my idea of what was “just right” evolved. At one point, in my 30s, I noticed that when my weight fell below 115 pounds I would feel frail, helpless, dependent. That made me recognize how patriarchy is served by keeping females model-thin.

Throughout those years, the buried secrecy/confusion as to how to be in my body germinated addictions: to cigarettes especially, not to mention coffee, wine, ice cream, all things sweet and salty. In college, I smoked two packs of Larks a day. I could not take a potato chip without devouring the whole bag. For a few years in my 30s, upon arising in the morning, my only thought was what to smoke first, a cigarette or a joint.

Underneath my cravings, anxiety hissed, snaking like the fuse to a timed explosion. Quick! Grab that food, liquor, cigarette, joint! Put out the fire before it flares into hell! Sometimes, making a great show of trying to “quit,” I would forbid myself such “pleasures” — for one day, one week, one month, two. But always, there would be a point where my will would break, and I would slink back in defeat.

The more I “tried to quit,” the worse I felt about myself, the stronger the grip of my addictions, and the more desperately I longed to be released from the constant failing struggle to escape my emotional and mental prison.

I vividly remember one day in my early 40s, standing in the kitchen alone, chopping vegetables. A day like any other — but *not*. Somehow, on this day, I woke up right in the middle of this activity and noticed myself, both outside and inside. I saw that from the outside I looked calm and collected in the simple act of chopping vegetables. And I saw that, inside, my solar plexus was chaotically churning — as usual. In a moment of extraordinary clarity, I wondered what it would be like to just stand there, chopping vegetables. To have my consciousness focused on the task at hand. To feel relaxed and at ease, at one with the world.

Soon after that, I remember waking up to nearby bird song through an open window — and this birthed another moment of acute, painful awareness. I *knew* the robin was singing, and that its song was beautiful, but my body felt like a 10-foot thick cement wall between me and the robin’s song. It felt muffled, as if from very far away.

At that moment I made a vow: I would work to clear my body of addictions until the cement dissolved, until my body distilled into the membrane of a drum that thrummed to the joyful notes of that bird’s song.

In order to clear my addictions to external substances I knew I had to reach into the innermost recesses of memory. I had to learn how to re-experience consciously whatever primal nightmares had imprinted my physical body with fear, insecurity, lack.

Something my mother had told me years earlier then loomed into the forefront of awareness. She had said that on the day my father left for World War II she weaned me from the breast to a cup — not a bottle, a cup! I was nine months old. (No blame. She was probably beside herself with anxiety; I imagine her milk dried up.) In one fateful cut of the sword, I was cleaved from both my mother and my father.

I knew this memory was key. But I knew it only second-hand, as a report from my mother. I had to flesh in this memory as personal experience. Something happened that had affected me, deeply. Something that twisted my body and psyche into a certain fixed unnatural structure. I naively assumed the work to transform this structure via emotional and mental clearing would take about six months.

Seven years after beginning this inner work, the pain and terror of that early abandonment were still present. Yet the work had been effective. What had changed was not the pain, but my relationship to it. I was now sensing within me a certain lightness of being, an emerging joy. This joy was like a fine mist that cradled memory. I could hold the memory now, rather than be dragged down by its weight. And with the holding of memory came compassion — for myself, for the little girl in me whose hidden unsatisfied need to suck sustenance from her own mother's body — her need for life itself! — had unconsciously obsessed me as a young adult.

I healed my addictions through seven long years of being consistently aware that this was my work, that this healing was the focus of my life. Who would have known? Outwardly, I was leading the same life as before, while gradually releasing addictions to one substance after another. Inwardly, I was engaged in a moment-by-moment discipline of viscerally sensing the inner child in me, her real needs, how to satisfy them. Throughout that period, I endured recurrent waves of terror and desolation that had originally accompanied my mother's failure to satisfy the instinctive sucking needs of her nine-month-old child. I realized that my urge to coil into a tiny ball was a replay of the instinctive sensing that only by remaining invisible would I be safe.

Thus, as a teenager, I had the paradoxical need to be both visible and invisible, both noticed and not. The burgeoning woman I was becoming was on an instinctive quest for her mate, and thus needed to be “attractive” to the opposite sex. Yet this quest was thwarted, on a biological level, by the culture’s need to keep women thin, childlike, undeveloped, disempowered. And the child I wanted to remain — since her needs had not been satisfied — knew that only by being invisible would I survive.

Survive, yes, but not thrive. To thrive, our needs must be met at the time when they naturally arise. Only as they are met can we unfold our natures further. I was one of millions of my generation whose early needs were not appropriately met and who thus got stuck at an early developmental phase. It is the mission of the generations now alive to heal ourselves of early deprivations by nourishing ourselves back to health and wholeness.

As each of us consciously re-mothers ourself the Goddess reappears in our world. Through our conscious action we reconstitute Her divine body.

Update 2010: As if by divine choreography, I reread this essay of ten years ago now, as I witness one of my own children, Colin, now 44 years old, as he moves through his own healing from being emotionally abandoned by me even before he was born, and then physically abandoned when he was five to the custody of his father. As my mother abandoned me, so I abandoned my children. The sins of the parents *are* visited upon the children. And, when the parent wakes up, the children can too, no matter how much time has elapsed. Moreover, while it took me seven years to process my own troubled childhood, I, and others like me, created a collective emotional healing template that he and others of his generation can access, so that their own healing need not take nearly as long. Lamarck was right. Mutations are not always random, and evolution can proceed by divine intent, each generation standing upon the shoulders of the one before it.

Essay

HOW I STOPPED SMOKING (for what it's worth)

2011

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Preface

January, 2011. Here we are, already in the second decade of the new century, new millennium, and I, for one, feel astonished to still be here — and waiting. Waiting for the Apocalypse? Waiting for Ascension? In any case, uneasy, and wondering. When will “it” come? And how will I prepare?

In the midst of sensing ourselves in the eye of a collective and telluric and even cosmic storm, most of us are still dealing with old issues that we know intuitively, we simply must release in order to move forward. Especially now, when time is accelerating so dramatically, events piling like dominos, and security systems of all kinds — personal, interpersonal, social and collective — thinning to the point of dissolution.

As an astrologer, I have been aware of the ongoing geometric pile-up of enormous systemic tensions amongst the planets in our solar system and how they impact Earth. I've known for years that beginning in 2008, civilizational infrastructures would undergo tectonic shifts that could collapse the entire house of cards. (And that's just our local system. Then there's all the talk of the Mayan Calendar, with its unimaginably long cycles, all said to be ending either in October of 2011 or December of 2012.)

My own response to this prior recognition has been to focus on centering myself to the point of being able to maintain continuous internal balance. In order to do this I need to clear my own biological system to the point where the energy of the universe can flow smoothly through without impediment. As I work to shift my own personal frequency, so that all traces of fear are eliminated as they arise, I ask that I be allowed to serve as a vessel of love spreading equally to all.

It is from within this larger, intensely private context of personal work that I feel impelled to tell this story now. I pray that it may assist others still saddled with seemingly intractable addictions and other habit patterns that appear to disconnect us from the inherent flow of love.

At the heart of my tale is the heartening news that there do seem to be moments when light suddenly, inexplicably, cracks through the thick walls of our old, stuck habit patterns. These moments of grace feel miraculous, undeserved; and yet, when we look back, we recognize that we have been, consciously or not, preparing ourselves all along. So much so, that when grace does, suddenly, illuminate, we are poised to follow through with its astonishing promise.

The Scene

October, 1982. I am 39 years old and my life has, slowly, inexorably, ground down to dust.

Everything I've worked for has whirled into the abyss. Three marriages, two children, career as a college professor, several utopian experiments in community — all gone. Vanished. Poof!

Last month, I loaded my little car and moved — to yet another new town, to launch yet another idealistic project with no money, and — tried, yet again, to “stop smoking.”

Each time I try, and fail, the ancient physiological/psychological pattern that grips me tightens. Repeated failure has exposed my essential worthlessness. “You think you can do this? HA! We’ll show you,” snarl the demon dogs of defeat while digging yet more dirt from my already deep grave.

My chronic inability to “quit smoking” has undermined every attempt to jumpstart my life, ignite my original nature, and unfold my unique destiny.

I know all this.

I also know that I *can’t* quit. That I just don’t have it in me to quit. As my brother-in-law, a few months ago, casually pronounced: “You have the personality of a smoker. You won’t quit. You can’t quit. You’ll *never* quit.” He said this as a statement of fact. I took it as a terminal insult. And yet, he was right. I had reached the end of my rope. I had to change, and I couldn’t.

The Shift

And here’s where this narrative suddenly accelerates, blasts through the usual three-dimensional matrix. For when I finally admitted to myself that I, my ego, was powerless in the face of this all-powerful addiction, the universe opened to admit the light. Not obviously, and not all at once. Others would never have known. In fact, from the outside it looked like the exact opposite: all of a sudden I started smoking more than usual! Voraciously. With a vengeance.

And yet, here’s what happened internally: at the precise moment when I fully realized that I *couldn’t* quit, that my ego was just not strong enough to control this horrid habit, I gave up. I stopped struggling and surrendered, handing the responsibility for releasing this addiction to what I called my “Higher Self.”

Looking back, I now recognize that during all those years as a smoker, I was also gradually acknowledging and incorporating this subtle, larger, mysterious aspect of my being within my smoke-ravaged body. In a stealth move, the diaphanous “higher self” had, apparently, burrowed into my body even deeper than the stink of addiction.

Or perhaps the Self had been present all along; and perhaps my conscious confession that I had no way out of the abyss of my despicable addiction was the price of admission. For the abyss, it turned out, was *not* the abyss! For it was not endless; I did *not* fall forever. To my utter astonishment, by consciously letting myself be totally sucked into my smoking habit — with no further attempts to curb it and no time wasted in denial or guilt — I ended up landing on, or in, the Self.

And the Self knew the future; knew that even though “I” — my ego — was still addicted, when that part of me was ready, it *would* let smoking go. And that moreover, releasing it would be easy.

So that’s where my ruminations ended on that day when I first confessed, and then surrendered, to what seemed, at first, to be a terrifying void. Unbeknownst to me, I had landed in this Self that knew the future. The Self that knew the ego would wake up, that it was only a matter of time. Indeed, the awakening process had already ignited, given that my awareness, in the act of *knowing*, absorbed the ego as a mere point within the seemingly boundless space of its being. This larger, deeper Self didn’t have to be told, or to check with others. External validation, that game played by the ego in the drama of 3-D illusion, was irrelevant. The Self just *knew*, with a serene, quiet assurance, that all was well.

From that moment on, I, that is, the Self, knew that the job of letting go of cigarettes wasn’t up to me, my ego. That this was a job only the Self could accomplish. So ego-I didn’t have to worry about it anymore, or hate myself anymore. I could smoke as much as I liked, for as long as I liked, while awaiting the miracle, when releasing cigarettes would be easy, a piece of cake, like falling off a log.

I didn't know how long I would have to wait. It might be three days, or three weeks or three years, or three lifetimes — and it didn't matter because, in any case, at some point the larger me *knew* that the smaller me would jettison this foul habit as way too small for the being that was unfolding, the person I was becoming.

Though validation was neither sought nor required, had I been more in touch with the culture at large I would have realized that in my own intensely private, personal process I had stumbled upon the first two steps of Alcoholics Anonymous: 1) admit that you are powerless, and 2) give the problem to a higher power. At the time I was not familiar with this organization's credo.

I had also stumbled upon the truth of Einstein's famous maxim: "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." Or, in the language I dressed it in later: "We cannot solve a problem until we put that problem in a larger context — where the problem is not solved but dissolved." The Higher Self, in my lingo, was that larger context. I would hand over my addiction to this larger being and know that when the larger "I" had fully prepared the smaller "ego," then the ego-self would easily release the addiction as a garment that no longer fit. How that would happen, I had no idea. From my ego's jaded, weary, thoroughly cynical perspective, it would clearly take a miracle, something so radical and shocking as to cleave my life in two.

Meanwhile, I would smoke as much as my ego-self wanted — hell, even more than usual. Rather than trying to hold myself on a tight rein, I would let go of all constraints and all the guilt, and just indulge. So I did.

