

Self-Empowerment

Autumn 2005

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

Vol. 13, Number 1

A publication of  Agape Interfaith Ministries

LABYRINTHIAN WAYS

A childhood game had us chanting, “Going on a treasure hunt, “X” marks the spot...” Since that time the wording may have changed, but the sentiment remains the same. We all seem to be going on a treasure hunt. Whether we are seeking better relationships, greater abundance, better health or deeper peace, everybody seems to be on some kind of journey toward one or more prizes. (Some people want it *all!*)

Symbolic Pilgrimage

From days of old there have been pilgrimages to holy places, journeys along sacred paths toward a distant sacred goal, quests for wholeness of body, mind, and spirit. We, too, are going on a treasure hunt, seeking guidance along a path that will move us toward our goals.

Part of the guidance we accept is from those who we know or trust to show us the way. Our guides include family, friends, and “experts” who share what they have experienced on their paths. They help give us guideposts that assist us during the navigation through life.

The other part of our guidance comes from deep within. It might feel like intuition or possibly that still small voice within that knows more than our day-to-day ego-based mind. Those who are willing to journey within, plumbing depths of consciousness to a deep well of knowing, can be guided in miraculous ways.

Certain personality types find themselves more comfortable with either external seeking or internal processing, and so they tend to focus a major part of their attention on whichever is their more comfortable direction. Very often, however, a great treasure can be found by going in the opposite direction of habitual patterns, not because either direction is right or wrong, but because of the balance that comes to those who are willing to stretch beyond their habit patterns.

The tricky part of this so-called journey is the realization that there is really nowhere to go. It has been known by a few, and glimpsed by many, that our wholeness is already right where we are, while our

limited perceptions block our awareness to our essential perfection. The journey-without-distance to our wholeness is said to be a remembering of truth within. Mystics speak of the Kingdom of Heaven being within us. Christianity and Judaism speak of heaven, Islam of Paradise, Buddhism of Nirvana, and Taoism of the Absolute. Some spiritual teachers point to the Power of Now as being that point in consciousness where life’s perfection can be experienced.

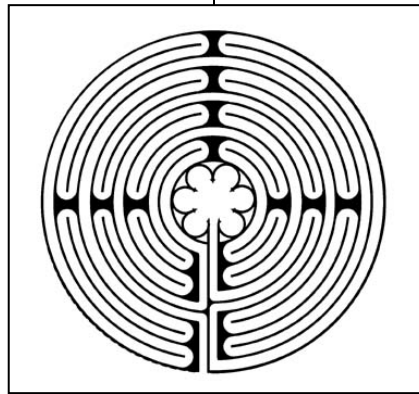
It is a paradox that each of us must follow our own internal guidance, yet we cannot find it by ourselves. It is in relationship with others that we see the parts of ourselves that are blind spots in need of healing. Our brothers and sisters gift us with feedback and guidance for our pilgrimage, when we are open to receiving such. The speck we see in our brother’s eye can bring our awareness to the beam in our own eye.

In past issues we have focused on how forgiveness and gratitude are the keys to getting warmer and warmer on this treasure hunt. The more we forgive ourselves and others, and the more we appreciate and feel gratitude, the closer we get to the heavenly treasure of the awareness of our wholeness in body, mind and spirit.

You’re getting warmer...

Several years ago I had the great fortune of being introduced to walking the labyrinth. A labyrinth is a confined single-path walk leading toward a center. Unlike a *maze*, which is designed with dead ends to confuse and challenge, a labyrinth’s single path allows for relaxation and meditation while walking. The graphic in the center of this page is an 11-circuit design from Chartres Cathedral in France. This is a popular labyrinth design, but it is far from being the only pattern.

Walking a labyrinth is, for some, a most delicious form of meditation. Walking can be a delightful meditation, and walking the labyrinth includes elements that can add to an awareness of the sacred. Some labyrinths are placed in wooded settings to include the sights and smells of nature. Others are indoors on a floor or canvas material. On the pattern shown here, the



walk goes in a circular pattern that takes the person close to the center and away from the center several times before actually reaching it. Upon reaching the center, the person can stand or sit in the center for a while, but must eventually leave it to complete the return walk to the “outside”. That movement has a powerful effect on the psyche and the effects can build cumulatively to nurture patience, humility, and trust. The walk spirals inward and spirals outward. The nonverbal impact bypasses the logical mind to touch the deepest parts of the self. Personally, I find that my old habit of wanting to control things in a linear way has less dominance in my thinking and behavior. Others have different experiences and insights as a result of a labyrinth walk.

