LISTEN: CRY OF THE HEART

It’s late afternoon, Sunday I think. Maybe Monday. No, it is definitely Sunday. Water pours over me. Eyes closed, I plant my feet side by side, toes firmly near the shower drain. Chin uplifted, drips of water mingle with my tears. A stifled sob escapes me. Then a deep breath, rib cage rises, shoulders square, and I turn around. I gaze through a tiny window in my shower and look to the west … the shimmer of an aqua colored reservoir reflects the Rocky Mountain foothills. Green budding bushes fill the landscape; a hint of purple rises beyond the windbreak of trees. Oh! The lilacs bloom. A 4:00 p.m. sun dapples its golden generosity across the land, reaching me, even here.

I’ve stopped asking the question “why.” The three letter word no longer makes sense to me. Turning my back to the sunlight, I again lift my face to the water spout. Thoughts flow through me as steady as the stream caressing my skin. “What meaning does this have now? Why is “why?” no longer a question that makes sense to me?” Everywhere I turn there is suffering and death. East, west, north, and south, of people known, and unknown.

So, here I stand in this, my prayer stall, after yet another telephone call today. The late sun penetrates my soul, and I wonder about the reason that “why” has lost its meaning and energy for me. Perhaps it’s because I’ve suffered. The only pertinent question that remains for me as a human person, as a spiritual guide, and as a seeker is, “What am I going to do with this new news? What meaning will I assign to the death of my friend’s brother—he jumped from the sixth story of a building last week. Or, in regard to my fifteen year old nephew’s medical diagnosis of diabetes, or about the high school senior killed instantly in an auto accident one mile from my home?” An interior voice admonishes me, “And these are just little things. What about world hunger, war, genocide, gangs, abuse, extinction of species, destitute poverty ….” I simply stand still, “What meaning? Why? …” The water begins to cool. I have only the capacity in this moment to stand in my shower, and welcome lukewarm water to wash me, in an ongoing baptism. I will take the moments of peace as they come. Be present. A prayer echoes in me: “Be still and know that I am God.”

I turn the water off, give a squeeze to my long hair, ring out the remnants of grief, turn to the light, and dry my body. When I walk downstairs I know I will see an orange breasted robin at work, building her sturdy nest, just above the back porch door. I too can choose to build a life of shelter and compassion. For myself, and others. My “why” becomes, “Here I am, send me.”

What is your cry of the heart? Do you listen to your body, your energy, your questioning, your wounds, your concerns, your hopes? Who listens to you? Who do you listen to? For whom are you sent?
Too often the body is omitted or forgotten in spiritual direction, despite the fact that nearly every faith tradition has spiritual teachings and practices that explicitly address the body such as fasting, communion, washing and bathing, eating, even sexuality. There are many times when directees are curious about or struggling with body related issues, such as health and illness, aging, sexuality and body image, to name a few.

Fortunately, there is a small but growing selection of contemporary books and articles that address the topic of spirituality and the body. One of the newest additions to this collection, written from the Jewish perspective, is *God in Your Body* by Jay Michaelson. Michaelson is a writer, editor, and retreat leader who integrates Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), Buddhist teachings on mindfulness, and traditional Jewish texts and practices in this easy to read how-to guide, which is subtitled *Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice*.

Each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of daily living or spiritual practice, such as eating, breathing, dancing, and fasting, to name a few examples. Michaelson’s writing style is very colloquial and accessible, as if he were sitting with the reader and sharing his experience, knowledge, and suggestions.

For example, in the chapter on prayer, Michaelson gives the reader a simple description of the prescribed bodily movements for the *Amidah*, the silent standing Jewish prayer in the morning and evening services. He also suggests bringing a specific focus and intention to this prayer, stating, “The *Amidah* posture is different from Mountain Pose (from yoga), but the basic idea is the same: readiness, uprightness, standing at attention” (p. 25).

I was curious to learn how Michaelson was going to approach some of the issues unique to women, such as menstruation. Interestingly, he actually includes a contribution written by a female colleague about menstruation rituals. Unfortunately, he did not address the topic of *shomer negiah* (observing sacred touch) in his chapter on touch, although he briefly mentions that in Judaism, as in other religions, there are guidelines and teachings regarding boundaries and touch.

Michaelson is the founder and director of Nehirim, a Jewish LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) spirituality organization that offers annual weekend retreats. His writing appears frequently in *Forward* and several other national progressive Jewish publications and Web sites. *God in Your Body* is a book for a much broader audience. Spiritual seekers and practitioners who are interested in both traditional and innovative approaches to a conscious affirmation of the body as integral to spiritual practice will appreciate the gifts of this book.