Meanwhile, and simultaneously, from that moment on, the mysterious event that had propelled this narrative through the 3-D veil continued its work of preparing little ego-me. At first, the process was so subtle that I hardly noticed it. Over the next weeks it gradually strengthened. Without consciously deciding to do so, I began to visualize myself as a snake shedding its skin. Over and over again, conjuring and holding this image, of being a snake, about to shed its skin.

Two months went by. At Christmastime, I traveled to Ketchum, Idaho for the usual strained visit with family. (I had been the first of eight children, the perfect, model child — until I turned 26, when I rebelled against my doctor father's Catholic ideology and morphed into the black sheep.)

Picture this: Ann, curled into a tense ball on the couch in the parental living room, pretending to read a book. Internally she is counting the days until she can leave. Not smoking in the house (her father forbade it), hasn't helped her contentious mood.

Shift Again

But then, again, for the second time, this narrative bursts through three-dimensional constraints to materialize an encounter so unexpected and remarkable that it shocked me further into aliveness. Even then I knew: this was the miracle I had been waiting for, the sudden, unexpected event that would cleave reality in two and set me on an entirely new course.

My father walked up to me with the current issue of the *Journal of American Medical Association*. He handed it to me, opened to a certain page, and said, in a voice unlike his own, "Here. You might want to read this." Rather than with his usual judgmental tone, my father had approached me seriously but casually; as if I were an equal, a colleague who would appreciate what he had to share.

The article claimed that the process of making cigarettes was radioactive! If this first-ever sensing of camaraderie with my father had already softened my habitual contentiousness, now I was galvanized. For if what the author claimed was true, then continuing to smoke cigarettes would make a mockery of my work as an anti-nuclear peace activist! Instantly, my perspective shifted. I could not tolerate hypocrisy. Either I would no longer smoke, or I would stop being an activist.

It's hard to describe how liberated I felt in that moment. All of a sudden, I had been yanked from sodden darkness into brilliant light, all senses switched on, heart thrumming and eager. Immediately, I knew exactly what I would do.

A good friend of mine and her husband owned a beautiful home on the north rim of the Snake River canyon, two hours away. The house was for sale, and empty. She had offered to let me stay there anytime. I arranged to be there until driving to Sun Valley for a previously scheduled weekend date.

During those five days I would fast on fresh vegetable and fruit juices, take long walks down into the magical canyon, soak in the luxurious hot tub, write in my beloved journal, and listen to soul-stirring music.

I'll never forget the ritual of smoking that last cigarette, sitting on the beautiful couch in the floor-to-ceiling windowed living room while absorbing surround-sound stereo and watching a pair of eagles swoop over the canyon rim.

And that was it. That truly was it. I haven't touched a cigarette since.

I followed that last cigarette with the blessed five-day interlude of fasting, walking, soaking, writing, listening, and, just as I had known in advance, releasing cigarettes was easy. A piece of cake. Like falling off a log. For the first time I wasn't even tempted to furtively scour wastebaskets and street curbs for butts; nor did I need to talk myself out of hopping in the car and going to the 7-Eleven for one more pack. Reality had cleaved in two. That was before. This was after. I was done.

Or was I?

Oops! Should I cancel my Sun Valley date? The man smoked. Of course he smoked. All my friends smoked. That's the outer environment I had attracted to mirror my inner state. Would I be able to spend an entire weekend with a man who still smoked and not smoke myself?

I decided I would keep the date. For if not now, when? I would have to learn how to hold this inner transformation. Indeed, this was the crucial test. Which would hold value no matter what the external environment, the new me, or the old? Which would prove more uncomfortable, to profoundly disappoint my Self or to create a temporary disruption in the atmosphere with my date? I was about to find out.

The third shift

Sitting down to dinner at the restaurant that Friday evening, we ordered drinks; graciously, he pulled out a cigarette pack and offered me one. That moment when he reached across the table was the third time this narrative suddenly burst through the usual 3-D dynamics. For not only did I refuse, but I surprised myself for doing so with a grace equal to his offer. Moreover, I did not judge him for smoking.

From that moment on, I intuitively *knew* that if I did judge him, or anyone for smoking, then I myself would start smoking again. Moreover, I *knew* that I would be required to continue living in an environment where people smoked for one full year, and not judge them for it. At the end of that year, my circumstances would change. Either those around me would also release smoking or I would find myself in an entirely new situation.

And that's exactly what happened. All my housemates smoked, and I lived among them, not smoking, and letting go of judgment each time it came up. Moreover, I noticed that judgment was gradually transforming into compassion. As a former smoker myself, I knew that my judgments were nothing compared to theirs against themselves. That like me, they were secretly riddled with guilt and self-hatred.

At the end of that year I was invited to move into a rural yurt community, where no one smoked.

An unusual twist

Meanwhile, it turned out that my higher self had to intervene one more time to help me thread my way through that year's 3-D cauldron. And this is the part of the story which, quite frankly, I find brilliant! Nor have I seen any other account of redemption from addiction which mentions the technique that my higher Self utilized to assist the shift.

This technique stemmed from an understanding that I had begun to integrate around this same time — that of the “inner child,” as elucidated in *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, Alice Miller's extraordinary book about the psychological and spiritual consequences of strict, even cruel German child-rearing methods. This book introduced me to the idea that a part of me, the inner child, whom I named “Orphan Annie,” did not get her oral needs met at the appropriate age. (On the day my father left for World War II, my mother weaned me from the breast to a cup. I was nine months old.) The book helped me to recognize that my craving for cigarettes was an unconscious — and consistently, desperately unsatisfying — substitute for that original unmet need.

Recognizing the source of the craving didn't stop it, but it did help me to understand that the part of me that was addicted was this inner child. And that in order to truly let go of this vicious habit I would need to find something to distract her for a while. Otherwise she would eventually rebel, insist on getting her way and march right back to cigarettes. It was important that Orphan Annie not feel bereft and ignored; to keep her from feeling abandoned, I would reward her for her sacrifice.

I would allow her to develop another addiction, and keep it for a full year, a habit that would be a welcome substitute for cigarettes and yet (hopefully!) not as addictive. Further, the second addiction couldn't cost any more than the original one, since at the time I was living on very little money.

So here's what I came up with: twice a week I would reward my inner child for "good behavior" by taking her out to breakfast, spending the same amount of money that I had spent on pack-a-day cigarettes on a sweet roll. I would allow the new addiction, to sugar. I knew it wouldn't be that difficult to let go of, since I did so after each Christmas holiday. So now, I would allow the addiction to sugar until the end of the first full year post-cigarettes.

The experiment worked. At the end of that year I easily released the sugar habit.

Looking Back

I still view the release of cigarettes as the biggest accomplishment of my entire life; for it set the foundation. By letting that addiction go I released the continuous undermining of my own self-esteem that had prevented me from unfolding the wonders of my original nature and expanding into oneness with all that is.

Yet the year-long release of cigarettes was just the beginning. I knew I would need to begin to uncover the emotional roots that had crystallized into the physical addiction. And in order to do that, I would have to go back to the beginning, and begin again. I would have to do that "inner child" work mentioned above, to "face, embrace and erase" the deep emotional patterns that had structured my so-called life into a tight little locked box with no key.

Being a perennial optimist, I thought the inner child work might take me six months. Instead, it took seven years — and even now, 30 years later, once in a while I detect traces, tendrils, of fear and constriction that I have had to learn to breathe my way through.

How I did all that is a story for another time. Suffice it to say that I did *not* go into therapy. I did it myself, with the help of my journal, my dreams, a heightened alertness to the presence of synchronicities, periodic co-counseling with a few close female

friends, and my overall commitment to waking up in the present moment, over and over again, to a larger awareness.

Meanwhile, I now recognize that once an addict, always an addict. The structure of my personality in this life is that of an addict. So I have a choice: I can choose “good” (life-maintaining or enhancing) addictions or I can choose “bad” (life-denying or destroying) ones.

I spend two hours in what I call “physical culture” each day: one hour walking with my little dog, and another hour doing a combination of yoga, chi kung and tai chi. I indulge and encourage these “addictions,” plus one more: the continuous strong and prayerful intention to practice awareness of the present moment: the *now*, as it opens into space, the quantum field holding endless potential.

As a result of consistent work over the decades, I can truly say that I feel stronger, more flexible, attuned and integrated, than at any time in my long life. Life truly does get better and better, as our awareness widens to encompass more and more of the loving generosity of being.

Luckily, I am one of many who have pioneered this work to clear the body/mind/spirit of life-denying addictions. As a result, the template for releasing what no longer serves us is in place; this makes it much easier for others to do the same work. It helps to know that the mysterious subtle, sacred realms that lie just on the other side of our usual third-dimensional experience of life can be called upon to aid us at any moment.

Just ask, and ye shall receive.

Presentation

A Metaphysical Approach to Addiction

Wyoming Psychological Association annual meeting,
Jackson, WY, October 2, 1987

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Note: I was excited for this opportunity, and assumed that this audience would love a fresh view of the world of addiction. WRONG! In fact, not only did no one in the audience ask questions afterwards, but I noticed that they deliberately avoided me in the hall. I should have known better. BTW: while I no longer use the word “God” so freely, I do still feel the thrumming of the entire panoply of existence as divine.

Introduction

Once, when I was a doctoral student in philosophy, I told my teacher I wanted to write a paper about the concept of “time.” “Time?” he sniffed. “I wouldn’t touch the subject. Too difficult.”

I wanted to understand time, and space, and our interaction with them. This quest drove me then, it drives me now. Anything else I study comes under this rubric, including the phenomenon of addiction, the subject of this presentation today.

Classical western philosophical studies did not satisfy me. They seemed too narrow, too confining. I was studying dead men’s ideas, and they weren’t going anywhere. Only one philosopher grabbed me, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein despaired of ever being understood by his contemporaries. And he despaired of ever doing good philosophy

either, because, he said, what we philosophers seem to be doing is “running up against the walls of our cage.”

Within one year after receiving my doctoral degree I became a student of astrology. That was fourteen years ago, and I am still a beginner! Actually, this is not surprising. Astrology is what philosophy should be, could be, and was, originally. Astrology studies the entire universe, and our place within it. Given an infinite field, one’s knowledge is always infinitesimal. There are no cages here, no boundaries, and therefore no experts.

I come to you today as an astrologer who has noticed a very definite signature involving the planet “Neptune” in the birthcharts of those who are alcoholics. I have studied this phenomenon intensively, both myself, and in partnership with a psychological counselor who specializes in alcoholism. Together, we have given workshops on the subject.

I come to you today as a philosopher/astrologer who is fascinated by the phenomenon of addiction, not just in its tendency to suck the life force out of individuals, but as a tragic symptom of the disease that infects our dying western scientific and industrial culture.

My fascination is not only conceptual, it is personal. I was once married to an alcoholic. He has since died, of bleeding ulcers, of liver disease. And I am an addictive person myself. Who among us, is not? I was hooked on cigarettes, marijuana and sugar for fourteen years. Caffeine teaches me still; as we say, in an effort to give our slavish needs a veneer of sophistication, caffeine is my “drug of choice.”

I was addicted to Phil, my alcoholic husband, too. I wanted to help him, to save him, heal him. Instead, he almost took me with him down his spiral into hell. Phil was the greatest teacher I ever had. Thanks to him, I now know, in my gut, that I cannot control another human being.

My growing fascination with addiction is a sign of the times. As the old order breaks down, our addictions increase. Things fall apart. The center does not hold. Rather than being centered, we are self-centered. Instead of being and moving from our depths, we identify with appearances, and aim to get more, more, constantly feeding the

peripheries of our beings with what does not nourish. Hungry, desperate, we substitute the smaller order of our habits for the larger significance for which, unconsciously, we yearn.

In Jackson, we have hard bodies. We ride our bikes, we run, we kayak, we climb mountains, we ski down them. An endless round, seasonal changes dictating movement from one strenuous activity to another. Always, the goal is to do more, to go faster, steeper, conquering time and danger with control, nerve, and technical finesse. We live on the edge, addicted to the adrenaline rush, and a mental dominance over our own bodies.