Consider trying this or other forms of meditative walks. (See the box below for a few of the labyrinths in the Philadelphia area.)

As you experience your personal pilgrimage, no matter what form it takes, may you find your treasure.

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

Labyrinths in the Philadelphia area

Holy Innocents St. Paul’s Church
Scheduled walks & workshops; labyrinth rental
Torresdale & Tyson Avenues, Phila., PA 19135
215-624-1144 HISPEpiscopal@aol.com

St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church
Daily walks; labyrinth rental
19 South 10th Street, Phila., PA 19107 215-922-3807

Jane Marie Downey, Clarity Concepts Inc.
Corporate & group workshops
610-825-3705
janedowney@clarityconceptsinc.com

A Course in Miracles study groups

Open your mind and heart to the consciousness and experience of miracles. Share in the peace and joy that results from changing your perceptions.

NE Philadelphia

1st & 3rd Sundays, 7:30 - 9:00 pm
1100 Friendship Street

Corner of Friendship Street & Algon Avenue,
4 streets south of Cottman Avenue (Route 73)

Moorestown, NJ

2nd & 4th Mondays, 7:00 – 8:30 pm
Center for Conscious Living

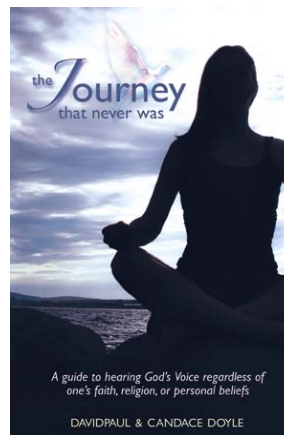
302 N. Washington Avenue, #101

For info call Rev. Jill Sabin Carel 215-742-0552.

Have you ever wanted to hear the Holy Spirit as a distinct and conversational Voice within you?

The Journey That Never Was

Can show you how...



The Journey That Never Was: A Guide to hearing God’s Voice regardless of one’s faith, religion, or personal beliefs by DavidPaul and Candace Doyle

The Journey That Never Was is for anyone who desires to hear the Voice of the Holy Spirit. It empowers individuals to receive guidance and support in all areas of their lives.

DavidPaul and Candace Doyle, a husband and wife team who each hear the Holy Spirit as a distinct and conversational Voice, share their personal spiritual journey, messages from the Holy Spirit, and exercises to help the reader hear God’s Voice with the specificity and clarity they truly long for.

“Very helpful to those who are trying to open the door to be guided by the inner Voice of God.” **Gerald G. Jampolsky, M.D., author of *Love Is Letting Go of Fear***

Available through local bookstores and online via Amazon.com.

Visit www.rightmindedness.com for information about the Doyles’ book, workshops, exercises, teleclasses, and messages from the Holy Spirit.

~

“The Holy Meeting Place Within” workshop is being offered as a 6-week telephone class on Monday evenings beginning November 7, 2005. Experience this incredible opportunity from the comfort of your own home.

Register before Oct 15th for \$65 (or \$80 for later registrations) online or by calling 541-488-0426.

~

A Badge of Courage

by Barbara C. Raven

Before having elective surgery in July of 2001, I had a routine sonogram. That test revealed that something more serious was wrong, and after further tests, it was confirmed that I had follicular lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system.

I then began chemotherapy treatment. By the fall of that year, I was in excruciating pain. The chemotherapy had caused sores in my mouth and on my tongue. Pieces of my tongue literally came off. I couldn't eat regular food for five or six months.

Reading *Daily Word* and Unity teachings supported me during that time and continue to support me today. According to the doctors, this kind of cancer is a very tenacious disease that, when caught early, is managed through periodic chemotherapy.

My work as Rev. Paul Tenaglia's assistant in the office of the Unity Church of New York also blessed me at this time and led me to experience renewed hope from a most unusual source at a Unity retreat.

In July 2002, I attended our regular church retreat at the beautiful Trinity Conference Center in West Cornwall, Connecticut. I had made it through the worst time of my treatment. Because of the cancer, I still needed chemotherapy, but I was no longer in such a devastated condition. On the evening before the last day of the retreat, those in attendance observed a time of silence. We started right before dinner and didn't break the silence until the next morning after we had returned from what we called "our silent walk with God." After breakfast, we ended the silence, and all of us, who chose to, shared what we experienced on that walk.