—Karen Lee Erlichman, MSS, LCSW is a licensed clinical social worker and spiritual director living in San Francisco, California, USA. You may e-mail her at karenerl@sbcglobal.net.
Energy Awareness: Centering, Grounding, and Personal Space

What is energy? In Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology, Peter Hodgson writes, “Spirit is an immaterial vitality that enlivens and shapes material nature … energy is simply that mysterious power that is active and at work in things, and that power is God as Spirit” (p. 270). Energy is a part of all things. Becoming attentive to energy and its influence on ourselves, others, and nonhuman others will help us to discern how we participate in creation. Centering, grounding, and personal space are three energy skills that enable us to grow in awareness of our own spiritual formation and discernment.

Centering is one of the most difficult skills to talk about. Two good spiritual questions to ask are: where do we center? and, what do we center on? Spiritual work is about entering Mystery. Mystery, or the unknown, is experienced. Through our experience of centering we gain an intuitive understanding of the material and the spiritual. Becoming aware of the rhythm of our breath, and the rise and fall of our chest will help us to center, become mindful, and tend to the present moment. We center not to get somewhere, or to do something. We center to reveal, to experience, to know our true nature, and the true nature of others.

Grounding is an energetic connection between our body and the earth. We are embodied beings. Therefore, grounding supports our ability to center within the energetic presence of our body. Our experiences of people, animals, situations, places, and so forth, can often result in a mixing, enmeshment, and merging of energies that cloud the knowledge of our own true nature. However, this is part of our growth process, and it is not something to avoid or resist. With the support of grounding, we let go or cleanse our personal space of energies that are not our own, or that we no longer need. Grounding offers fluidity in our spiritual growth, and attention to our true nature. When we are grounded we are present, focused, and dynamic. We are able to know our limits and possibilities, and create healthy boundaries, a part of our personal space.

Our personal space is an electromagnetic field that can be likened to a bubble surrounding our entire body, at about an arm’s length distance. The ideal electromagnetic field is clear and defined, with a fluid edge or boundary flowing downwards from above the head to beneath the feet, where it joins with the flow of our grounding. Our personal space influences our ability to engage in an ‘I and thou’ relationship, described as the place where the spirit in me greets the spirit in you. Many of us have boundary issues that instigate from physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual experiences that were not safe for our true nature. We then develop defense mechanisms to protect ourselves from a painful sense of self. This results in the creation of a false self, and dissociation from our true nature. Our boundaries and our self-definition or self-formation is weakened. We can begin to let go of our false sense of self when we sit in meditation, are mindful in the experiences of daily living, or when we focus our intention to reveal our true self.

When you and I are centered, grounded, and aware of our personal space and its flow, we can lean into Mystery, and invite the Unknown to help us experience, see, name, discern, heal, and move us in a direction Mystery calls forth in us. Immeasurable value is brought forth in this difficult, transformational work.

Mary Millerd, MATS, is a spiritual director and teacher living in the Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada area. You can reach her at millerds@direct.ca.
GLOBAL RESOURCES: Places, Programs, and Crafts

Australia
Dayspring Centre for Christian Spirituality and Counselling Inc.
Graduate Diploma in Spiritual Direction
Perth, Western Australia: 61-8-9275-3773
info@dayspring.org.au
www.dayspring.org.au

Canada
The Jubilee Programs in Spiritual Direction
Pacific - Prairie - Central - Atlantic
Ecumenical and multi-faith training
in a progressive Christian context
Inquiries to: Donald.Grayston@gmail.com
Information at: www.jubileeassociates.ca

The Enchanted Ground Retreat (non-profit)
Come away to simple stillness.
Supportive solitude for one or two people
in upper suite of country house on Saltspring Island, BC.
Spiritual Direction/Pastoral Care by appointment.
Contact revelaina@hydes.com, www.hydes.com/retreat

USA
Hesychia School of Spiritual Direction
at the Redemptorist Renewal Center
7101 W. Picture Rocks, Tucson, AZ 85743
520-744-3400; Toll free: 866-737-5751
Teresa Blythe 520-290-6734, tblythe@jps.net
www.desertrenewal.org/hesychia

Spiritual Ministry Center
Religious of the Sacred Heart
San Diego, CA, USA 619-224-9444
Retreats, Spiritual Direction, Sabbaticals
spiritmin@rscj.org
www.spiritmin.org

Bethany Spirituality Center
Highland Mills, NY 10930
A Ministry of the Religious of Jesus and Mary
Spiritual Direction, Retreats, Sabbaticals
845-460-3061; fax 845-928-2320
www.bethanyspiritualitycenter.org

Servant Song Ministries
Retreat House & Spirituality Center
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Waynesburg, PA 15370
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www.servantsongministries.org

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“Deepen into the skills of your sacredness”
You are on your knees
in awe, in gratitude, in joy.
You are on your knees
in despair, in anxiety, in sorrow.
You are on your knees.
You yearn to be lifted.
You yearn to understand your longing perhaps even to feel a connection with this pull this push this strange, unnameable calling, in the heart of your soul.
You hear you read the words Spiritual Direction.