It is my feeling that, in our fascination with addiction, both theoretical and in practice, we are, in fact, beginning to run up against the walls of our cage. The cage of the old world order, western scientific culture. Wittgenstein was right about philosophy. And classical philosophy is but the abstract description of western culture. What was formerly experienced as a vast and open space now feels pinched, limited, closed. Only we don't know it. We think everything is as it should be, as it has always been; but it isn't. Blindly, we feel the walls, moving along them, seeking an opening. Going round and round in circles, we cover the same ground, obsessed, bored: addicted. No way out. Frustrated, enraged, we pummel the walls with our fists. "I can solve this problem, I will get control of it!" The walls close in on us. We feel suffocated, panicky; lashing out, we smash, from the inside, the invisible boundaries of what I would like to call the metaphysical "sphere" that contains and embodies our current world view.

If we think of a world view as an invisible "sphere," and ourselves inside it, then once we have explored the limits of its "time" and its "space"; once we have begun to sense that our world view is not the universe, but rather, a closed, finite, system within it — then our continuing response to that system, while remaining inside it, can only be addictive. In addiction, we repeat ourselves: going round and round in circles, those circles tend to tighten with time. Digging our rut deeper and deeper, we get caught in a downward spiral. No way out.

No way out — unless we break out entirely. Our growing fascination with addiction is a sign of the times; it is also a portent for the future, a symbol of hope. As we run up

against the walls of our cage, they thin; inevitably, sooner or later, we push through them and are born — reborn — into a larger, more inclusive reality.

In my talk here today, I hope to inspire a vision for our future. I pray that when we walk out of this room, it will be with new eyes to see, new ears to hear, a new world within which we are beginning to live. I pray that as we settle into this larger space, we can look back, look down, and view the more limited space of addiction — as a whole.

Let us remember. The world we are leaving is ground we have already covered, and to which we have no need of return. We humans are explorers by nature. Our path is an ascending trajectory, an upward spiral, aiming for the stars.

It is by first visualizing, and then entering the larger sphere that we begin to systematically understand — and dismantle — the smaller sphere of addiction. A problem can be fully understood once we situate it within a context larger than itself. This way we gain distance, perspective; we learn to see this space from afar as a point within the larger space, and surround it with meaning.

To approach the phenomenon of addiction from a metaphysical perspective is to see it as a whole, as a figure upon a ground. Without the background context, there is no contrast, and the figure does not snap into place, as a form. But to do this takes a great leap of imagination. Indeed, we must smash through the walls of our cage even to grasp what I am saying here. This is not an easy business. This is perhaps the most important difficult business we have to conduct in our lifetimes. As Gregory Bateson said, towards the end of a long life filled with discovery, “Addiction is a nice problem, about which we know almost nothing — almost nothing formally. It is one of the big ones, on which civilizations rise and fall.”

Yes. Our addictive civilization is about to fall. And from its ashes will arise, phoenix-like, the new world.

The Fruits of Newtonian Science

From our point of view, the new, larger space we are about to enter is absolutely frightening. It feels infinite, limitless. Just thinking about it makes us confused, dizzy,

even nauseated. Like little children, when suddenly presented for the first time with an entire park to play in, we cling to what makes us feel secure. Yet we are excited too, quivering with eagerness to explore, to drink in with all our senses what it has to teach. Since we have not yet penetrated its reaches, we have not yet run up against the walls of its cage. No doubt they exist. Perhaps our children, seven generations hence, shall know them.

The old, western, narrowly scientific world view was once felt to be infinite, limitless, too. Three centuries ago, science was a vigorous new approach to perceiving and inhabiting reality. The goal was truth, and the method was to be inductive, objective. The murky medieval fog of superstition would gradually disappear, to be replaced by the clear light of Truth.

The result now, is not the big truth we were hoping for. Science did not replace God. Instead, we witness an endless stream of isolated facts — I call them “factoids,” as their half-lives are so short! — connected as dots via theoretical constructs, maps in the mind.

Three centuries ago there was plenty of time to roam, both inside the imagination, and outside, exploring the frontiers of the planet. The scientific world view helped us develop the linear, rational left brain into an extraordinary power. A power that, literally, changed the face of the earth through technology.

Now, instead of sensing mother earth, participating in her mystery, her eternally recycling fecundity, we observe her from afar, cameras and telescopes and microscopes inserted between our bodies and hers. Only rarely — on vacation! — do we walk barefoot on the earth, feeling her intricate and ticklish irregularities, warmed and cooled by soil’s reflected sun, our nervous system nourished and stimulated by shifting pressures underneath.

Usually, we don’t walk at all. There isn’t enough time, we think. Time for what? Time for our projects, time to reach our goals. Time for our straight line linear projections into a future which, unless we change our view of time, release that addiction too, will not exist!

The future, according to think tanks that view it as a set of straight line projections from the past, looks mighty bleak. The world's population grows by billions geometrically. The world's resources shrink in equal, and devastating proportion. By the year 2000 . . . but we don't want to think about the world in the year 2000. So we block it out, and concentrate on our selves, our projects, our success, here and now. Nervously stealing glances at our watches, we drive to our appointments in cars, or fly overhead, or lift off earth entirely, in rockets.

Instead of fully Being here, we Know, we Do. Instead of stopping, and listening, and truly feeling the ever-recurring subtle swell and subsidence of our own body's pain and joy, and that of our mother earth, we fend off those feelings, and treat ourselves as machines. Keeping a stiff upper lip, we pretend it's all okay. Yet secretly, in private, our mouths open to ingest more, more; we are distracting ourselves from a constant low level anxiety — a soul hunger — via an endless stream of addictions.

The power of the left brain has overreached itself. Asphalt and concrete pave the planet; our dear mother earth can no longer breathe! Pollution invades and corrupts air and water and soil. Defying our deepest animal instincts, we spoil our own nest! Pollution invades our bodies too. Our bodies are corrupted — and since we no longer feel them, we are unaware until it is too late. Our immune systems fail us. We feel we can no longer defend ourselves against what is out there. All the filth, all the fear. The more we fear, the more we stress our immune systems, the more susceptible we become to diseases of all kinds, and the less and less are we able to rally the deep instinctive life force of survival.

Our daring and imaginative investigation into the heart of the atom has been perverted, into the creation of nuclear technology for more and more power over both nature and ourselves. Our much vaunted "control" over nature has now run out of control, into the Bomb. The two bombs that destroyed two cities in Japan in 1945 have now mushroomed into 80,000. How many are enough? This question, for the addictive society, is irrelevant. There are never enough. The bomb is our final addiction. And our final clue, too. Certainly, bombs blow up cages. In contemplating that fact, we can see it as a symbol for what we need to do.

Our addictive society hungers, we ache, for true security. Like children, we are naïve. Still mesmerized by deadly war toys, we look to the outside to supply our inner needs. Real security will be found as we open ourselves up to who we really are. Breathing the same air, hearts beating in unison, we are one world, one community.

Two Kinds of Questions

Let us call the seemingly infinite sphere within which the smaller sphere of addiction is embedded the “spiritual world.” I think everyone here would agree that the psychological and sociological dynamics of addiction need to be viewed within a context that is spiritual in nature. The first two steps of the Twelve Step Program of AA have shown that to us. We must admit that our lives are out of our control. We must surrender ourselves to a Higher Power.

Little children come to us from God. They are still immersed in that other, larger and more mysterious reality. Children teach us, through their questions, to remember where we came from, who we are, where we are going.

“Mom?” — my son Colin, then three years old, came wandering into the kitchen, bouncing a ball: “Which is more real, my dreams or yesterday?”

What would you do when presented with Colin’s question? Would you try to answer it? What kind of answer would do?

There are two kinds of questions, factual and metaphysical. Factual questions can be answered, according to the rules and databases that belong to some kind of organized, recognized, and closed system. Metaphysical questions, on the other hand, are posits in infinity. To attempt to answer one is to pretend it arises from a finite, closed world. A world where the rules of its organization allow for only certain possibilities — even certain questions — as valid. A world wherein whatever does not fit its criteria is altered — co-opted — into something that does.

To attempt then, to answer a metaphysical question — that herald from and point to what lies beyond any closed world — is to betray the original intent of the question. All

we can do, and remain true to the value of Colin's question, is to honor it, expand upon it, attempt to explore it with him.

When I was six years old, and frustrated, I raised my hand during initial lessons in arithmetic. Trembling, terribly serious and shy, I asked my teacher, a Catholic nun, "But . . . what is a number?" The chalk, busily writing figures, stopped in midair. She turned and stared at me, long; so long my face burned. Finally, she muttered, "That is not a question, dear."

If that is not a question, then there are no questions that reach beyond the walls of our cage. If that is not a question, then there is no way out, and we are condemned, as history seems to show us, to repeat ourselves.

If what happens the first time is tragic, then the second time it is farce — Karl Marx. History — his story — is a farce! An endless boring story of war and rape and plunder, and it is still going on! History itself is an addiction, a constant repetition of the territorial struggle of one against all. We have been running around in circles, from one end of the globe to the other, getting nowhere. We have been distracting ourselves from our true purpose, our path on earth, which is, as Socrates said, to know ourselves. And in this ancient Greek view, such knowledge is virtue; and evil, mere ignorance.

Those who continue to fight with one another, to take from one another, to blame one another, are ignorant. Peace will come when we get down to business, and look inside. An infinity awaits us. The new frontier lies within.

Learning, says Socrates, is remembering, *re-membering*. Is putting ourselves back together again, with what we've always known. Even the original meaning of the word "education" reveals the Socratic message. The word, from the Latin, "educare," means, "to pull out, to draw forth." Not, notice, "to put in." Real learning has nothing to do with accumulating, but rather with a process of emptying ourselves of all trivial factual data and reentering that place of the spirit. The place from which we come, and that we've always known. To truly know our own deep selves, mystics have reminded us for centuries, is to reach into infinity and behold the face of God.

Current Science Is Mystical

Current scientific theory is finally catching up with mysticism. The universe, we are now told, is an infinite streaming of energy transformations. Matter converts to energy. Matter is energy, condensed. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as “materialism.” The foundations of our materialistic world rest on nothing, no thing, limitless energy.

Within the new mystical science, the world is structured hologramatically. The form of every part in it, no matter how tiny or insignificant, reflects the form of the whole. Macro meets micro. The two orders are one. The composition within a single atom mirrors that of an entire galaxy.

As above, so below, says the old Hermetic principle. And what links the two is our very selves. We stand midway between the very large and the very small. This is no metaphor. Within our protective skulls the tiny space that holds the vibrating pineal gland is both atomic and galactic. The link between the galaxy and the atom is nothing less than human!

At birth the human fontanel is open. Only thin skin covers the opening in the top of the skull. The pineal gland sits underneath this opening, in the center of the brain, composed of tissue like that of the optic nerve. Both are activated by light. Light hits the pineal gland at birth. We enter this planet in light; we come here, as Wordsworth said, “trailing clouds of glory, knowing all and everything.”

Within a year or two that fontanel has closed. Within seven years the plates of the skull fuse. From then on, we are on our own, cut off from the light, fully caught by gravity’s pull. Losing ourselves in the glamorous illusion of the physical world, eventually we will want to turn around, find our way back. Only we don’t know it. Gradually, we sink into “time” and “space” as our society has organized them. Gradually, we build that spherical bubble within which to live as a light being hidden within a body, while here, on earth.

In the view of Western medical science, the pineal gland has no known function, it is a useless vestige from an earlier evolutionary time.

Rene Descartes, however, back in the 17th century — and some would call him the philosophical founder of the age of science — viewed the pineal gland as the “Seat of the Soul,” the link between the visible and invisible worlds. Descartes further referred to this tiny ductless gland as our internal or “Common Sense.” Far cry from what we consider to be common sense! The only senses we recognize are private, and they exist on the surface of our beings. Within our so-called “common sense” we have no senses in common, no third eye. Nothing links us to others. No wonder we feel alienated. No wonder we build bombs. No wonder we have trouble appreciating our unity, our community.

Interestingly, classical philosophers today take everything Descartes said seriously, except his views on the pineal gland!

Nevertheless, certain Indian tribes still pick their future spiritual leaders from those children for whom the fontanel closes over late. Indians, and other aboriginal cultures, never do lose their original links with our larger natures.

The individual mirrors society

As above, so below. The addictive person mirrors the addictive society. Each addict who enters the process of recovery, who steps through the bars of the addictive cage, the veil of the finite closed system we have all trapped ourselves within, helps to heal us all. Likewise, as we fill our minds and hearts and spirits with a new vision of possibilities, the new endless and open world to come, we infuse others with that energy, and catalyze their recovery of what we have always known.