During my walk with God, I saw what I can only describe as a miracle tree: a huge tree with a deep gash that had been burned into its trunk by what I surmised was a searing lightning strike. I could almost feel the pain that tree must have suffered, but as I raised my eyes from that terrible scar to the rest of the tree, I was in awe of the truth that was revealed. There was a full canopy of healthy green leaves at the top of the tree!

Despite the appearance of the scarred trunk, this was a thriving tree, encompassing and healing its wound with new life and growth. This tree was a living metaphor for what I had been through. As I stood in front of the tree, it showed me a story of its own healing that literally took my breath away. Feeling both comforted and inspired, I took in a deep breath of air and walked over to a low stone wall on the property. Immediately I began to write words in my notebook that seemed to flow from my heart to my hand and out through my pen.

During our time of sharing messages that God had given us during our silent morning walk, I read "Badge of Courage," the poem I had just written. Later David Friedman, a Broadway composer who was helping with

the music for the retreat, said, "Barbara, I was so moved by your poem I would like a copy of it so that I can set it to music." I was pleased about his request, gave him a copy of my poem, and heard nothing more about it for a while.

On the first anniversary of September 11, we were having a church service that was dedicated to courage and overcoming. The music director, Britt Hall, said to me, "I seem to recall that the poem you read at our retreat had something to do with the theme of this service. Would you be willing to read it this Sunday?"

"Of course, I would," was my answer.

That Sunday I read my poem.

**Tree standing so tall and proud
Wearing her bold scar like a survival talisman
A wound – a deep burnt gash in her trunk
Reaching down to her roots
Yet surrounded by the power of the trunk
Which somehow encompassed it
Allowing it to become one dignified whole
So that the scar is one with the tree –
a badge of courage.**

**It says, "Be not afraid – look how far I've come,
How tall I've grown; my leaves continue to unfurl
In the morning sun and the mist of twilight.
There is nothing to hold me back
No tragedy so great that I cannot overcome;
I have walked through the valley of the shadow
And returned triumphant to the Source of all.
My beloved sister, you can do – wait –
You are doing the same, for we are one with God."
With that utterance no more needs to be said.**

Afterward I took a seat in the front row. The next thing I knew, David announced that he had set my poem to music and began to play as Spiritus, the church's choral group, sang "Badge of Courage." I was deeply moved and started crying.

Word about the poem grew from that time on. David read the poem to Patricia Neal, an award-winning actress, and she loved it. Patricia, who has recovered from three strokes, said, "This poem should be in every stroke center in the world," and she offered to record a reading of the poem.

Then David showed the poem to someone who was a cancer survivor, and she said, "The message of this poem should be in a book." Later a book was developed and published. In addition to that, Spiritus recorded "Badge of Courage" on their first CD.

I believe the real message of my poem is that no matter what we have to deal with in life, the power and the presence of God within will help us overcome it. In the darkest moments, we might feel that we are abandoned, but we never are. God is always present, and we

experience this holy presence when we open ourselves to God.

I didn't always consciously know this during my treatment, but I knew it on some deeper level. At one point I asked a very spiritually aware person who had written a book about healing, "Tell me something. When you're in pain, how do you overcome it?" She said, "That's when I pray for other people."

That is a practice I began to apply in my life. If I woke in the middle of the night because my mouth was hurting, I would pray for those who might be suffering at that moment. The very act of praying for others relieved me of the intense pain and reminded me that we each have a badge of courage.

Barbara Raven serves as director of pastoral care and as administrative assistant at Unity Church of New York. More information on Barbara's book may be found at www.unitynyc.org. To hear "Badge of Courage" go to www.dailyword.org/spiritus.

Published in August 2005 Daily Word® magazine. Reprinted by permission of author.

The Practice by Dan Joseph

In past newsletters, I've written about my love of rock climbing. Whether high up on a cliff, or bouldering close to the ground, I find climbing deeply fulfilling. However, it turns out that there's a common trap that many climbers fall into. And I am no exception. Many of us climbers are rather intense people. We have a hard time saying "no" to repeated attempts at a challenge. As a fellow climber once said: "If you throw yourself at the rock enough times, the rock will eventually yield." Perhaps it will. But in the process, you might end up twisting your ankles and straining your shoulders and tweaking your back. At least, that's what happened to me.

