

# The Post-Traumatic Gazette No. 25

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## PTSD and Spirituality by Patience Mason

Although some people's spiritual life is strengthened by trauma, many traumas have the opposite effect. They occur in private (rape, incest, beatings, torture) and remain secret, creating terrible isolation. Victims can feel either abandoned or punished by God. Even if traumas are semi-public or become public, victim blaming (he/she/I must have done something to cause it) creates isolation. Public traumas, like war, have moments of private hell, and the veteran returns to a community that cannot understand, even if they want to. Uncomprehending approval (WWII) or disapproval (Vietnam) can wound, especially if God is brought into it.

Spiritual abuse is commonplace: Being told you somehow "attracted" the trauma (New Age), or caused it by being bad, are still suffering because you don't have enough faith, haven't forgiven, or God is teaching you a lesson, testing your faith, or that suffering is holy, it's God's will, and so forth (Judeo-Christian) are all abusive. The just world theory may make non-religious people think if you are suffering, you deserve it. People say a lot of emotionally and spiritually abusive things to trauma survivors.

The belief that God is a guy (so men are better than women) and demands obedience can be perverted by religious abusers to justify their crimes. When religious leaders tell children to obey their abusers, to forgive their abusers, to behave better, or tell battered wives to obey husbands, forgive husbands, be nicer to them, they are colluding in crime. Religious leaders who preach obedience and/or forgiveness without mentioning that abuse is never part of God's will for anyone encourage abuse. If they promote forgiveness without actual change of behavior on the part of the perpetrator, starting with admitting to the crime (sexual and physical abuse are criminal acts) in court (rendering unto Caesar) and submitting to justice, they perpetuate

the problem. Anything else encourages denial of the seriousness of the abuse, the amount of effort required to recover from abuse, and the effort required to change abusive behavior.

In the Bible forgiveness is only required if the person repents (Luke 17, 4), and true repentance ("To make a change for the better as a result of remorse or contrition for one's sins.") is not just words, particularly not just the words, "I'm sorry. I'll never do it again." Repentance is also paying for therapy for the abused person and getting therapy or whatever it takes so the offense is never repeated.

Religious leaders who encourage hitting children, especially breaking their spirit and demanding instant obedience, are also spiritually abusing their congregations. They participate in the creation of a new generation of victims, traumatized numb people who can't tell when they are hurting others.

Saying that your sex, race, religion or country is chosen and others are not is also spiritual abuse. We are all "children of God." In my studies, I have seen that this kind of spiritual abuse is extremely likely to lead to the infliction of trauma on the un-chosen.

Encouraging premature forgiveness (i.e. without talking about it and feeling the pain) may entrench survivors in numbness ("It didn't affect me.") so they pass the wound on to others ("You wouldn't be having problems if you forgave.") That's spiritual abuse, too.

Spiritual wounds: Feeling singled out is probably the most painful spiritual wound. Why did [God let] this happen to me? It is hard not to feel singled out when terrible things happen to you, or when in the course of trying to stay alive, you've done terrible things (or normal things you believe are terrible). For a lot of people, this is a faith destroying experience.

At the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Conference in November, Father Thomas Moran said traumatized people who have had a

beautiful static faith may have a spiritual crisis and no longer believe, trust or hope. They feel abandoned by God and by their faith community. They feel outside, disillusioned and bitterly disappointed, frustrated and unrelentingly angry. They can no longer believe what they cherished, no longer feel connected. It's a state of spiritual isolation. The Rev. Alan Cutter, at the same conference, defined toxic faith as "a poisonous world view caused by a wounded *imago dei* [Latin for "image of god"] characterized by secret keeping, loss of voice, and self-enforced separation." This leads to what he calls Post-Traumatic Spiritual Disorder. Notice that both talk about the PTSD symptom, "feelings of detachment or estrangement from others." This isolation, particularly from former spiritual resources, makes it harder to find help and healing.

Another spiritual wound is that "efforts to avoid thoughts and feelings associated with the trauma" isolate us from our own inner wisdom and strength. We can't look within for guidance.

Other spiritual wounds include thinking the idea of God and/or religion is stupid after what happened. Feeling you've been suckered in by ideas of God as Santa, as persecutor, as all-powerful. Survivors and family members may not trust anything. They can't believe in good, in God, or in religion, especially the one they grew up with. They may feel damned. They may be angry at God. They may feel betrayed by God, especially if they were taught that following the rules would ensure a good happy life. Many trauma survivors bear deep painful spiritual wounds even when they deny it. Desmond Tutu said, "The most wounded people are those who deny their woundedness."