Some time after when a new-born moon with her silver sliver has brought you to your knees once more in your joy in your despair; when a full moon has cast her radiant glow has brought you to your knees once more in your joy in your despair you sit in a quiet room in a chair.
Near you a Spiritual Companion in a chair.
And, too, a third chair.

In an ordinary home three chairs.

Three chairs on ocean’s edge, on towering cliff, on a ragged, jagged, majestic rock-face beside the lighthouse which beckons.

Your awe begins to radiate.
Your anxiety begins to intensify to gentle.
“Why three chairs?” you ask this quiet, so present Spiritual Companion.
“The third chair” she offers “is for the True Guide, the only Director the One within you the One in all of life. I am here to help you learn to listen.”
You weep soft tears.
You are home.

—Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann, February 21, 2007

When you visit the Spiritual Directors International Web site at www.sdiworld.org, you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other events related to spiritual direction. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions, and discover excellent questions to ask of yourself, and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go on-line to Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors. More than 5,500 available spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.
**Licking Our Wounds**

I believe men have issues and wounds. And, that sometimes the male journey includes a bit more drudgery, worthlessness, and pain than necessary—perhaps even more than we realize. As men, we may intellectually know that tremendous growth can occur when we embrace the pain in our lives. Yet we fear the hurt, and so we avoid the encounter. We often cram our most intimate desires into the deepest parts of our inner selves, and avoid that which we know needs to be spoken. We remain wounded and paralyzed.

Men have a heart, a soul, and a deeper spirit … something to offer other than hunting, gathering, and winning bread. So how can we lick our wounds?

A wound must be irrigated in order for rapid and complete healing with minimal scarring. And yes, there is pain. The pain comes from the physical experience of irrigating the wound. We may fear the pain unless we can share our sacred story with a male spiritual companion. Safe, gentle, and compassionate listening becomes the irrigation. We are not broken, so there is nothing to fix.

Our life experience and story is sacred. Yet, we struggle to share what is held deep within, often for many years. Now may be a time to bring it up from the depths. C. S. Lewis once said of his own journey, “Nothing is any good until it has been down in the cellar for awhile.”

So men, put words around your story. Let’s develop language to express our own deep frozen experience in order to have it heard, validated, and honored without judgment. We need to listen to each other and through this companionship, lick our wounds and be healed.

—Jim Neppl lives in Minnesota, USA and invites men to gather and share sacred stories. You can reach him at jim@spiritsatwork.net.

**Ask Owl**

**Question:** I want to go on a retreat, but I’m hesitant. How long will a retreat last? What can I expect?

Hoot-hoot: What a great question! Retreats are really a time to treat yourself, and enter into living more deeply. There are many reasons to take time to make a retreat. And, there are also many different types of retreats. Perhaps you will choose to go on retreat with a group of people that you know from a spiritual community. Or, you might not know anyone! You might be on retreat in solitude and silence, with a small group, large group, or only men, or only women. Maybe there is a teacher or guide leading a retreat that will offer new learning for you. Perhaps you will have a spiritual companion or director to aid in your discernment or questions that arise. Maybe you simply want to deepen your prayer life. There are many reasons you can choose to make a retreat. It is important to listen to the longings and stirrings within you, and respond.

Retreats can last a few hours, or longer. Some people enter into a prolonged retreat or sabbatical that can last a year or more. Most often, retreats are either a weekend, week, or occur during your daily life. A retreat can be self directed or with a structure that is provided for you.

We can expect just about anything on a retreat! Most often, when we open ourselves to the unknown and mystery, we are surprised in an unexpected way, and discover a nugget or gem that holds truth and depth for our life specifics. If we take the time to slow down, we might experience questions and confrontations that are challenging. And, we may find connections that bring us alive in new ways. Read about a retreat a feathered friend observed at www.sdiworld.org.

—If you have a question for the Wise Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org. You may see a response in a future issue of Listen!
G O B L A N D  E V E N T S :  P r o g r a m s  a n d  E v e n t s  t o  S u p p o r t  Y o u r  S p i r i t u a l  J o u r n e y

● ASIA
December 3-7, 2007
South Korea: Seoul
Topic: Spiritual Direction and Supervision Seminar
Presenter: Mary Ann Scofield, RSM
Location: Soegang University, Ignatius Hall
Contact: Russ Feldmeier, russfeldmeier@yahoo.com

● OCEANIA-AUSTRALIA
October 12-17, 2007
Papua New Guinea: Port Moresby
Topic: Ongoing Formation and Peer Support for Active Spiritual Directors
Presenter: Team of spiritual directors
Location: Xavier University
Contact: Marie Turner, DW, mariedw@dalton.com.pg