It is not surprising that not only individuals, but our whole society can be described as addictive. We begin that process of closing ourselves down to the larger sphere from which we come by the way we are trained as children. By pretending that all children’s questions can be answered, by treating all questions as if they are factual, we assume a finite, closed world — and assure our children’s slide into addiction later on, once the limits of that world are reached. We destroy all possibility of wonder, discovery, gratitude at the glory which both surrounds and lives within us. We despise and fear and make fun of those grand transformations — where we step, automatically, through the

veil — and which everyone whose heart is still beating undergoes at least three times in life.

- At birth. When we push through that long dark tunnel into the light — into high intensity artificial light, unfortunately; a first clue as to what awaits us. Then we are spanked!

- At puberty. When the miraculous ability to create new life suddenly blossoms within. Parents don't know what to do with us. Determined to keep our feet on the ground, they "ground" us. (To be "grounded" then, becomes something to avoid. Our avoidance of earth begins early on.) To curb our imaginations, they talk to us sternly. And, it seems, no matter what we do in our efforts, during that short, explosive time, to make sense of life, they shake their heads, lips pursed, disappointed.

- At death. When again we enter a long dark tunnel into the light. A light that has overlit our lives all along, only we don't know it until we give this life up. A light that could enhance our lives, could be a shining star to which we owe allegiance, and/or to which we strive, endlessly, to perfect ourselves while here.

Why are we so afraid?

Why are we so afraid of stepping through the veil? What are we afraid of, really? The remark of one woman still stands out vividly in memory. She was sitting forlornly at the piano in an empty bar early one morning. Stale smoke hung in the air. "This is my second day without cigarettes," she said, eyes nervous, darting. Her walls were beginning to thin. The woman was terrified. "There are so many empty spaces," she whispered, shaking her head in fear and confusion, "so many empty spaces."

I suspect that what makes us tremble so is our fear of empty space, of infinity, the void. Seemingly by instinct, we see it as a nightmare, as in those dreams at night, where we fall, endless, through space, screaming, and wake up with a start, paralyzed.

Philosophers fear it, they call it the fallacy (sic) of the "infinite regress." Colin, however, doesn't fear it. Once, when his older brother Sean came home from his Catholic kindergarten, he stood in the kitchen doorway and asked me, as if he already

knew the answer, “Hey Mom, who made the world?” Well,” I said, wanting in my answer to not foster an already incipient dogmatism, “some people say God made the world.” My qualified answer unsettled Sean, which is what I intended. Then three year old Colin, nonchalantly bounding a ball, piped up, “Yeah, and another god made that god and another god made that god . . . there are lottsa gods!”

As a graduate student I had to take a course called formal “Boolean” logic. In this kind of logic, there’s a move you’re not supposed to ever make. You can’t ever say A equals not-A. Contradictions are not allowed. Most students took this structure for granted. I, on the other hand, wanted to know why, and one day got up the nerve to ask the teacher. The question unnerved him. He became agitated, crying out: “Because, if we allow contradiction, then anything follows. Anything is possible, *anything!*” To him this was a horrible situation to contemplate. To me, it is a clue to what we must do to break out of our cages.

Rather than awaken to the vastness — emptying ourselves into the continuum, where all feelings flow as one, where there is no separation, and we are one, one community, one world — we prefer to bind time and space, creating singular and separate egos and their projects, and then live within that, taking that, that puny simulacrum, for reality.

Rather than, like the ancients, gazing into the vastness of the night sky, opening into ourselves the dark pregnant spaces among the shining stars, we look down, make sure we don’t stumble, watch the signs, obey the rules, get on and off the highway according to commuter schedules day by day. And at night, beneath the shining starry sky, we sit under roofs in houses, exhausted, numb, watching television. Our laughter is canned. Our smiles are video. There is no magic. God is not present here.

No wonder we are addictive! No wonder we turn to some substance, or some small behavioral process, as a fetish, a substitute for what we have lost. We crave the larger order, pattern, meaning, purpose, significance. We have not found it in a world fat, and flat, with facts. All we have is the smaller order of our habits. They help define us, keeping the outside out and the inside in — we hope. We are in control — we hope. But we can’t help it. We are hungry, we want more. So we smoke more, or drink more, or

gather more money, or more success, or fame, or property. But to no avail. It does not satisfy. Something is missing. Something. What? We don't remember. There's only a vague feeling, a sort of itch. We scratch it. It doesn't go away. We scratch it again. We bleed.

Meanwhile, outside — and inside, way down deep — the stars wink and glow and stream forth endlessly, endless fiery energy. This energy fumes deep at the core of our mother earth. This energy fumes deep in our human hearts.

Our hearts are full with feeling — frozen feeling. Our hearts beat as one, each beat counting down — to one. We are volcanoes. And we are about to blow — creatively, or otherwise.

Let us dare to step into the void. Let us look infinity in the eye and bow to her larger substance. Let us acknowledge our deeper selves and go forth, with God, into the wilderness that is our unknown nature.

Aboriginal peoples live their lives in accordance with nature. They participate in the life of a cosmos both mysterious and unknown, and also vast and regular in its motions, ordering their lives in a way which has both beauty and complexity. Sleep and waking cycles are governed by the daily rotation of the planet upon which they live. Planting and harvesting cycles are timed to the annual changing relations between sun and earth, the equinox and solstice points serving as grand structural markers, climaxing periods of time, ending one and beginning another. Human celebrations are timed in accordance with these natural ceremonies, the part reflecting the whole, the inside mirroring the outside, the way of the above corresponding to the way down here below. Aboriginals are natural mystics. As we all are, at birth, and often are, at puberty, and again, at death. The larger world does intrude upon the smaller one at least at these points. It could do so forever. It could do so now.

Love steers the stars

Ancient man's flow in harmony with the larger universe was read by learned ancient astrologers. The heavens declared the glory of God, and God lived among them.

Warming them as golden light in endless blue by day; enveloping them with infinite inky black by night, its depths broken by tiny points of light circling the earth in ever-changing patterns of regularity. The longer the ancients watched, the more regularity appeared. Long cycles held smaller ones, gave them context, meaning, significance.

Within the cycle of one human life are embedded many smaller cycles, each of them with its own purpose, its own point. As each of these cycles completes itself, there arises a feeling of closure, satisfaction, significance; that profound sense of safety and rightness which comes from bowing to necessity, in obedience to inner laws of being and becoming.

The longer we live, the longer are the cycles we encompass; the more humble and compassionate we become as we see/feel the patterns of our experience as a whole, and how similar our patterns are to those of others'. The longer we live, the more energy we can contain and express at will: our personal wills surrender to the whole; we dedicate ourselves in service to the universal order.

The cycle of human life as a whole is embedded within an infinity of larger cycles, concentric rings, spheres of meaning, radiating out from the center, our centerpoint. Our sensing of these larger cycles is an attunement to mystery, to magic, to miracle. In surrendering to what these cycles teach us, we release our small egos, the cage created by binding space and time, and embrace the unknown. This is faith, faith in the substance of things unseen, faith in the larger order, faith in God.

That center point within us, that small still point of a turning world, when looked at from close to, reveals a hole, vast and dark and mysterious. As we direct the searchlight of consciousness into that void, we ourselves are illumined, and all is one. All is love. Love steers the stars.

The movement from the smaller addictive sphere into the larger mystical vision is imminent. I speak literally here. What has been the province of isolated individuals in the past is to become a mass cultural event. Nothing less will do. The condition of both the planet and the human spirit demand it. The miracle is at hand.

Column

PRAYER: as surrender to the larger order

Sagewoman #64, Spring 2004

Theme: Prayer

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When I was a child, I prayed in church on Sundays, asking for things I wanted. Head down, eyes shut, kneeling with hands folded in a state of chronic guilt, I tried to hook up with God.

I look back now at all those children and adults in church, apparently deep in prayer, and wonder: did others, like me, wonder if God was really there? Not that I wondered if God existed — heaven forbid! — but if He was there for me. Worse, how could I tell if He was there? Shouldn't I feel some kind of zap, a sudden flood of feeling? What if I'm not prayerful enough or saintly enough for God to bother with? What if all my sins have disgusted Him? I keep quarreling with my brothers and sisters. Sometimes I talk back to Mom and make excuses for not making my bed. I'm always mean to Marnie — for no reason! I try not to hate her, but I do.

Screwing my eyes tighter, I redouble my efforts, focus so powerfully that God has to hear me.

Maybe I'm going about it all wrong. Maybe, though it looks like I'm praying, I'm not. Not really. My mind keeps skittering off . . . I'm mad at myself for being too lazy to ride

my bike to church and go to confession. If I had just gone and done it yesterday, I wouldn't feel so guilty today. At least those sins would be gone. I'm hoping I got an "A" on Friday's religion test; I wonder . . . can I get Mom to drive me out to Robin's farm this afternoon?

Suddenly, my mind telescopes back from its wandering; I "come to," still kneeling, hands tensely folded, eyes squeezed tight, head down, just like everybody else. How long was I gone? Could anybody tell I was gone? Nobody else seems to go. Or maybe they do! Maybe they're just like me, daydreaming when they should be praying. No! NO! Don't think bad thoughts about others. I'm the only one. I'm sure I'm the only one. The only one who feels like a fake.

We were all kneeling in supplication. Some were cheating, butts propped on the seat of the pew behind, but mostly we were straight-backed. Now I ask: Did the others secretly fear they were the only ones who kept trying, and failing, to dial direct? And did they also deny this feeling, fall into pretending? Did their pretending in church spill over into daily life, in their need to seem correct, no matter what the cost to authenticity?

Once I reached my 20s, it then took me a full decade to process the trauma of the masks I had grown up wearing. I wanted to discover what was inside them. Wanted to tear them off and, in the vernacular of the time, "let it all hang out," "do my thing," "be here now." Like others of my generation who came of age in the late '60s and '70s, I was determined to act spontaneously, intuitively. Change was in the air.

I not only refused to pray, I hated all ritual, so much did any hint of it remind me of the tedium and hypocrisy of early church-going years.

But of course I did have some rituals, and of course, given my proud headlong flight into the new, I refused to acknowledge them. My rituals took the form of addictions — to substances, mostly, but also to certain other behavioral patterns. During the following decade my shame and disgust with being controlled by something outside myself did finally lead me to release the most glaring addiction — to cigarettes. That I could

actually let go of that chronic craving still amazes me. Indeed, I date the beginnings of real self-worth to the day when I realized I had succeeded in what I set out to do.

That was almost exactly 20 years ago. Had I not been able to stop smoking, I would probably be dead. Not, I imagine, because of some dread disease, but because the lifelong burden of guilt and self-hate would have attracted some kind of “accident” to release me from that death-in-life.

I might date the time when “prayer” re-entered my life to the day, six months earlier, when I made the decision to let go of “trying” to stop smoking, and handed the task to my “higher self.” At the time, I did not know that this approach to releasing addiction was somewhat similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. All I knew was that I had been trying to stop for so long, and that every time I stopped, and then started again, the addiction grabbed me even more tightly, as the guilt in which it was embedded settled in at an even more profound level.

There was nothing else I could do! I had hit bottom. The situation was out of my control. All I could do was let go.

On that day I surrendered, not to the AA “God” or “higher self,” but to the addiction itself, giving myself permission to smoke as long and as much as I wanted. In turning the problem of my addiction over to my “higher self,” I intended that if and when I did stop smoking, it would be effortless.

It had become obvious that my ego was not strong enough to overcome my body’s constant need for a “fix.” Trying to stop had not worked. Another approach was needed.

Years before I had discovered this “other self,” as an inner voice which boomed at me during critical crossroads of my life. The first time I heard it I was in the hospital, on my way out with apparently terminal abdominal peritonitis. I never forgot the startling alacrity of this voice, nor its singular message: **LIVE OR DIE, IT’S YOUR CHOICE.**

Twenty four hours later, my body miraculously clear of disease, I walked out of the hospital, stunned. I date my understanding that “body follows the spirit” to that experience, and view specific physical symptoms as symbolic expressions of the soul’s yearning.