Trauma survivors may say "who needs spirituality?" I do. Having a spiritual life has been very healing for me. In *The Solution*, Laurel Mellin talks about spiri-

tuality as a process in which the feeling of emptiness becomes less and “In its place will come a renewed awareness of the goodness within you and a heightened appreciation for life’s mystery and grace.” I like that. Most trauma survivors and family members need to recognize the goodness within, no matter what they did to survive, and to find a way to feel that healing is possible and life can be good. Having spiritual resources can help with this.

So What is Spirituality? Father Moran sees three factors in spirituality, acknowledgement of something that gives meaning and purpose to life, trust, and commitment. Bob gave meaning and purpose to my life, but I don’t think that’s what Father Moran had in mind. Making another person your higher power is a recipe for hell. (This includes any religious leader. Remember people who say they have the answer for you are acting like they are a higher power. Their boundaries are bad.). Religion can provide a framework for spirituality, but for many of us, it is not necessary.

What gives meaning and purpose to your life?

What do you trust? How can you enlarge the number of trustworthy supporters for yourself? Learning to trust is a one day at a time process.

Can you commit to your own recovery? What spiritual resources will help? Remember any commitment can be made in small steps. No reason to jump head first into someone else’s spiritual system. You don’t have to define or defend your spiritual beliefs if they work for you, and they don’t have to make sense. Things of the spirit transcend logic.

Whether you are high spirited, low spirited, or dispirited, the common English phrases refer to a part of us that isn’t quite brain, emotion, or brawn. Everyone has it. Defining it isn’t necessary for healing it. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, spiritual means “of or pertaining to, affecting, or concerning the spirit or higher moral qualities.” The definition also includes the words “devotional,” “sacred,” and “of transcendent beauty or charm.”

With this in mind, what spiritual qualities and resources do you already have? You may have more than you realize. Higher moral qualities like compassion, loyalty and courage are common among trauma survivors. There is nothing stron-

ger than their devotion to each other. Some say they have a sacred bond of brotherhood or sisterhood.

To what do you devote yourself? What is sacred to you? Is it your relationship, your pet, your room, books, poetry, nature, mountains, sailing?

I believe that primitive people, who didn’t have all the distractions of modern life, were more able to appreciate the sacredness of every tree and rock and waterfall, of every one’s story, and of everyday actions, especially those that express caring. Most of us have been brought up to see the sacred only in that building where the religious paraphernalia is, but we can re-find the capacity to see it in ourselves, each other, and our surroundings. We all have spiritual longings for beauty, for connection, for sanctuary, for a meaning and purpose in life.

Where do you find beauty? Perhaps you have noticed your heart lightening when the sun rises out of a misty dawn and the birds sing. Walking on the beach, climbing a mountain, messing around in boats (as the Water Rat says in *Wind in the Willows*), the charm of a grove of trees, of a summer garden, or of a person who is truly present for you may make you feel a part of something greater, rather than set apart. I consider these experiences of grace. If you want to add the word God to that, it is okay, but I don’t find it necessary.

Whatever your answers, you can use them to find your own spiritual life. Reframing your concept of God from static (just follow the rules and nothing bad will happen) to dynamic (I will help you whatever happens) can help.

Another spiritual resource you may already have is intuition, a direct line to the sacred within. Most of us have suppressed this for so long it takes effort to revive it, but it is worth it. By intuition I do not mean that crazed codependent urgency to fix a situation. My experience has been that urgency means it is my will, not God’s will. Nor is it the sometimes irresistible lie that “this time is different,” which leads to so many mistakes. Nor is it punitive, self-righteous, or self-serving. A passage in AA’s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p.103-104, says:

...any man, who tries to run his life rigidly by this kind of prayer, by this self-serving demand of God for replies, is a particularly disconcert-

ing individual. To any questioning or criticism...he instantly proffers his reliance upon prayer in all matters great or small. He may have forgotten the possibility that his own wishful thinking and the human tendency to rationalize have distorted his so-called guidance. With the best of intentions, he tends to force his own will into all sorts of situations and problems with the comfortable assurance that he is acting under God’s specific direction. Under such an illusion, he can of course create great havoc without in the least intending it.

