

Self-Empowerment

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The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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Once Upon a Time

We love stories – sagas, dramas, tales, parables, anecdotes, narratives, myths, fables, folktales, short stories and novels.

Some enjoy love stories while others relish science fiction. We each have our preferences for the style and content of the stories we are attracted to. We delight in tales that resonate with the thoughts and feelings we have experienced or seek.

Basic Plot Lines

It has been suggested that there are only a few basic plot lines to the stories we share. One short list enumerates the possible varieties of conflict between a character and something or someone else: as in conflict with nature, another character, the environment, technology, the supernatural, the self, or God.

A more descriptive list of plots suggests: adventure, discovery, escape, love, forbidden love, maturation, metamorphosis, pursuit, quest, rescue, revenge, the riddle, rivalry, sacrifice, temptation, transformation, underdog, wretched excess, ascension, descension.

There are other lists, but in general, it appears that they are simply more detailed descriptions of previously mentioned potential conflicts. It would seem that our stories tell of conflicts endured, surmounted, or lost.

Who or what would we be without conflict? Could we live a story of ongoing peace and harmony? What would be described or experienced? Would ongoing peace be boring or blissful? Do we want peace or are we addicted to stories of conflict?

What are your favorite stories? Do you love the story of your life? Maybe you love the story of a bigger-than-life hero, actor, historical figure, or ancestor. Are your favorite stories fact or fiction?

The Palace of Illusions

I recently savored reading *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. This novel is a retelling of the 5,000 year old Indian epic, the Mahabharata, from the point of view of one of the

female characters. Most Westerners have not been exposed to the Mahabharata or the Bhagavad Gita (one part of the Mahabharata), a magnificent ancient tale of soap-opera relationships, political dynamics, and spiritual lessons. Those who are familiar with this epic are deeply touched by its wealth of wisdom.

Despite cultural differences, I dare say that the Mahabharata is the ultimate story of every plot line we know. It tells of baffling compulsions, vices and their consequences, loyalty, betrayal, pride, humiliation, revenge, virtue, leadership, war, and destiny. And the motivations of the characters 5,000 years ago are the same motivations that drive us today.

This version of the story, as seen through the eyes of

Draupadi, begins with her love of stories. She wants to be told and re-told the story of her entrance into the world and the prediction

of her huge impact on the history of the world. Like Draupadi, we want to savor the story of our purpose in the world. Also, like Draupadi, we are beginning to recognize the positive and negative consequences of repeating our story. At one point she realizes, “I thought, I shouldn’t have chosen this story. Every time I spoke it, it embedded itself deeper into my brother’s flesh, for a story gains power with retelling.” And later she says, “Perhaps that is the miracle of stories. They make us realize that we’re not alone in our folly and our suffering.”

Who Would You Be Without Your Story?

I love “The Work” of Byron Katie as described in her books, taught through trainings and appearances, and shared on www.TheWork.com.

In 1986, Byron Kathleen Reid (known as “Katie”) was at a critical point in her life. For ten years, she had grown increasingly paranoid, angry, and depressed. She often stayed in bed for weeks at a time, afraid to leave the house, unable even to brush her teeth. Then one morning, suddenly, Katie woke up with a completely different perspective on reality. Her experience was a major transformational experience of consciousness. She lost the old concept of herself and dissociated from her previously painful “story,” all the meanings and definitions that had caused her suffering. Instead, she had a wordless experience of herself as clear presence, without any

A story gains power with retelling.

attachment to her old view of her life circumstances. For a time, she could not even articulate her new perceptions. As others approached her and asked how they could achieve such freedom, she formulated an elegantly simple process of questioning one's thoughts, – one suffering thought at a time. The process of self-inquiry that is known as The Work has traveled worldwide and is helping countless people end their confusion and suffering.