After that uncanny and miraculous initial contact, I heard the voice a few more times. Each occasion felt like a crossroads, with the voice pointing in a thoroughly unfamiliar direction: “Go this way.” I knew that, no matter how frightening, if I followed the direction indicated, I would continue to unfold my authentic nature.

The issue of my smoking had bedeviled me for a long time. My body was suffering from lack of energy. I couldn’t smell or taste. I hated myself for my “weakness” and knew I had to stop. And I knew I couldn’t stop. So this was the day when I actually asked this other self for help; in so doing, I began to consciously not just admit, but to actually work with the notion of not one but two selves, one of them larger and more powerful than the other.

At the time, of course, I didn’t know if my desperate and novel approach to addiction would succeed and, in fact, I was willing to smoke the rest of my life, two packs a day, in order to find out. I put my life on the line that day, in order to discover if there was more to life than dreary guilt-ridden tedium.

My approach did “work,” and I have been “praying” ever since. By this I mean I have been in relationship to what I consider “the divine.” I am not always consciously aware of this relationship, but I do have access to it, and can call upon it at any time. This relationship connects my normal everyday “ego” with that other mysterious locus of awareness inside me. And because that larger Self does not seem to recognize limitation, I sense it is also outside me. In fact, there is the little pinhole ego me, and there is the great fullness of Being, utterly alive birthing creation with every breath.

“Praying,” now, to me, is not asking for what I want, but surrendering to this larger order, so that my will and the will of the universe are one. And in this surrendering, ritual has come to play a very important part. Small, repeating actions help to center me, just as smoking cigarettes, a small repeating pattern, was itself a disguised attempt at centering. Even during those years when Marlboro Lights were always at hand, I would joke that smoking was a “fucked up pranayama,” i.e., a breathing exercise meant to hook me up to the universe, but instead filling me with poison. I did see the irony in my situation. I did cynically realize that each time I lit up a new cigarette, the first inhalation was an instinctive attempt to fill myself with whatever lies beyond. But then, of course, the disappointment in myself, as time after time after time I deliberately allowed my lungs to absorb noxious gases in a doomed effort to pacify the chugging anxiety underneath.

At some point during the process of letting go of cigarettes — it began three months after I had surrendered to the addiction, and was, to a great extent, effortless! — I began to realize that even if I did succeed, I was temperamentally an addict; that I was condemned, because of my somewhat obsessive compulsive nature, to addiction; that my choices were confined to whether my addictions served or denied life. In short, would I be a slave to good addictions or to bad ones? Thus my consciously chosen rituals now, as deliberate daily exercises in the awareness of centering my own small ego in the vastness of the real.

When my husband Jeff Joel died, not quite one year ago, I was filled with gratitude for the ritual I had established over the last few years. That ritual was a lifeline in those early months, assisting me in taking the edges off, first shock, and then subliminal, anxiety-producing chaos. No matter what unpredictable peaks and troughs of feeling I was facing, this ritual helped set a rhythm for that day, sculpting a channel for my nervous system that moderated my moods.

Now, each morning at dawn, as I finish my hour-long round of yoga/chi kung/tai chi, ending with a prayer of blessing to the four directions, I remain immensely grateful for this centering practice which guides me as I continue to work through the intense and prolonged process of grieving.

Only on the actual day of his death did I not do tai chi. Indeed, so extraordinary was that day that, when I woke up on the second morning, I was stunned to realize I had skipped my morning practice the day before. That was when I knew just how deep the shock of his death was to my system. For this practice is something I do every single day, no matter what, and has been, for the past three years. Even if I have a 6 AM plane trip, and must arise at 3 AM to drive to Indianapolis to make it, I will set my clock for 2 AM in order to do tai chi before leaving. (Tai chi gives me more energy than the extra hour of sleep.)

That morning of the second day of my new life, though I was still, of course, in shock, I followed my body into the studio and watched it get out the yoga mat, then lie down and begin to breathe in the long, slow, deep way that signals initiation into this most sacred hour in my day. No matter what, no matter how much cataclysmic change I would have to endure, this practice would hold me true, help me stay the course as I navigated rough waters ahead. My body knew that, even if my mind, at that point in the early days of my grieving, was too numb to care.

Every morning I move first into yoga's stretching and balancing, waking up every single cell to the new day; yoga seamlessly segues into chi kung's ultra-slow-moving postures, activating the tingling and flow of chi throughout the body's energy pathways; then, finally, my body enters the dance form of tai chi, slow and methodical, straight-backed and as if sitting on a horse, with knees bent, and toes pointed slightly inward, shifting from one foot and that side of the body to the other, over and over again, arms like tree limbs in wind, waving energy in and out, from heaven to earth and back again. Feet grip earth like a lover, head shoots to the stars.

This ritual sets the tone for each day. If someone were to watch me, they might think, “Ah my, she has her act together.” Just like in church, when I assumed everybody but me was really praying. But the cycle has turned round to the beginning. Now, 50 years from my early church-going years, I am still caught in monkey-mind, still endeavoring to train my everyday awareness to not spin out into hope or regret or nostalgia, not latch on; once I do notice that my mind has left my body and lost itself in imaginings, I gently lead myself back, to right here, right now.

Yes, I must admit that hooking up to the universe is still a sometime thing, intermittent and episodic. But once in a while, time does stop and grace steals in, to bestow its subtle fluid blessing. I thank whatever is this mysterious divine order which dissolves the veil between inside and outside, for attuning me to Oneness, for its persistent patient reach into my wayward soul.

Update 2010:

Six years later, these practices remain my daily prayer. Changes in my body/mind/spirit complex continue; what used to be a strong alteration between practice and the rest of my day, between a ritual-based heightened state of awareness and the frenzied, impatient chattering of my monkey mind is mostly gone. In its place I experience a near-continuous dimension of more-or-less awareness that varies within a certain narrow band. I’m still susceptible to deranging shocks from inside or outside, but very seldom, and I find it much easier and quicker to right myself when they come.

I suspect that the continued practice of any form of meditation, when done with ever-renewed focus and attention, will tend in the same direction of smoothing out the life, making it not just “easier to bear,” but actually opening spaces between and within the cells for a continuous flooding of gratitude and joy.

Essay

WHEN IS DISCIPLINE ONLY DENIAL?

© Ann Kreilkamp, 1987

Introduction

The “new age” is now so well established that anyone who undergoes the famous “paradigm shift” has a new cultural reference system with which to immediately identify. Gone are the days when each person underwent that awesome changeover alone, stranger in a strange land. Now converts enter a world which thousands, perhaps millions of others have been constructing for more than two decades.

We in this new culture like to think it is radically new, a total transformation of the old. And yet, as usual, what seems new is often only surface dazzle, signaled by catchwords, consumer products, fads which blink in and out with dizzying rapidity. The old culture has an amazing ability to co-opt evolutionary advances almost instantly, streamlining for mass consumption. For everyone who truly changes form there are a hundred others who merely change clothes.

Whatever cultural transformation we have initiated has only barely begun. And in order to continue to deepen our experience of this evolving situation it is necessary to continually question ourselves, especially noticing those situations where we think we have changed, but have not, not really.

I think of my work as a peace activist a few years ago, and in the middle of that, the sudden, terrible recognition: of my dogmatism, my righteousness, an insufferable need to convince people that I was right. I was, in fact, a (mentally) *violent* peace activist, one particularly obnoxious example of what I was so determined to change.

In the following essay I present another example, from my own experience, of something which I think is all too common within the new age, our tendency to confuse true discipline with denial. In this confusion, we find ourselves still captured by the old world view which, we know all too well, has not only outlived its usefulness, it has become positively toxic to all living things.

I am introduced to yoga

It is the summer of my 29th year. I am a nervous, driven, high strung woman, smoking two packs a day. My emotional and behavioral patterns are strong, deeply rooted, and, unbeknownst to me, about to be plowed under.

Saturn's long turning is arcing towards closure for the very first time. I am to complete one cycle and begin again, at a new level of the spiral, sowing different habits over time. Slowly, subtly, inexorably, these habits will bend me on a trajectory of increasing emotional and physical health.

As usual — though I don't know it yet — my unconscious mind works its magic, attracts to me exactly what I need at this time. A yogi walks into my life. I am to share a beach house with him and several others for the summer. This man offers to teach me his discipline. Reluctant, but curious, I accept the challenge.

At first it is difficult, this “yoga,” utterly alien to my way of life.

I am an idea person. Ideas move swiftly: they fly, like birds, or arrows. Ideas swirl around, flashing streaks of light, evanescent, blinking on and off, in and out, mere thinking makes it so.

Yoga has nothing to do with ideas. Instead of expanding outwards, captivated by my own mental projections, I must turn around, face what's inside. To practice yoga is to focus on the inner reaches of my own physical substance. Not a comfortable place to be.

This body feels heavy, dense, inert, like sludge. Its habits are fixed and immutable. They give me stability, continuity through time. They make me feel safe. I like my habits.

I hate my habits. I hate the fact that I cannot control my smoking. I hate my body. It feels so alien to me, the real me, the thinking me it zooms out, fast — like lightning! — to play with itself, spinning out airy tentacles in all directions, ideas spawning each other in prolific protean display.

And then eventually — so frustrating — the mind suddenly turns, zooms back in, to its anchor, its albatross, that damned body of mine, it doesn't like to go anywhere, doesn't want anything other than what it already is.

I zoom out. Aaaaah . . . so exciting, so free! Swirling into infinity . . . sudden fear, terror . . . zoom back in. Whew. I made it. I'm still here. Quick, anchor myself. Light another cigarette, take another puff. Round and round. Just one more cigarette, one more puff. I hate myself. I want to be free. Free of this habit, this terrible constriction.

But at least I have my cigarettes! Without them I feel so afraid . . . so lost . . . My cigarettes measure my day, keep time like a metronome, guarantee my existence from moment to moment within an otherwise featureless infinity . . .

To begin to practice yoga is to begin to change my routines. Is to threaten an internal bodily security constructed so carefully over time. A security based on what is familiar, habitual. For no matter how pernicious, how destructive my habits, at least I know them, they are mine.

But something in me wants to change — despite the body's resistance. Something powerful in me which I do not yet understand. Without consciously deciding to, I call upon the discipline I learned so thoroughly as a child. I generate the enormous resolve necessary to continue this new practice.

Instead of rolling a joint at around 4 PM, for years my way of relaxing at the end of a day, I change into loose clothing and submit to instruction in the rigors of yoga, exactly matching the breathing to certain bodily postures.

When my mentor does the poses, they look supple, graceful, loose. As he moves, he changes, seems to become another person entirely, someone both utterly concentrated and yet completely at ease. I watch his face as it clarifies, becomes still, serene. He

seems to go somewhere deep inside, and while down there generates an atmosphere so powerful that it alters my reality, calming me, enveloping me in an awesome, spacious silence.

My turn. Back to reality.

I try to remember when to breathe in, when to breathe out, how to time the breath to the complicated motions of the “Salute to the Sun.” No good. I lose my balance. I forget what comes next. I try too hard. I simply don’t have the strength, or the flexibility, to arch my back that way, or that far.

“Slow down!” he urges me quietly, placing a hand gently on my knee, or the small of my back. “Don’t reach too far, just stay with what is comfortable at any one time. There need be no pain.” The man is patient, subtle. And I am to learn to perceive and move the way he does, with full appreciation of subtle, at times almost imperceptible distinctions in attitudes of both body and mind.

We agree to practice each afternoon. Which means each afternoon I have to make another conscious decision, dedicate myself once again to this change in daily routine. Everything in me wants to forget yoga and roll that joint instead. Gritting my teeth, I change clothes and march on out to the porch.

After a few days it becomes easier. There is not quite so much resistance. The body begins to sense a pattern in the new — another habit, another safe place. The temptation to return to what I had known before is dissipating. My stiff body is beginning to flex and stretch, its former rigidity loosening, becoming more elastic.

After a few weeks I notice that my nervous system seems to be changing, balancing itself. The interface between inside and outside, between me and the world, feels less jarring, more flowing. I am not as much on edge, as nervous.

As the months go on, I notice that I’m not smoking nearly as many cigarettes as before. Not because I am trying to stop, but because my hand does not automatically reach for them as often. I have cut down from two packs a day to one without even trying! Ruefully, I begin to recognize my smoking as a negative “pranayama” (yogic

breathing exercise), its deep inhalations a misguided attempt to balance a nervous system chronically stressed by years of hypervigilant perfectionism.