To develop intuition, the 12 Steps suggest daily prayer and meditation. Verbalizing your concerns helps you identify them (prayer) and then listening to your own inner wisdom (meditation) will, with practice, make your intuition (or inner connection to God if you see it that way) “a working part of the mind.”

In *The Body Speaks*, the Griffiths discuss enlisting spiritual resources for healing and challenging unspoken assumptions which are destructive and which prevent healing. Meditation and prayer can also help you examine your spiritual beliefs so you can reframe the ones that keep you stuck.

Family patterns can have an impact on spiritual beliefs. In my family we were always trying to find out whose “fault” it was, whatever happened. If something bad happened it was your fault because you weren’t careful enough or whatever. God punished you. Later, when Bob went to Vietnam, it was easy for me to believe it was God’s fault, so to hell with God. I can’t say that this represents mature healthy thinking, but it is what I felt.

### **Finding Spiritual Resources That Work For You:**

When Bob was sent to Vietnam, I felt deserted by the God of my childhood. Later I found the theology and language of the religion I grew up in unacceptable. For a long time I had no spiritual life at all, and my life, as you know if you’ve read *Recovering From The War* or the back issues of the Gazette, was a kind of hell.

After I started a 12-Step program, I began to develop a spiritual life because it was suggested—not because I wanted to—and it has been really helpful to me. I’d like to share some of what helped me and point you towards what might help you. Today I have faith, not in a guy

named God, but that help is available to me from a variety of spiritual resources, not least of which is the 12 Steps.

One thing they said at 12-Step meetings was, "The only thing you need to know about God at this point is that you're not it!" It's a good point if you've been trying to control the uncontrollable or be more than human like I was. Today I'm a retired Higher Power.

"Religion is for people who don't want to go to hell, and spirituality is for people who have been there and don't want to go back," always gets a big laugh from those who are familiar with the hell of addiction, trauma or PTSD, but the phrase brings freedom to many.

When I started in Adult Children of Alcoholics in 1987, I remember deciding to stay because they read the words, "this is a spiritual program based on honesty and trust and love." Those words appealed to me. I found a community there to which I still belong 13 years later. For me, community is essential to spirituality.

Discussing the retreats for combat vets and their spouses that he and Father Phil Salois and Rev. Jack Day give, The Rev. Alan Cutter said, "What we are interested in doing [in our retreats] is helping people find some sort of healing by forming a new base community of husband and wife. We are dealing with people who do not have a real base community quite often, because husband and wife have not talked about what happened." By talking and listening (listening is the ultimate act of caring) a couple can start to make their relationship a sanctuary instead of a battleground. People are encouraged to tell the parts of their experience that deal with faith, what they had, what changed it, what they have now. We work from there. Alan says at the beginning of every retreat. "We're not here to raise the body count for our denominations." Father Phil assures everyone that they are not going to be "godded" to death. Father Phil found his healing among other Vietnam vets, but the Church is where he goes to celebrate that healing.

One thing that helped me to find a spiritual life was another quote in AA's 12&12:

First, Alcoholics Anonymous does not demand that you believe in anything. All of its Twelve Steps are but suggestions...all you really need is a

truly open mind. Just resign from the debating society.

12-Step programs suggest starting a quest for spiritual healing with the idea of a power greater than yourself, a concept I can grasp. I think two people have more power than one. So does a group of recovering survivors. The library knows more than me. Rivers are stronger.

Someone I respect shared with me that she writes "God" as G\*d to remind herself that we perceive the divine through our human capacities which means we might not be capable of perceiving all of it. I agree. I am an atheist because I do not believe in a guy named God running a boot camp or playing Santa to a chosen few and consigning everyone else to hell. The idea that there is only one right religion and every one else is wrong just doesn't seem likely. Bob calls it simplistic. It divides people and gives permission to harm others. The way I look at it, if there were a creator, the creator would not be that small-minded. The 12-Steps' marvelous contribution to spirituality is the suggestion that you find your own higher power which works for you. Effectiveness is the key, not rightness. I think the multiplicity of religions and spiritual practices is evidence that we are spiritual beings with spiritual needs, so we are provided with a variety of spiritual resources. It is obvious that what is right for some people is not right for others.

Accepting that there are a variety of spiritual solutions sidesteps the one right/punishing God concept and allows people to develop a faith that works for them. Sometimes they can utilize the religion they grew up with, sometimes not.