So recently, I gave the rock a break and backed off to visit a physical therapist. And there I found something quite interesting. My physical therapist was highly skilled. She was actually a former climber herself, and she was familiar with the common injuries that climbers encounter. She had a very good sense of what was wrong with me, and how to fix it. But here was the interesting thing: Instead of "fixing" my problems, she took me into the exercise room and said, "I'm going to teach you a series of exercises. These will strengthen the supportive muscles. You're going to have to work hard, but you should make a good recovery." She then proceeded to work me to exhaustion. There were Swiss ball balances, elastic rope stretches, weight lifts, and deep bends. I had to catch objects while standing on one leg, on a pivoting thing. I had to balance with my eyes closed. "It's like Jedi training," I said. "Yes," she said, "We'll start levitating objects next." After a few weeks of this, I felt

much better. And I was able to begin climbing again (a bit more gently this time) without any troubles. In the end, it turned out that I had done the bulk of the work – not my therapist. She had taught me; I had practiced. I had used the tools that she gave me. And the results were significant.

An Active Approach

So here's the reason that I share this story: As I was working on my exercises – both in sessions, and at home – I began to wonder something. If this approach worked so well for physical therapy, why not apply it to *psychotherapy*? Or for that matter, any type of inner or spiritual growth? This was an active process; I was expected to practice. The therapist was a teacher, a supporter, and a cheerleader of sorts. But the real work came from me. There was an ongoing set of practices, which required some effort – and produced noticeable results.

In truth, this active approach is central to a variety of spiritual and psychological systems. The workbook of *A Course in Miracles* takes a similar tack. So do many meditation courses. It's similar to the methods employed by cognitive-behavioral psychotherapists, as well. In all of these approaches, we are expected to take an active role in our growth.

I first came to appreciate the value of an active approach through my work with *A Course in Miracles*. For the first few years that I studied the book, I thought that understanding the concepts was the key. So I studied and studied and studied. After a while, I knew the book inside and out – and yet I was miserable! Then one day I shifted my focus. I decided to *practice* the ideas that I had been reading. And boy, was that a whole new ballgame. I began to appreciate the huge difference between insight and application – between theory and practice. It wasn't easy, but I found that every little step produced results. The theory was helpful, but the *practice* was the key.

I find that the same holds true for any form of inner or spiritual growth. In order to experience true, lasting results, we need to practice. Our practice can be gentle; it doesn't have to be intense. But there is some work to do.

Meditation

Building on this, I'd like to share a basic spiritual practice that you can try out. This practice is similar to various meditation and prayer practices from other disciplines. It is by no means new. However, I'll offer my own unique take on it.

I decided to write about this topic because I realized that many people are seeking a simple approach to meditation (or prayer). They don't want something too esoteric. They might, as a friend of mine said, simply want to calm their "monkey minds."

I am a big fan of meditation and focused prayer. I consider meditation to be an essential part of spiritual growth. *A Course in Miracles* frequently speaks to the importance of training the mind. Many other spiritual

paths offer similar attitudes. The idea is that the flitting-about nature of the mind interferes with our ability to receive the Thoughts of God – and sustain an experience of the Love of God. A meditation practice addresses this. It can help us receive clearer inner guidance, feel more spiritually connected, and provide a sense of focus and direction. It is a powerful tool.

Before I outline this simple practice, I want to share a few things:

1. Very few people find meditation easy at first.
2. However, it usually becomes easier through practice.

Don't let the initial challenge scare you off! Let me now share three introductory points about meditation, and then the main practice.

The Setting

One of the first steps in developing a meditation practice is to give yourself a comfortable setting. As you go along, you will likely need less and less external support. You'll be able to meditate on a subway or bus, or in the middle of a shopping center. But at the beginning, try to make things easy on yourself.

Some people choose a favorite chair for their practice. Others enjoy a setting with a view of nature. People who aren't able to meditate at home might seek out a church or meditation center. (Churches in big cities tend to be remarkably quiet and under-utilized.) Some people are able to set aside a whole room for use in meditation. The key is to find a comfortable space that you can use daily – or multiple times during the day. Although a comfortable external setting won't be as important in the future, it can be a nice support at the beginning.

Structure

Perhaps the most important aspect in developing a meditation practice is regularity. When meditation becomes a habit, it's easy. *A Course in Miracles* recommends setting aside some time for a spiritual practice just after waking up in the morning, and just before going to sleep at night. Other systems of meditation recommend a similar morning/evening pattern. However, you can experiment and see what works. Perhaps you will find that mid-day is best for you. Or late afternoon. The key is to find a time that's repeatable. Daily structure can provide great support – at least, at the beginning.