My body begins to feel lighter, more spacious, toned, a proper channel for the energy coursing through it. Sometimes now, when I put on my shoe, I do so while standing one-legged, like a stork, internally balanced. All parts of me feel like one thing, the energy moving from one part to another in continuous flowing motion.

This change radiates into every aspect of my daily life. Because the energy flows, because the physical channel for that energy is clearing, I no longer have to make those hundreds of tiny, seemingly insignificant, and mostly unconscious, yet energy consuming decisions — to get up, to sit down, to bend over, to reach for . . .

I begin to notice other people, those who “have energy,” those who don’t. I wonder what it would be like to be an enormously fat and sluggish person. I imagine how all his or her time and energy would be taken up first, in just deciding to, then in “getting up the energy” — to go up and down stairs, to get in and out of chairs . . . I begin to realize how “dead” most people really are, how numb.

I have settled into a routine, allowing thirty minutes a day for this exercise, sandwiching it in when I need its energy lift the most, right before dinnertime.

It feels good, this practice. My body feels better — and my conscience feels better too. I have actually managed to change a long-standing physical habit, creating a new and life-affirming space for myself for thirty minutes each day.

At the crossroads

Suddenly, unaccountably, after six months my body revolts. Or is it my will? All I know is I don’t want to practice yoga anymore.

I force myself to do it anyway, though I hate every single minute of it. Can’t wait to get it over with. My practice speeds up, becomes sloppy, loses tone. It’s doing me no good. I might as well quit.

I decide to quit for awhile. And then suffer pangs of guilt for making that decision.

“Finish what you start!” the old adage, repeated by parents and teachers from as long as I can remember, hammers my brain.

I have reached a crucial point in the history of my practice of yoga. This point will later be remembered as a crucial fork in the road I am on. It is a fork that everybody reaches, sooner or later, after they have already overcome the initial inertia to establish a new habit, but that habit is still somewhat tentative, fragile. The consequences of this decision are both subtle in their origins and far reaching in their implications.

Here the road splits in two, and the divergence between the two roads will increase as they proceed further and further from their common source. This is the point of creativity, where, depending upon which choice I make, will tend to become either 1) more or less depressed, deadened to my life or 2) more and more disciplined, the passion within me channeling into full productive expression.

The first choice, depression, is the consequence of what most people still call “discipline.” And the second choice, true discipline, is something most people in our culture have never even heard of.

Each point contains a choice

Let us remember, each and every moment of our lives is always the crucial one. The point of power is precisely in the present. At each point the choice is simple. We can proceed with fear or with love.

If I am fearful, then I contract, repress myself. If I am loving, then I expand, enter fully into my experience of the present moment.

The simplicity of this continuously recurring choice is obvious at a theoretical level. It is also obvious in practice to someone who has been operating in a more or less expanded way for some time. For those who have been locked in fear, however — and that is most of us, until we “wake up,” and over and over again, we must wake up, must

remember ourselves, who we are, souls, portions of divinity — the choice is not only not obvious, it is damnably difficult to both understand and act upon.

For here's the rub. Unless one is already comfortable inside one's body, attuned to subtle differences in both feeling tones and points of tension — unless one is truly thus “embodied,” so that one can instantly detect the tightening of fear, the expansion of love, the choice I am talking about does not even appear to be there.

Remember, at the point of origin the two roads are not yet divided. Once they do divide, for a while they are still quite close together, the difference between them subtle. Only over a more or less long period of time do the extraordinary differences between them become obvious.

Now let's go back to my blockage, after six months, in the practice of yoga.

The usual choices

The choice appears to be obvious: either I can recommit myself to the daily practice of yoga or I can decide not to.

At this point in my life, I am still a creature conditioned by my culture, operating automatically within its assumptions, including those governing the meaning of the word “discipline.” Given those assumptions, I assume that, in order to return to yoga, I must use my “will power” to overcome the resistance. And if I do this, my conscious self will feel righteous, congratulating itself by showing such determination despite the body's contrary pull.

To return to yoga, despite the body's resistance — indeed, especially because of this resistance — is, I assume, to “build discipline,” a quality that everyone around me agrees is good.

This is one view of discipline, the one most of us learned as children. This understanding of discipline is embedded as one small thread in the seamless weave of the culture into which we were born, and which has been with us for at least two thousand years.

This view of discipline, where the body is denied in order to do something the mind deems worthy, has split us from the flow of our own body's life. At this point in history, the ramifications of this split are both manifold and ubiquitous.

What we call "discipline" is, in truth, a form of denial. We deny the natural flow of our own energy; we damn it up. This is not love, this is fear. The more we deny it, the stronger it gets, the more energy it takes to continue the denial. Our energy, which would naturally be used to express ourselves creatively in the world, splits in two, part of it damming up, the remainder used against itself.

Eventually, as more and more of our energy is used internally, to keep ourselves from expressing ourselves naturally, we become depressed. We go around the world as if we are deadened to its effects on us; and in truth, we are. We are so unconsciously preoccupied with controlling our own internal functioning that we have shut down to the natural beauty and wonder of it all. The world outside begins to actually look bleak, flat, black and white — the same way we feel inside.

To return to yoga, then, while still feeling bodily resistance to it, is not a good idea. Well then, one might think, just decide not to do it! Forget yoga! But look at what happens when I make this choice.

Most likely, I would do this with guilty conscience intact, but denied. I would say to myself "I'm just too busy," and this justification would mask the deeper feeling: "I should do this, but I am too weak, just don't have enough will power."

In this case, by choosing not to do yoga, I get caught in the same bias as in choosing to do it. Either way, I feel split off from my body. I identify with only a part of myself, my mind, which then either succeeds in controlling the recalcitrant body, or capitulates to its resistance. Either I feel strong ("have enough will power") or I feel weak.

Thus, in the usual approach to discipline, both the choice to continue and the choice not to continue are essentially unhealthy in their effects. The first leads to a feeling of righteousness and power, the second to a feeling of weakness and guilt.

On the other hand, this same choice can be based on an entirely different attitude, or set of assumptions — about life, about the meaning of true discipline.

The same choices under different assumptions

In this other way of going about deciding, I do not identify myself as my mind (my will), having to somehow manage or control a recalcitrant body. Rather, I assume the mind and body are one integrated system, whether or not they experience it as such all the time. Indeed, it is such practices as yoga which lead us eventually, to the realization of that unity. (The very word, “yoga,” means union.)

Here, where I encounter a blockage inside myself towards a practice which had been flowing smoothly, I stop to ponder the meaning of its occurrence. Have I been moving ahead of myself here, getting out of balance in some way, so that this desire to stop is a symptom of my need to pay attention to what is happening? Am I feeling so distracted by all the stresses in my life right now that I cannot give yoga the attention it deserves? Do I really want to practice yoga, or have I finished what was essentially an experiment. (After all, my entire life is an experiment!)

As I ponder these questions, I also pay attention to the exact feelings that are arising within my body. Do I feel like a little kid who is being asked to practice the piano every day when she would rather be outside playing?

This question rings a bell. I do feel this way! Just like when I was a little girl, practicing every day for eight long years! And I did so, having absorbed our usual cultural ideas about discipline. Forcing myself to sit down at the piano, I was subduing a young vigorous body, sacrificing the natural physical growth of that period of life to the unnatural growth of “will power.”

As a result, my playing, though it became technically accomplished, was utterly mechanical, devoid of life. Indeed, not until I was in my late 30s did I begin to feel whole enough within myself to want to play the piano again — this time with an entirely different attitude. Having opened to the full range of bodily feelings, I could now begin to express them expansively through the technical training I had received as a child.

Sometimes, as above, I can answer my initial questions, and this changes my entire relationship to the blockage, starts the energy moving. And sometimes I just have to sit for awhile with my questions.

Meanwhile, as I continue to pay attention to my body's actual feelings, I notice the icky, yucky feeling of "guilt" that pervades the decision to stop. I remember back to other times — how many times! — in my life when I also felt guilty. I notice how guilt makes me feel — bad, worthless, almost paralyzed. It clouds my perception and my judgment to the point of inertia, where I am caught on a treadmill, running in place, getting nowhere. Guilt, when I get right down to it, is just an excuse to keep on doing the same damn thing.

Here is the atmosphere of death-in-life to which so much of the human race is still in thrall. We use guilt to mask our real feelings, because we think if we allow ourselves to really feel them, it would be so painful we would die.

What a paradox! We are so afraid of death that in order to avoid it, we deaden ourselves to life. Entranced by our collective dream of guilt, we stumble about like sleepwalkers, numbed to our actual experience. So wake up!

Each time we accept and embrace one small "death," we wake up. We open ourselves, to enlarge the passage through which the life force flows.

Applying all this to my body's sudden reluctance to continue doing yoga, I notice how tempted I am to split myself off from that reluctant feeling and force myself to do it anyway. And here's the crucial point, the actual crossroads: because I notice the temptation on a mental level, because I notice both the reluctance and the beginning of the sensation of splitting on the physical level — because I notice both mind and body with my body/mind, I am no longer in either the temptation or the split in the same manner.

Something has changed. Something is moving, healing. I am becoming whole. Through my acceptance of what is actually happening, what is happening changes. I move with the changes. I process my actual experience of this blockage in my practice of yoga.

In my acknowledgement of the actual experience of both mind and body, I am weaving a conscious unity between them. And now, paradoxically, as I begin to feel that unity, I again feel the stirrings of the need to practice yoga, stirrings which originate, not in the “will power” (the mind); not forced, but naturally, as an instinctive bodily need.

I have moved through the blockage, rather than pretending to ignore it. Rather than contracting fearfully, denying my feelings, numbing myself to anything but preset expectations of what I should do, I have expanded, to lovingly include my bodily feelings, include and process them to the point where, of their own accord — what a miracle! — they change.

True discipline

This process of moving through the blockage to yoga took another six months. And when it was over, and I had begun to practice again, I began to feel the first stirrings of the long-range trajectory I was on in this practice. Because of the personal rewards I had already experienced, I knew yoga was “good for me.” And because of both the experience of blockage and the way I had worked with it, I knew also that any further blockages could be processed in the same way. That even if I would go for years, at times, not doing yoga, it was okay, I need not feel guilty. That this would be simply the point in my process which I was currently moving through.

Seventeen years have gone by since that time. I usually practice yoga five or six times a week, and those days in which I do not I hardly notice. Nor do I pay much attention to those days in which I do. Yoga has become a part of my life so thoroughly entrenched that when I do not do it for a few days I notice the first hints of a slackness in my body/mind and so instinctively move into it once again.

People say I’m “disciplined.” I agree. But what I mean by it and what they mean are usually two different things.

I am the point of origin between two roads which are continually proceeding out divergently from my center. Each moment of my life the choice is a simple one. I choose

fear or I choose love. To fear is to contract, to deny what is really going on, and leads, over time to depression, and death. To love is to expand, to include what is really going on, and leads, over time, to dedication, and ultimately devotion.

The discernment between the two choices, though simple, is difficult in the beginning. And we are always beginning.

Paradoxically, we beginners are always, simultaneously, more or less experienced. With experience comes fine tuning, and ultimately, the immediate, even instinctive, constant choosing of love over fear.

The usual cultural version of “discipline” is fearful at its core and creates the very split which yoga and other true disciplines are designed to overcome. To be truly disciplined, is to continually choose to expand — first, to include our own internal feelings, and ultimately, our entire world. The more deeply we sense our own feelings, the larger does our world become. As we center ourselves there, deep down inside, we balance at the center of our universe, and become increasingly aware of its endless radiation out from that inner core.

True discipline leads to the awareness of unity with all that is. This awareness itself, automatically creates an attitude of dedication, and ultimately, that utterly selfless devotion required during this sacred and momentous time of planetary healing.

Essay

My Chiron Return

Welcome to Planet Earth, Winter 1993

© Ann Kreilkamp

This spring my faithful old Subaru finally bit the dust. I've been lucky with used cars. Of course I would get another one. So, you can imagine my complete bewilderment when I received an inner directive to buy a new car. "A new car?" I sputtered. "Brand new?" "Yes."

"You want me to become a materialist? This is totally unnecessary. A stupid luxury. Besides, how can I afford it?!!"