When you hear passages from the holy book of your childhood religion, you may hear what you were taught to hear as a child, and find it unhelpful. Ask yourself what you need to hear that would help. Return to the literature and re-read it with new eyes, grownup eyes. Through reading and talking to people, you may find a way to reframe your childhood conceptions.

A spiritual way of life like AA may lead you to a religion that suits you or it may not. Your higher power needs to be what is effective for you. (Saying "this is right for me" is ok. Saying "this is right for you" shows a disrespect for others' boundaries.)

I found a lot of help in working the 12 Steps after I got over the fact that they say "God as we understood *Him*." Him

is often a big block to trauma survivors who have had men traumatize them—the idea of God as a not-so-nice guy (selfish, self-centered, and abusive) can certainly be read into the Bible (Job and Jericho to start with) but I remind myself the Bible was written by human beings who tend to self-justification.

I started with Lee Iacocca as my higher power as a joke because being head of Chrysler, he had more power than me. I decided to turn my BIG problems, Bob and Jack over to Lee. The funny thing is it worked! I stopped obsessing and fixing, and even though he never once called and checked up on them, or nagged them, or went out of his way to do something for them that he hadn't been asked to do and really didn't want to do, they were fine. As a matter of fact they were better. It really opened my eyes.

Eventually I became interested in finding a more spiritual HP, so I started using the 12-Step fellowships as a HP. I also began to accept that a guy named God worked for many people. (Boundaries!) For some people God meant "good orderly direction." For others, He was all-caring, loving, accepting and supportive.

The spiritual resources I find helpful emphasize being in balance and harmony with ourselves, nature, and other people (Navajo and other Native American traditions, Taoist, Buddhist, 12-Steps) and the Quaker idea that we all have a spark of "god" inside us so we don't have to kowtow to each other. (Quakers used to go to jail for this egalitarian idea because they would not take their hats off to the gentry). I also liked the idea of being part of a great whole. Egalitarian and impersonal works for me. Something entirely different (personal and loving) might help you. I urge you to find what works for you.

A suggestion: Write a want ad for a higher power, listing everything you would want it to be and then act as if it were true. What do you need or want from a spiritual life? Write it down and work towards it.

Many people look to other traditions for help and find it. I recently attended a Gathering of Wounded Warriors and All of Their Relations at Ft Belknap Reservation in Montana. Participants were healing war-related PTSD and childhood traumas through sweat lodges, talking circles, and other traditional Native American spiritual practices.

Other trauma survivors use meditation

practices which developed in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Storytelling, martial arts, the discipline of physical exertion can all be spiritual acts. Working with others is a spiritual act which has physical (altruism improves health), emotional, and mental benefits.

At an ISTSS workshop, "PTSD and Spirituality: Trauma, Transformation and Healing," Zev Harel, Ph.D., a Holocaust survivor and Israeli veteran (who is only alive because he lied about his age when he got to Auschwitz), said that for him part of spiritual healing is "bearing witness, even though it hurts. We need to honor those who didn't make it." He also said "I have a strong faith. Had I not had it, I would not be here now. Every person who gave up was a goner—every person who relied only on himself. People made community—helped each other physically and in spirit." After the war, he set out to establish himself as a family and community member and to remember and to honor and to speak about what he had been through. He said it is important for all survivors to "aid persons who are hurt by trauma and to forge a better future. When you work with others, help them find their inner self, inner strength, help them utilize the love that is around them to continue and believe in a better tomorrow."

His remarks about testimony as spiritual healing were reinforced by an article in the May/June 1999 Family Therapy Networker which reports that Bosnian refugees telling their stories to create a public document of the horrors endured by the Bosnian people resulted in a substantial decrease in PTSD. After six weeks of testimony, PTSD was down by 25%. After 6 months 47% no longer had PTSD. This is an unexpected but not surprising result. They created a new community while making a monument to their old community.

Some advantages of a spiritual life:

A sense of belonging gives strength whether you belong to a particular church or are part of the harmony of the universe.

Having a spiritual life can give you awareness of help even in the midst of pain.

You may find you feel that there is a well of strength you can draw upon so you don't have to depend so much on individual people.

Seeing yourself as a child of God or as part of the harmony of the universe means you are entitled to help and didn't deserve what you got in the form of trauma.

Being a part of something greater relieves learned helplessness and empowers one to find help.