● EUROPE
August 13-17, 2007
United Kingdom: Hoddesdon Herts
Topic: Conference of the Spiritual Exercises Network
Presenter: Rev. Andrew Walker, and Rev. Philip Endean, SJ
Location: High Leigh Conference Centre
Contact: Maria Evans, maria01.orangehome.co.uk

● NORTH AMERICA-Canada
August 4-12, 2007
Canada: Burnaby, British Columbia
Topic: Building Interfaith Solidarity: Moving Beyond the Racialization of the Religious Other
Location: Simon Fraser University
Contact: Trish Graham, 604-291-5855

August 22-29, 2007
Canada: Edmonton, Alberta
Topic: Centering Prayer Intensive Retreat
Presenter: Rev. Raymond Sevigny
Location: Providence Renewal Centre
Contact: Jocelyne Marple, jmarple@providencerenewal.ca

October 12, 2007
Canada: Vancouver, British Columbia
Topic: Professional Day: Surrender to Freedom: Addiction, Co-dependency and Spiritual Direction
Presenter: Maureen Conroy, RSM, DMin
Time: 8:45 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Location: Carey Centre, University of B.C. Campus
Contact: Karen Webber, soulstream1@gmail.com

October 12-14, 2007
Canada: Vancouver, British Columbia
Presenter: Maureen Conroy, RSM, DMin
Location: Carey Centre, University of B.C. campus
Contact: Karen Webber, soulstream1@gmail.com

● NORTH AMERICA-USA
August 4, 2007
USA: Beech Grove, Indiana
Topic: A Day with Hildegard of Bingen
Presenter: Barbara Leonhard, OSF
Time: 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Location: Benedict Inn Retreat Center
Contact: Rev. Dr. M. Lorraine Coufal, mcoufal@clarian.org

August 20-24, 2007
USA: Auburn, California
Topic: The Cost of Consciousness: Leadership and the Piercing of the Soul
Presenter: Don Bisson, FMS, DMin, Sandra Lommasson, and Alexander Shaia, PhD
Location: Mercy Center Auburn
Contact: Sandra Lommasson, sandra@breadoflife.org

August 31-September 2, 2007
USA: Lake Dallas, Texas
Topic: Retreat Day for Spiritual Directors
Presenter: Sr. Macrina Weiderkehr, OSF
Time: 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Location: Montserrat Retreat Center
Contact: Nancy Dunkerley, nk@txrr.com, 214-908-0229

September 18, 2007
USA: Lake Dallas, Texas
Topic: Living with Thomas Merton
Presenter: Dr. Rebecca Bradburn Langer
Time: 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
Location: Shalom Prayer Center
Contact: Rev. Elaine Andre, elaine@sacredpathministry.com

September 20-23, 2007
USA: New Haven, Kentucky
Topic: Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton
Location: Bethany Spring
Contact: The Merton Institute for Contemplative Living, info@merton institute.org
502-899-1991

September 27-30, 2007
USA: Lake Dallas, Texas
Presenter: Jeremy Taylor
Location: Stillpoint Lodge

October 12-14, 2007
Canada: Vancouver, British Columbia
Presenter: Maureen Conroy, RSM, DMin
Location: Carey Centre, University of B.C. campus
Contact: Karen Webber, soulstream1@gmail.com

October 6, 2007
USA: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Topic: Desires of the Heart and Spiritual Direction
Presenter: Robert Howlett, EdD
Time: 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Location: Chestnut Hill College
Contact: Val Downing, valerie.dowing@verizon.net
610-688-3892

October 12, 2007
USA: Mt. Angel, Oregon
Topic: Art and Spirituality
Presenter: Rev. Dr. Rebecca Bradburn Langer
Time: 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
Location: Bon Secours Spiritual Center
Contact: Anna Gilcher, agilcher@earthlink.net, 301-589-7070

October 15, 2007
USA: Marriottsville, Maryland
Topic: to be determined
Time: 3:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.
Location: The Summit Conference Center
Contact: Tom Lane, info@journeyconferences.com

March 26-30, 2008
USA: Washington, DC
Topic: Annual Conference of Spiritual Directors International, “Being Present”
Presenter: Keynote—Rose Mary Dougherty, SSND; Spiritual Director—Jacob Staab; and forty-two workshops
Location: Hilton Washington Dulles Airport Hotel
Contact: Spiritual Directors International, events@sidworld.org

● SOUTH AMERICA
Latin America - Caribbean
Ongoing
Peru: Arequipa
Topic: Incarnational Spirituality: Prayer in Movement with Tai Ji
Presenter: Patricia V. Roberts
Time: Mon. and Wed.
9:30-10:30 a.m.
Tues. and Thurs. 8:00-9:00 a.m.
Contact: Patricia V. Roberts, robertsbillig@yahoo.com
051-54-255689

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