"Just buy it."

So I did. I became a regular American citizen, with payments every month for the next five years.

Why did I need a new car? Because cars, at least in my dreams, symbolize my body. The new car would symbolize my new body.

New body? I am 50 years old. I never tire of saying it, amazed at this accomplishment. All my life I have wanted to be old. I have wanted to "get beyond the bullshit females in this culture are subject to"; wanted to "focus on reality rather than appearances," to *live from the inside out*. Ever since I was a little girl, I figured that in old age I would enter a blessed time when finally others would have to see through my "outside" to encounter the real me.

So here I am, 50 years old, on the verge of achieving my long-awaited goal, and what happens? I get a new car. "To symbolize my new body." Isn't this exactly the opposite of what I was so wanting to achieve? More on this later.

It is August, 1993, the month of my Chiron Return. For me, Chiron is at 29° Leo, 9th house, conjunct my North Node at 28° Leo, square Mars/Uranus at 1-2° Gemini/Sagittarius, trine Sun at 27° Sagittarius.

In the past month I have formally resigned from my original family system, or, I should say, I have formally resigned from my antagonistic relationship to the kingpin of that family system, my German Catholic father, his near-biblical judgments against who I am, what I believe, and what I do.

I've "left home" many times before, of course, but never have I made a conscious decision to separate out from my family and do it with love and respect. Simply, I must now follow the impulse of my 9th house Chiron in Leo conjunct North Node and trine my Sagittarian Sun.

I have also, within the past two weeks, let go of my final substance abuse, addiction to caffeine. My body demanded that I let go of coffee four or five years ago. But I had hung on to black tea. "Two teabags a day, one in the morning, one in the afternoon," I would say, laughing, uneasy. "This is my final vice. I don't want to give it up!" I was clinging to my addiction as a life raft in the sea of infinite possibility. I couldn't bear to contemplate such freedom. I had to keep that one anchor to my old ways of surviving.

Now, my body demanded that I let go of caffeine in all forms. That was three weeks ago. I remember that first morning, lying in bed contemplating life without my familiar, comforting, initial pot of tea. I dragged myself out of bed, put myself on automatic. That whole day I felt spacey, slightly headachy, unable to focus. The second and third days I was still dragging around with little or nothing to motivate me. By the fifth day, I began to open my eyes. On the sixth and seventh days, I began to focus in a more sustained manner. By the second week, I was astonished to realize that I was already burning a different sort of fuel. It was as if I had gone from a low-grade variety which put me through zig-zag highs and lows to something much more serene and powerful.

What a contrast! I realize now that what has fueled me since I began to drink caffeine, as a high school senior, was anxiety. Anxiety kept me on edge; danger lurked everywhere. Stay alert! Caffeine kicked in the energy of adrenalin, which then overrode the anxiety. I was busy, doing something, making something happen. Nervous. See-sawing between panic and relief. Trying to stay on top of things so I wouldn't have to feel. So I wouldn't have to sink down under the adrenalin to the pain pooled there.

Then, after an hour, or an afternoon, whoosh — I would go down, crashing down. One minute hyperactive, the next exhausted, ready for bed — or another hit of caffeine.

Every time I've let go of an addiction, I've had to shove something else into its place immediately, as a substitute, in order to keep the anxiety masked. When I let go of cigarettes, I brought in sugar. When I let go of marijuana, I doubled the caffeine load. This is the first time in my life I have not been sucked into the anxiety as soon as I entered withdrawal from the addiction. Instead, what I have noticed is space. A sense of great spaciousness.

[I wrote the above paragraph three days ago. Since then I have noticed symptoms of the old anxiety returning: there is a vague feeling of something missing — something drastic, an extreme high or low, a crisis. As if life isn't as interesting as it was before. As if only in crisis do I feel alive. Feeling anxious is like stumbling through fog, knowing the edge of a cliff is somewhere near. But where? "Be alert! Grab that cup of caffeine!" "No! No! Just keep going, let the fog surround you. Trust the process. Move through it." Yes, for the first time in my life I *can* do this. Why? . . . Something about this new sense of internal space . . . creating an enclosure within which I feel safe. There *is* no cliff. I walk on level ground, despite this temporary dimming of vision.

As the serenity of the new spaciousness unrolls from my center out to the horizon, so does my subconscious, long familiar with conflict and difficulty, seize up with fear. Fear of loss of the familiar. Fear of loss of old survival mechanisms. This is a crucial time. I know it. I hang between two worlds. I have not yet completely let go of the one. I have not yet fully embodied the other. Meanwhile, with the return of anxiety, life loses its sharpness, its clarity. Inside, unease. Outside, boredom. I plod along, minute by minute, hour by hour, waiting for relief, knowing it will arrive eventually.]

During the month of my Chiron Return, I have released (or begun to release) two immensely old patterns, both of them symptomatic of my original wound. One pattern is external, the energy system of my family of origin; the other internal, the withdrawal of caffeine from my physical and emotional bodies. In exchange for these great losses, I begin to sense the presence of an enormous internal space.

Which came first? The decision to release the old patterns or the new sense of spaciousness? Both, I would say. They evolved together. I have been feeling inner stirrings from both of them for months, but only now are they both actually present, as new realities, in my life. It feels as if the new sense of space opening has itself created — or is identical with — a new context, or field of meaning, one which no longer sustains the ancient patterns; it is made of finer stuff. Likewise, the old patterns created a heaviness in my life. As this heaviness drops away, I am able to sense the more subtle quality of the new field.

I imagine the small repeating patterns of addictions themselves as spaces, tiny closed systems that become more and more clogged, suffocated with the contents of their particular addictions as the years pass. Perhaps that's why my family system feels so claustrophobic. The same or similar feelings had gotten packed over and over again into the contained spaces created by the repeating patterns so tightly that at some point there was no more room to move. Either I resigned myself to the death-in-life of my own mechanicalness — over and over again reacting to the same sorts of situations in the same sorts of ways — or, I set myself free.

In the past, when I have thought I set myself free, it was only to enter the tiny space of a new addiction, which then, in turn, I would gradually fill to the point of bursting, etc. etc. There was no end to this repeating process. My addictions structured my life, so that I wouldn't drown in the chaos of feelings. My addictions were survival mechanisms, enabling me to function in the world. I could not really set myself free, because to do so was to become filled with the anxiety attending extreme disorientation. I would fall off the cliff, either plunging into the void, or shooting into space — the space that knows no circumference, and in which the center is everywhere and nowhere. I had no capacity for

the infinite. My Moon is in Taurus. Emotionally I needed the feeling of being supported and cushioned by earth's gravity.

Given these constraints, the astonishing thing about my Chiron Return has been this sense of space which has opened up internally for me. The space feels both enormous and yet not anxiety-producing, because it is contained; contained by the circumference of my entire life! The space of 50 years: Chiron's space. Paradoxically, it is as if I feel myself both beginning to encompass (and to feel comfortable within) that enormous space now, and I feel myself beginning to accept the discomfort of infinite possibility that the future presents. I feel both the fullness of this space as something already accomplished, and the emptiness of this space as the new matrix for future action. Thus, my overall feeling is what astrologers would expect with the Chiron Return: an extraordinary sense of completion and new beginning.

I struggle with talking about this, because we astrologers are so glib in talking about cycles, and about the feeling of completion and new beginning that happens as a result of the return of any planetary body to its natal place. Our talk threatens to become a cliché. We expect certain things to happen and they do. It's as if we see the universe as a giant clock, and our job is to tell the time. We get so focused on the structural aspects of cycles, on our ability to tell people when things are going to happen, that we lose sight of the unspeakable mystery at the heart of things. The mystery is what is contained in those spaces, the wondrously subtle and complex interplay of our feelings. Our feelings, no matter how uncomfortable, are our lifeline; they move us out of mechanicalness and into the heart, the soul, the spirit.

What I have been fascinated by here is that fact that I began to feel these sensations — of enormous space, of completion and new beginning — a few months ago. At that time I was not consciously thinking about the fact that my Chiron was returning. Of course, for years now I had known that Chiron would return in August 1993, and had wondered about it, how it would feel. But this feeling I am talking about here came from lived experience alone, uninterpreted. I had not yet put a name to it, not yet painted it with the patina of astrological language. And along with the sense of spaciousness, another feeling has sifted in, a feeling of immense awe and gratitude. It is as if I am

being *gifted* with this spaciousness. As if it is a reward for a job well done. I sense this space as the matrix within which all my experiences have taken place, each one taking its place now as a “point” within the space, connected to all the other points in a radiating dance of feelings. I sense the uncanny coherence within this dance, as if it were choreographed by some kind of subtle genius, so that only at the end of the 50-year dance do I realize it as one, a unity, whole.

Again, when I attempt to talk about this, I grow frustrated. For the way I am talking about my Chiron Return is exactly the same way as I talk about the first Saturn Return (about age 30) to others who are going through it! Though I struggle to find words which will invoke the feeling of this grand Chirotic event, all that I am able to come up with is the same words which I would use to describe the feeling which attends the close of another, smaller cycle. The fact that a certain space has now been contained — through the closing of the cycle for the first time — is what the two events have in common. It is the actual space itself that is new. The space of 50 years is not merely 1.666 . . . times the space of 30 years. The difference is not merely quantitative. It is qualitative. And this qualitative difference is what the structural aspects of the astrological language — of any scientific language — cannot describe. The feeling of the whole. With each whole there is a feeling appropriate to that specific whole alone. That’s where the meanings of these astrological symbols, the planetary energies, come from in the first place, from the space/time which each of them describe/enclose. Once again I am reminded that I cannot comprehend any cycle until I literally “go through it.”

A great 50-year cycle is ending for me, and a new one begins. The new one will be molded from the ashes of the old. Those ashes contain the distillation of 50 years of experience, a nugget of gold, the seed of my new life.

Now, during the month the Chiron Return is actually taking place, I feel as if I am undergoing a month-long ceremony and celebration (despite my temporary dullness these last few days). I am releasing what has wounded me, the judgmental world-view of the Patriarchal Catholic family system. I am freeing myself up to actualize my ninth house Chiron in Leo trine Sagittarian Sun, to actively express my own world-view, the gold gleaned from 50 years of survival through adaptation to my original woundedness.

I survived it; my spirit has come through intact. This itself is quite an accomplishment. Now I am to thrive. I feel I am on the brink of an entirely new life, one in which I hope to take that gold and spend it on a new beginning.

In the first cycle of Chiron, I experienced the spiritual and emotional wound that results when a fiery philosophical self-expressive personality interacts with the staid, stuck tradition of the world's oldest and most powerful organized religion. I was attempting to both find my own way and yet remain loyal to the past. The result was paralysis, pain. One cannot do both at once.

In the first cycle of Chiron, I was learning about the interaction between my Sagittarian personality and the cultural world I was born into. In the second cycle of Chiron I wish to help to create a reality that reflects the vision of Sagittarius: a continuously expanding, more and more inclusive, world-view that begins inside the radiating center of each and every unique individual.

Which brings me back to the beginning. The new car. My new body. A body cleared of old survival mechanisms, which kept my body operating in fits and starts. I am learning to appreciate the new high-test, smooth performance fuel of natural energy, supplied by the universe. That energy fires a new, more efficient, more spacious, more joyous body. Fires it with truth-telling, true love.

I look forward to the next 50 years.

Essay

BUILDING THE SNOW CASTLE

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Once, on a sunny winter afternoon playing with children on the lawn of the park nearby, I encountered an experience that prefigured what would later become a more conscious longing.

The air is clear, crisp and cold. Blue sky sparkles with ice crystals. The voices of children laughing, seriously discussing, squealing with delight. I help another girl roll one of the massive snowballs we are using to make the wall. When it gets too big, one of the big boys joins us in rolling, and then he and another even taller boy lift the ball to the top of the wall. The castle is growing, wall by wall, room by room. I am astonished and amazed, flooded with feeling—for this day, this snow, this communion. I'm so happy I could burst.

This magical afternoon struck an internal chord, one which has been strumming, as an undertone through all my experiences, ever since.

All my life I have been fascinated by the subject of community, and its relationship to the individual. I seek to understand how communities work and don't work, their tendency to become either too structured or to degenerate into chaos. I am also fascinated with the underlying invisible but very real dynamics which give each community its unique identity.