Feeling spiritually supported can give you the strength to speak about your trauma and to find effective help.

You will probably find others. I wish you well on the search.

## A Private Ritual

Today I took a small American flag, my old unit patch and a list of names on paper. I got in my pickup, and started driving. I didn't really have a destination in mind, but being a logger, I soon found myself at a place called Coldwater Ridge. Its a beautiful bare mountain ridge. You can see Mt. St. Helen's and Mt. Rainier, and Mt. Hood from there. I parked and got out, and with my paper sack of items, I walked about 2 miles further up the ridge. There I found an old growth stump about ten feet across. I crawled up on the stump. I placed the small flag, unit patch and list of names in the center. Then I sat and prayed, and cried, and screamed at the wind. After about an hour, I stood up and was turning to leave, when I swear I heard voices (more than one) say "Thank you." I may have over medicated but I like to think that my friends heard me.

When I asked Randy's permission to use this, he emailed me back:

I can only add that I seem to have many anniversaries with Nam. They kinda sneak up. Sometimes its a new one, something you had hidden for 30 years. You start having a bad day and WHAMMO, flashback or whatever. Anyway the battle for C3 is a big one for me, call it survivors guilt or whatever, but I deal with it each year. Of the 12 survivors (out of 55) of that fight, there are only 5 of us left alive. I know the other guys remember because I hear from them every year in April. In the past I have tried to deal with it with Jack Daniels or Jim Beam, but they were not there so no help. This year by honoring them in the only way I felt meant something really helped. I am not a deeply religious man, but feel there is a higher power. I still to this day believe I heard those voices say thank you.

And yes my rucksack is lighter now.  
Peace,  
Randy (Tiny)

The treatment center is a place of self-discovery. Our culture and ceremonies is the place of recovery for us.

—Frederick V. Gone,  
Gros Ventres Elder, Mission  
Canyon, Hays, MT, Gathering of  
Wounded Warriors and All Their  
Relations,  
June 1999

"We have no past, because the past is our present, if we haven't healed it."

—Yogi Bhajan

# Spiritual Resources:

## Books:

\*Any conference approved literature by a 12-Step program will address spiritual issues.

*Body Voices*, Carolyn J Braddock, PageMill Press, 1995. Has a wonderful chapter on "The Spiritual Body."

*Conscious Breathing*, Gay Hen-dricks, Bantam, 1995.

*Dance of the Spirit: The Seven Steps of Women's Spirituality*, Maria Harris, Bantam, 1989. Finding what's holy for you within the Christian tradition.

\**The Feminine Face of God: The Unfolding of The Sacred in Women*, Sherry Anderson & Patricia Hopkins, Bantam 1991. How women experience the sacred in various religions and traditions. I gave copies of this book to all my friends when it came out.

\**Good Goats: Healing Our Image of God*, Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn, 1994, Paulist Press, also *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*, Paulist Press, two profound books, Christian perspective. The Linn's have written several other good books on healing trauma.

\**A Guide to Walking Meditation*, Thich Nhat Hanh, 1985, Fellowship Press, \$6.95. *Breathe! You Are Alive*, Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, 1996, \$10.00. Meditation guides. Any book by him is worth reading.

\**Kitchen Table Wisdom, Stories That Heal*, Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, 1996, Riverhead Books. An all time favorite of Bob's and mine.

*Nam Vet*, Multnomah Press, 1988 *The Book of Soldiers*, Pointman International, 1991, Chuck Dean. Fund-amentalist Christian; has helped many.

\**Out of the Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Vets*, William P Mahedy, Ballentine, 1986. By a vet for vets. No bull. One of my favorites.

\**Rituals For Our Times: Celebrating, Healing, and Changing Our Lives and Our Relationships*, Evan Imber-Black & Janine Roberts, 1993, Harper Perrenial. Helped me find my own rituals.

\**Wherever You Go There You Are*, Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1994, Hyperion. Meditation guide. A favorite of ours.

\**Woman, Why Do You Weep?* Sandra M Flaherty, 1992, Paulist Press. Healing from childhood sexual abuse, Christian perspective.

*A Woman's Book of Life*, Joan Borysenko, Riverhead, 1996. Appendix of meditation and prayer practices.

*Women Who Run With the Wolves*, Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ballantine, 1992.