Comfort

Certain schools of meditation teach that you need to adopt specific postures (back straight, etc.) I do not encourage people – especially at the beginning – to become concerned about this. Rather, I encourage you to *make yourself comfortable*. If that means a cross-legged, back-straight posture on the floor, great! But if it means relaxing in a cozy chair, wonderful. Again, give yourself a chance. After developing a meditation practice for a while, you will very likely tailor things in a unique way. You might try various postures, techniques, and so forth.

But at the beginning, make yourself comfortable. The goal is to keep things enjoyable!

Centering Point

Let me now move on to the heart of the practice. Although there are many different approaches to meditation, I'm going to offer a simple method. You might recognize this as similar to something that you've learned elsewhere. In this meditation approach, you begin by choosing a word or phrase that brings you a sense of peace. You can choose a word like:

"Peace" "Tranquility" "Gentleness" Or a phrase like: "God is with me." "All is forgiven." "My heart is filled with love." Or whatever else appeals to you.

Then, having chosen this word or phrase, you begin to calmly repeat it to yourself, over and over. As you do this, it's likely that your mind will try to send you off on various tracks. What about that business project? And the dinner with the neighbors tonight? Is the thing with the bank taken care of? When's the last time that you got an oil change? Through this all, you gently, calmly repeat the phrase. Continue to bring your mind back to the centering point, regardless of how many tracks it tries to follow.

If you were to take a brief "snapshot" of your practice, it might look like this:

"Tranquility." "Tranquility." "Tranquility."
"Oh shoot – I think I forgot to tell Bill about that issue with the loan. I really should have..." "Tranquility."
"...should have thought about that before. But maybe..."
"Tranquility." "...maybe if..." "Tranquility."
"Tranquility." "...maybe if I call him..."
"Tranquility." "Tranquility."

There is no "forcing" things in this practice. There is no fighting. Rather, there is just a calm, gentle repetition of the word or phrase – and a continued practice of bringing the mind back to this centering point. If the mind wanders, you bring it gently back. Then again. Then again.

That's it! It's not too difficult, really.

Of course, many people find this practice challenging at the beginning. Sometimes the mind will put up a bit of resistance to this introduction of focus. But eventually, things will become easier. At some point, the mind realizes that it feels *good* to be at peace. At that point, the practice can become second-nature.

I've included a slightly more developed commentary on this practice in my book *Inspired by Miracles*. An excerpt can be found in the "excerpts" section of my website (under "Focusing the Mind.") And as always, I encourage you to experiment and see what works for you. There are as many approaches to meditation as there are people. Feel free to tailor things to suit your needs. You're also welcome to ask me any questions, if things are unclear.

Dan Joseph / Quiet Mind Newsletter
August 2005

<http://www.DanJoseph.com>

Daily Word

My life is a spiritual journey that fulfills my soul.

My life is a journey, a journey of the soul that uplifts me and leads me to the mountaintop experiences of life.

To fully experience the blessings I will encounter along the way, I prepare for my journey by spending time in the silence with God. Here, I connect with the wonder that God is. I let go of my own thoughts and preconceived notions about how things should be and let God lead me on a journey of light and love and new wonders to behold.

In the silence with God, I learn what I need to do today, this moment. I trust God to lead me to those people and experiences that will bless my journey of knowing the joy of spiritual fulfillment.

Reprinted with permission of Unity®, publisher of *Daily Word*®. The Daily Word, Unity Village, MO 64065. One year subscription \$10.95. Customer Svc: 1-800-669-0282.

Agape Interfaith Ministries
1100 Friendship Street
Philadelphia, PA 19111



PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Self-Empowerment is published quarterly (4 issues/year)

Publisher & Editor-in-Chief: Rev. Jill Sabin Carel

Editor: Michael P. Tunney

Agape Interfaith Ministries, 1100 Friendship Street,

Philadelphia, PA 19111 Phone: (215) 742-0552

Email: Jilleroni@juno.com

Web: www.AgapeInterfaith.org

Subscriptions are available without charge, but tax-deductible donations are gratefully received to support the printing and mailing expenses of this publication. A suggested donation of \$5 or more per year is invited.

To be added to the Self-Empowerment mailing list, you may call, email or mail your clearly printed name and address to Agape Interfaith Ministries.

Submission of letters, questions and articles are welcome and encouraged. We reserve the right to edit. Please note on any correspondence if you wish your name to be withheld. We publish under One-Time Rights (rights revert to writer's ownership after publication).

Entire contents © 2005, Agape Interfaith Ministries.

The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.