My own experiences with community have been diverse. I grew up as the model first-born in a large Catholic family, later turning rebellious. I have experimented with living in communes and other group situations. I have been married, several times, creating families with children and stepchildren. I have also lived for some years alone. For the last seven years, I have lived in my dream home, a 20-foot diameter yurt inside a small yurt community in the village of Kelly, Wyoming, directly across the valley from the Grand Teton. Four years ago, my partner and now husband, Jeffrey Joel, joined me in the yurt.

My connections with both Jeffrey and our little community are continuously evolving. Whatever the current situation, no matter how attached to my own ego position I sometimes become in conflicts, through it all that original undertone strums. The vision of children playing joyfully together has always served as an ideal standard. Increasingly, this vision is guiding my practice.

Sometimes my vision blurs, and I see myself living in a dream world. Reading the newspapers, I notice the shocking recent increase in overt greed, hatred and violence of individual, class, ethnic and racial oppression all over the world. I think that this “news” is what is really real. That I am merely escaping from this reality.

Then I remember the world I live in is what I have created, over a lifetime of thinking in a certain way. My reality is a manifestation of my vision. Intuitively, I know that there are many of us creating another, more peaceful reality in tiny pockets of the world, and that the seeds of this more sane and humane way of life are spreading and reseeding themselves everywhere.

I am a member of an entire generation for whom the vision of peace on earth is central. Without this vision, there is no meaning in our world. As an astrologer, I ascribe my generation’s longing for peaceful connection to “Neptune in Libra.” This is one of our two main generational signatures. (The other is Pluto in Leo, described later on.)

Those born between 1942 and 1957, when planet Neptune was traveling through the sign of Libra, carry the Neptune in Libra signature in their birth charts. In my case,

Neptune was also conjunct the Midheaven, which signifies the purpose for which one was born. For me, Neptune symbolizes a personal as well as a generational calling.

This is the generation which came of age during the '60s. Usually, our expression of the Neptunian energy is unconscious. We feel it in our continuous disappointments in love. We sense it in our tendency to become addicted — to love, to glamour, to liquor, marijuana, cocaine, prozac — all of which seem to take us out of our bodies and into a more ideal world. And yet there have been times when this generation has moved as one body in our inchoate gut responses to mass events: our work for racial equality in the civil rights movement, our repugnance over the war in Vietnam.

For reasons which remain inscrutable to the conscious mind, there are moments when the divine seems to draw near, and light up the heart. For those within whom the formerly unconscious movement of Neptune awakens, it is as if we have been visited by the Holy Spirit. A miracle occurs. We begin to release our addictions and awaken from the common cultural trance. Now, the serenity and compassion of Neptune becomes an ideal for which we are consciously longing. Some of us become transformed by this energy; we give our lives to make it real.

Even when the energy remains unconscious, it inspires leaders to create institutions which reflect its value: the United Nations, founded in 1945, is a collective symbol of the vision of a peaceful world. And our generational myth, given national significance in John F. Kennedy's public love of "Camelot," is that of the Quest for the Holy Grail.

We long for peace on earth, and we long for personal love, the one who would be our "soul mate." No matter how bitter, how cynical our experience has been, our eyes still mist over whenever someone mentions this common longing, our secret hope. It's as if we see into the distant future, or back to a utopian past. Like in the novel, *Mists of Avalon* (the story of Camelot told from the female point of view), so memorable especially to the women of this generation, some ancient part of ourselves remembers how it was, and wants to recreate that sense of original unity, with someone, somehow, somewhere.

Though we have been the generation which destroyed the marriage vow as a commitment “‘til death do us part,” this destruction has always had a transcendent goal; we are searching for divinity, our Holy Grail, the perfect union with another, and until we find it, our search will continue.

These two Neptune in Libra ideals, human community and personal love, though not identical, are related. Both are difficult to achieve, and it feels as if each of them is necessary for the other to be possible. We do not form genuine communities unless we can also allow ourselves to love in a personal way. (One doesn’t love humanity without being capable of experiencing intimacy with real human beings. Thus the motto: “Think globally, act locally”). And we do not open to personal love without feeling the security of a genuine community context. (Those abandoned emotionally as children do not easily partner or parent as adults. Thus an entire industry was spawned: healing from childhood abuse.)

I notice that differences in community dynamics seem primarily to be a function of the varying relations between structure and process. This relationship establishes a certain proportion between permanence and change, stability and flow, knowledge and the search for it. We have to stand on something, but we’ve also got to keep moving. We need to be grounded, and yet we’re reaching for the stars. Too much of the first leads to conformity and stasis. Too much of the second, and context is lost. The actual tension between structure and process generates aliveness. It has been my experience that in a living community, structure and process are continuously rebalancing.

In my earliest experience of community, structure was stronger than process. Dad was the boss; Mom was his helper. We eight children were to obey him and help her. The burgeoning growth within us was contained within exacting spatial, temporal and moral guidelines. Dinner was at six. Children’s chores, posted on the refrigerator, rotated weekly. Bedtime was determined by age. We all memorized the ten commandments and dressed for church on Sunday. My experience as a child within a “nuclear family” echoes that of many in my generation. It was the ‘50s. Structure took precedence over process.

I can say now that the magic of that one sunny winter afternoon building the snow castle was the result of process and structure being in perfect dynamic balance. So perfect that the distinction between them dissolved. What we were creating and our joyful participation in creating it flowed from a common spring. Our castle was a fruit unfolding from the seed of our inner communion. No one was overseeing what we did. Like a flock of birds, we were turning, and turning again, to some hidden instruction.

During high school, I was connected to an unusual group of boys and girls. Like all of the communities I would be drawn to in the future, this one was very unlike my own family. Process reigned over structure. Unlike most social relations back in the '50s, our group experience was free-flowing and individualistic, the boundaries and rules elastic and in continuous evolution. We skied together, campaigned for each others' student body elections; we got together for heated arguments about the existence of God, and dared each other to outrageous stunts.

I was a teenager, "being socialized." The various associations I formed with others were in turn, forming me. The give and take (process) in each relationship left its residue in my personality (structure). I was a different person in each of my relationships, adjusting and blending who I was becoming to fit the contours of those with whom I was relating.

At that age, my identity was the sum total of all those qualities within myself called forth by all my different relationships. I avoided the space in between relationships. It was scary. It felt like a void.

Both my early marriages were schools in role-playing — as a wife, as mother, as step-mother. I slipped into these roles easily, the way prepared for me by the contours of invisible cultural forms molded and remolded through centuries. Then came the feelings of suffocation, followed by instinctive struggles to break free of roles, while remaining connected. This proved impossible, as neither my husbands nor I were authentic enough at the time to honor that in ourselves and each other.

During the late '60s and early '70s, I lived in four different communes, each of them full of “sex, drugs, rock’n roll” — and intense confusion. Our unconscious Neptune in Libra energy made us yearn for both true love and utopian community. And we were also acting out the dictates of our other, more overtly powerful, unconscious generational energy, “Pluto in Leo.”

The planet Pluto traveled through the sign of Leo from 1938 to 1958, its energy overlapping with that of Neptune in Libra. Our Pluto in Leo energy was intensely individualistic: we wanted to “express ourselves,” to “do our thing” — while damning the authorities and accusing each other of “power-trips” and “ego-trips.” With Pluto, we saw ourselves as anarchists. And yet, with Neptune, we loved the idea of living in community. Combining Neptune with Pluto, we trumpeted “free love,” pretending to give up our egos, and treat each other as equals — no attachment, no commitment, just NOW baby, BE HERE NOW. In reality, we came away from these experiences battered and bruised, as our intellectual ideologies bludgeoned our emotional sensitivities. Many more years would pass before I would admit to this, realizing that I had damaged myself by posing as a lover before my heart was opened.

To my knowledge, the few communities which did achieve some sort of stability during those years were either religious in nature, their beliefs serving as the glue which held them together, and/or, more likely, they were headed by a (strong religious or otherwise) father figure (or more rarely, a mother figure), recreating the hierarchically structured nuclear family.

Between 1974 and 1980 I lived in my old home town in Idaho, intentionally attempting to create a sense of “community” there, an alternative to the social forms of organized religions. I was gifted a house to live in, which I transformed into a community center with soup on the stove and free loaves of homemade bread for the first two people to walk in the door. I also founded and published a community magazine, *OpenSpace*, in which individuals who had been closeted forever in that small conservative town were invited to “open up space” by speaking their truths. Our spirit of sharing and adventure was exciting. It was also short-lived, due to my own unconscious

Pluto in Leo and Neptune in Libra energies. Neptune was making me utterly desperate for a perfect mate; and Pluto had set me up as “guru” for our tiny community.

My hubris was abruptly knocked off its pedestal by a man who walked in the door and psychically seduced me, dragging me off into his Plutonian realm. The Neptunian hook was perfect too: he was sick, in body, mind and soul. I would heal his body, change his mind, and save his soul. I would become the guru again, this time for one other.

The next year was hell. Our power struggle was covert, intense, and relentless. So was my unacknowledged feeling of being victimized by him, a prisoner of his latent violence. Finally, late one night, he came home drunk and belligerent. I was awakened by an inner voice. “*Center yourself,*” it said. “*You have one minute.*”

By the time he walked into the bedroom one minute later, I was ready. His arrival catalyzed my own Plutonian empowerment process. Over a four or five hour period, in order to physically survive, I had to psychically meet him with my own power. I did this, staring him down until he broke. Stepping over his guns, I walked out the door. For two more years I lived in fear of him stalking me. The day I heard of his death (from complications of alcoholism) my spirit soared — for him, for me. His death freed us both — and sobered me up from my addiction to saving another.

That was when I was 37 years old. Since then my fascination with community has not dulled, though my personal experiments with it have been outwardly much more subdued. My longing for a soul mate, however, did not abate. I spent my 40s learning to accept my loneliness, and to recognize its source, by uncovering the abandoned child within. She was one member of an entire community of inner selves with whom I am still working to bring into harmony.

I thought this work with my inner child and all her friends and relations would take oh, maybe six months. After a while I revised it to two years . . . Instead, this inner work took top priority for seven long years. I gave myself over to it, viewing my outer work as professional astrologer as a mere byproduct. The journal which I had already kept for 20 years became my constant companion. My dreams provided me with images, instruction, and mystery. I began to emotionally process each remembered event in my

life, undertaking to learn its significance and place in the whole. In 1986, I wrote a 300-page autobiography of my first 30 years, looking at my life from the point of view of the soul and its journey.

While I was undergoing this great internal transformation, I wondered if it would ever end, and what it would mean if it did. My inner universe became so familiar and so inherently fascinating, that it came as a shock, a few years ago, to realize that this work no longer automatically took priority. I was beginning to reconnect with the outer world.

In my early years, I was socialized, to adapt myself to others. I felt “real” only in relationship. Later on, I played out the expected roles to the point where they became imprisoning, and escaped, over and over again, while still needing others to enact my own destiny. I was running from the void.

In order to release my addiction to cigarettes, I had to face and embrace the indefinite lengthening of the terrifying empty spaces which loomed between puffs. Likewise, in order to release relationships with others, I had to deliberately step into the void, and *feel* it. I had to learn to live precisely there. What I discovered was that the void was full! — of ghosts from long ago. My ghosts had imprisoned me in certain roles — with them! Some ghosts were carping critics. Others were more subtly undermining. One by one, circling round and round, dipping down into full feeling and soaring up into insight, I gradually acknowledged them, embraced them, released them. I was letting go of others so that I could feel myself.

As the void emptied out, what I began to notice was that “I” did not exist! My ego was a function of my relationship with others! The whole question of the tension between individual and society, which had preoccupied me all my life, began to dissolve into a larger understanding. In emptying out others, I became the void, a vast internal space which includes everything and is in itself, nothing.

Now, at 51, this vast internal space is the still tentative, still easily lost, Crone aspect of myself. Crone is the area “in between” events, people, places, words; She is the space which includes the particular dynamics of all human connections, and yet does not attach to any of them. The Crone lives in the void, which She experiences as full. The

void as womb of the world. In occupying this sacred space She embraces all the worlds, free both to connect with and to detach from others. Insofar as I embody Crone, I remain myself, no matter what the dynamics of my associations. Insofar as the Crone lives within me, I can remain myself and live in community, building snow castles.