## Audio:

\**Healing Trauma: Guided Imagery for PTSD*, Belleruth Naparstek, Image Paths, Inc. 891 Moe Drive, Suite C, Akron, OH 44310, 1-800-800-8661, www.healthjourneys.com. Written for trauma survivors, this is a marvelous tape/CD. Half an hour of guided imagery and half an hour of affirmations. I recommend it highly.

\**Meditation: Bringing the Mind Home*, Sogyal Rinpoche, Ringpa Publications, P. O. Box 607, Santa Cruz, CA 95061, 1-800-256-5262. Hilarious and full of practical advice on how to meditate. I love this tape.

"You say I'm living in the past,  
And it's not wise to go back  
But for me it's just as close as yesterday  
I'm not the kind for breaking rules  
And I'm not wanting to be cruel  
I've just been walkin' round with  
secrets now too long.

—Iris DeMent, singer, songwriter  
"Letter to Mom," on the CD,  
*The way I should* (great CD!)

# Sweatlodge

Dear Patience:

I found the healing circle and sweatlodge while I was inpatient at American Lake VA Hospital.

The leaders of the circle and the sweatlodge were volunteers at the ALVA but no staff members attended the circles or the sweats for the veterans.

Using the circle to heal has been an opening of my heart as well as my eyes.

The telling of my story at the time to others whom I could trust would understand because their experience was similar to my own somehow lessened the burden for me. As if just the acceptance of my story by these others gave me some relief from the guilt, shame, anger or other negative emotions associated with the story. I have seen similar responses in the eyes and behaviour of other veterans.

The sweat lodge is a place of prayer and self revelation that I found to be of great peace and inspiration depending on my need at the time.

You asked how I used these things to heal myself and I say that I did not use these things. The circle and the sweatlodge called to me clearly and undeniably. I am now dedicated to continuing the sweat lodge and healing circle for others. In this way I continue the process that has given me so much in the healing way.

Peace and Prayers be with you.

Dominic.

We met at Mission Canyon, Hays, Montana, Gathering of Wounded Warriors and All Their Relations. Next year the gathering will be in Texas.

# VOICES in Action Conference report

VOICES in Action is a wonderful non-profit organization for incest and child sexual abuse survivors. Most of the presenters at VOICES are also survivors and understand survivors questions and issues. The workshops were filled with recovering men and women who helped and supported the newcomers. I found it amazingly healing.

In her workshop on Relationships, Robin Moulds, LMFT, discussed relearning boundaries. Children have a natural instinct to say no to uncomfortable things, which incest survivors had to suppress, so survivors go from 0 to 10 in seconds instead of having the more moderate reactions afforded by limit setting skills. Reclaiming and re-finding that instinct so you can say no when you need to without going to extremes is very important. If you develop a feeling of aversion towards your partner it may be because you have not set boundaries about small things that bother you. Sometimes in the process of reclaiming boundaries, survivors go through a period when they are at the other extreme and are very controlling. It is a stage.

Incest survivors need to reclaim their bodies one inch at a time. Part of this is figuring out the sexual activities that are safe, possibly safe, and unsafe. She suggested we make a chart so it is down in black and white. Incest survivors almost always have to cut down on sexual activities for a time. Sharing the chart with a partner paves the way for honesty and renewal, but this can be pretty hard on partners. In discussing this, the survivor needs to use warmth, emphasize that this is a stage and not a permanent condition, and that he or she (at least a quarter of the people at the conference were male, and Mike Lew, author of *Victims No More*, was the keynote speaker) still loves the partner and is willing to engage in the things that feel safe as long as it is understood that they will

not lead to the things that feel unsafe. Providing the partner with reassurance and discussing sensual, loving, non-sexual activities which strengthen your emotional ties such as cuddling are ways you can increase emotional intimacy and demonstrate love.

What is wounding to the partners of survivors, who usually have wounds of their own, is when this is presented coldly or angrily. It is also not wise to communicate boundaries from a triggered state, so don't wait till you are having sex to discuss this, because then you may be projecting the perpetrator onto your partner.

For a partner who was neglected in childhood, the silent treatment, any kind of non-responsiveness, non-engagement, especially not being greeted or connected with, and not saying goodbye are all behaviors that trigger feelings of not being worthy, not existing, not mattering. (If you find yourself in a lot of arguments over hello and goodbye, that may be why.) Such people often self-neglect (which is an unsafe behavior for them), while doing stuff for others and hoping for reciprocation (that hit home with me). Overreaching to keep others from feeling neglected is another aspect of this. What is needed in the relationship, especially if you are withdrawing sex for a while is to let the partner with this wound know s/he matters to you. When you talk, emphasize that you see them and care: "You look like you're \_\_\_\_." Clear greetings, spending a moment to connect and clear goodbyes are other simple steps that will help your partner feel valued.

For those who suffered abandonment and rejection, any sudden unexplained withdrawal especially of warmth is overwhelming. So if you decide you need a moratorium on some or all sexual activity, and your partner has these issues, it is very important to have clear boundaries

and provide explanations and reassurance with warmth and love. The worst thing you can say is "I'll leave," or "So leave if you don't like it." A phrase like, "This is bottom line for me," is less threatening. Don't blame your partner when expressing your need for boundaries. Depersonalize it. "This is not personal. I love you, but, for now, I am doing what I need to do to heal." (More effective to say what you need.) With a person who fears abandonment, de-escalate arguments with time outs. Set a time to finish the discussion. Making change requests without blame is a skill, but for most of us, learning to do this is a process!

Robin Moulds covered more material than I can fit on this page and her's was only one workshop.

## 5 Spiritual Things You Can Do Today

1. Sit quietly and breathe.
2. Ask yourself when and where you got your spiritual ideas. Do they help today?
3. Sit in nature. Feel the connection between all things.
4. Write a want ad for a higher power. What do you need? Act as if that existed.
5. Ask for knowledge of what will help you recover each day and keep an open mind.

# Artwork

Sune Maura's artwork "Altar of Redemption" at the Gainesville Commission on the Status of Women's Sexual Battery Committee's Annual Conference's Art Show this year was a small altar with a candle burning on it. On the wall next to it the following artist's statement appeared:

and somewhere in my spirit, Redemption spoke, saying "pray. pray for the ones who have hurt the children, for no one knows pain like the ones who live the hell of the self-damned." and i prayed the rosary, which led me to the Mother—the Mother who raised the one who manifested as the Christ. i saw that only one raised in the purest love could have become the Christ. and the Mother taught me to love, and in loving my own child, i found compassion for the ones who could not love me. and in compassion, i found hope. hope for those who live the hell of the self-damned. for without hope for those who have hurt the children, there can be no hope for the children.

I was so struck by this that I arranged to meet her. Among other things, she told me: "I don't believe you're able to hurt or torment another person if you aren't hurt yourself. I came to see my father as a hurt man, spiritually and psychologically injured. Part of the legacy of that is the capacity to abuse even in small ways." She mentioned being critical as one of these she sees in herself. She has found help in therapy and in 12-Step programs. One other thing she said struck me:

"A few years ago, I picked up praying the rosary, saying the prayers I used to say as a Catholic, and had a new understanding of who Mary was, the Divine Mother, and a whole new appreciation—My spiritual practice honors all paths."

# Notes on meditation

Robert Mason

A sign on my wall says, "Breathing is good for you." It's to remind me to focus on my breath for a moment. Why? Because once you are aware of your breath, you are in the present moment. And in the present moment, when you are aware of what you are actually saying or thinking or hearing or seeing, life is much more interesting and peaceful.

I've been reading about meditation for decades. I actually began doing it five years ago when I realized that to meditate is to practice being. Just being. I used to spend all my time in my mind, a very busy, chaotic, often scary place. Being alone with my thoughts was something I avoided because they were painful, so I diverted myself with drugs and adrenaline. That worked, more or less.

Meditation is better. I realized that when I meditate, I kind of step away from whatever stream of chaos happens to be splashing through my mind at the time, and look at it from outside. Sometimes I imagine I'm in a comfortable place under a waterfall of thoughts and ideas cascading overhead. I can be aware of the thoughts that come into my present, and then I can let them go. (Observe the thought, it is said, don't be the thought.) When I discover I've been seduced by a thought (which happened constantly when I started), and have been involved with it for awhile, I just smile at the persistence of my mind trying to keep up its chatter, and return to my breath.

Ask a hundred people how to meditate, get a hundred answers. After reading about the various methods, including a pricey Transcendental Meditation program, I decided to take Buddha's advice to sit quietly and focus on my breathing.

Here's what I recommend:

- Change your wake-up time to accommodate 10-30 minutes free time every morning. I meditate for 15-20 minutes.

- Find a quiet place where you can sit and not be disturbed. I'm immersed in bird calls in the morning, but that's

part of the environment, and it isn't distracting.

- Sit. You can sit in a chair if you sit upright, not leaning back where you can fall asleep. You can sit cross-legged on a carpet, kneel in the Japanese tradition, sit on pillows, whatever is comfortable for you.

- Set a timer or a clock to end the session. Close your eyes.

- Notice your breathing. Don't change how you're breathing. Just be aware of your breath coming in and going out. When you breathe in, say to yourself "Breathing in." When you breathe out say to yourself, "Breathing out." Later, you can shorten this to simply "In" and "Out." Eventually you won't need the words at all. For now, the words help you to concentrate on the present moment. Your breath is your anchor. Whenever you lose your concentration, just refocus on your breath.

- Your breathing cycle has four distinct stages you can be aware of: 1) The beginning of breathing in. 2) The end of breathing in (pause). 3) The beginning of breathing out. 4) The end of breathing out.

- Notice whether you are breathing fast or slow, but make no effort to consciously change that rate. Just notice what it is. Your breathing rate will naturally slow and quiet as you meditate.

- Do it every day for a few years and see how it works.

- Read about meditation to get other insights.

My favorite books on the subject are *Wherever You Go There You Are* by Jon Kabat-Zinn and *Walking Meditation* by Thich Nhat Hanh.

# Some thoughts for PTSD and Spirituality

## by Sister Ave Clark

Post Traumatic Stress disorder can so devastate one's life. One moment we are fine, and then a memory, a flashback, a panic and anxiety attack leave us shattered, holding fragilely onto life, wondering if we can ever keep on. It is so very painful and lonely a journey. Then we are reminded of the reading in Romans 8:38-39, "nothing, nothing can separate us from God's love." When I am in this fragile state, I find myself chatting with my God, whom I call a God of Compassion (some might call a higher power). I let my weakness be my strength. It has taught me so much and filled my emptiness with compassion for other survivors of violence.

I suffer greatly at night, many a sleepless night, and what has helped me is to light a little candle and feel its warmth console me and I gently say to myself, "you are safe," in God's love is your refuge, in a caring companion's phone call late at night, in prayers whispered or wept from my Spirit that yearns to keep on surviving—

I guess you might say my chronic PTSD has taken me (as I am sure all of you) into the dark places and with my inner spirit— a spark is rekindled that says "keep on, keep on." Trusting is not always easy but that little candle's light and warmth have given me HOPE to believe greatly that

my weakness has become my strength, my PTSD has become an unassuming Grace, and so we continue to pray for all of you heart to heart.

I leave with you my ten mercy beads to pray:

1. Lord, show me your mercy in the ordinary events of each day
2. Lord, help me to rest and stay calm.
3. Lord, fill my emptiness with your presence.
4. Lord, comfort my aching spirit and help me to comfort others.
5. Lord, let me close my eyes and sleep in peace.
6. Lord, teach me to take time with myself.
7. Lord, be my constant and loyal friend.
8. Lord, help me to be valiant.
9. Lord, be gentle and help me to be gentle with my pain.
10. Lord, walk with me.

—Sister Ave Clark, O.P. is coordinator of Heart To Heart Ministry, and author of *Lights In The Darkness* (which is also available in Spanish),

## Letting Go

In October of 1997, I went to the first Attleboro retreat for Combat Veterans and Spouses. Saturday evening, we all sat in a circle. In couples, or supported by one of the leaders, people went up and put a piece of paper in the bowl on Father Phil's table/altar. On each paper was written something we wanted to leave at the retreat. Some people read what they had written, some did not.

I felt silly, doubted that it would work, but I chose one of my deepest wounds, the feeling of being unlovable, which had often caused me to misinterpret Bob's behavior—particularly his PTSD symptoms—as proof that I'm no good or that he didn't really love me.

I wrote "the feeling that no one could ever really love me" on a piece of paper, walked up, read it, crumpled it up and threw it in. When every one had done this we passed the bowl around the circle which symbolized sharing each other's burden, and then went outside and burned the papers.

I forgot about it until a couple of weeks ago when I realized that that feeling is gone.

In her new CD, *The Way I Should*, Iris DeMent sings,

"I don't know just where God lives  
Ain't all that sure just exactly who  
God is

I don't know there's a church that  
deserves to take God's name  
I just know when I look around  
I see

The hand of someone or something  
that is bigger than me,  
and I call that God  
and I pray to that God."