Katie writes, "What I realized in 1986 is that when I argue with reality, I lose – but only 100% of the time. How do I know the wind should blow? It's blowing. How do I know that Paul should yell at me? He's yelling. Arguing with reality is like trying to teach a cat to bark: Hopeless. What is is. Everything in the world is doing its job perfectly. (That doesn't mean it won't change.) Doing The Work and seeing reality as it is (not as it isn't) leaves me the freedom to act with clarity, kindness, and love. People think that when you stop fighting reality you become complacent and lose all motivation for action. That's not my experience. There are two ways to bring change into the world – at war with reality, or in peace. Who's going to be more effective? We need fear as a motivator – is it true? Who would you be without that story?"

The Work is a series of four questions and a turnaround that breaks the spell of the limited version of our story. It offers alternate possibilities for the meaning of circumstances in our lives, and frees us up to being with what is happening in a more flexible and open way.

Do you have an imagined story about what life will be like when one of the current presidential candidates is elected? Do you think that the country will be in trouble if one of those candidates wins? Byron Katie's The Work would ask: Is it true? Can you absolutely know that it's true? How do you react when you think that thought? Who would you be without the thought?

We have an opportunity to drop the story, which is only a thought or a set of thoughts. We can be free of the suffering that is the result of our investment in the story we are believing. When a new president is elected, we will have many opportunities to notice what decisions are made and respond to them as we are guided, preferably from a state of peace instead of fear or anger. We can choose to learn more about the issues, advocate for change, pray for those in positions of power, communicate our positions, educate others with the facts as we know them, etc. We can turn around our fear-based "should" or "shouldn't" stories to face what is with clarity and freedom.

Everybody's Right

In the story "Fiddler on the Roof" the character Tevye tells each person that they are right. One man, exasperated, says to him, "They can't all be right." Tevye answer, "You're right, too!"

From each of our perspectives, we are all right! Alas, it is little comfort to know that everyone is right from their point of view. Each of us wants things the way we want them. And as much as we say we don't want war, we are constantly at war in our hearts and minds with those who do not agree with our positions. Wars with guns are the inevitable consequence of our own violent desire to have our way.

The story of the Mahabharata tells of characters who are following "Dharma" even in the decision to go to war, despite their efforts to solve conflicts peacefully. The Sanskrit term Dharma means one's righteous duty, right action, right path, or that which is correct for that person at that point in time. Questions about destiny vs free-will provoke doubts and fears about how to know one's Dharma. How clear is it to any individual whether to participate in a war? Would I be following Dharma when I decide one way or the other? What is my story? Can I follow a path without suffering?

We cannot know the future. We can only follow the path that appears to be our right path now. When we choose to act consciously, our Dharma is directed by an Inner Wisdom.

There is an Inner Wisdom that has been known as the Holy Spirit or the Voice for God. When we drop our resistance to what is, the clarity that emerges is a wonderful guidance system. While we still love stories, that Inner Wisdom can use those stories to enlighten and inspire us. When we are willing to drop the stories of conflict and suffering, that Inner Wisdom can show us the way back to unconditional love and freedom.

A story gains power with retelling – that's good news and bad news. What stories are you rehearsing and replaying in your life?

Be still. Meditate. Pray. Allow your story to emerge from the most conscious place within you.

May our story, the one that gains power with retelling, be one of freedom, respect, and peace.

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

ÉÉÉ

THE PATH WITHIN by Resta Burnham

Time passes by. We ask why
we are living in this world.
Days come and go. Still we don't know
if there is meaning in this world.
Now there's a path that opens into darkness,
leads me past everything my heart has
thought was true. And if I choose to go within,
what will I find, what monsters
guard the meaning for my life,
the symbols I am dreaming? Is it worth
the painful search to go within?

Time passes by. So long we've tried
adjusting to the world.
Years come and go. Still our souls
yearn for meaning in this world.
Again the road that leads into the forest.
Shall I go? Have I the courage to explore it?
Can I bear what's hidden there deep within?
Would you come, take my hand and
walk beside me. Joined as one,
we can face what's been denied,
be healed by light, undo the night that lies within.

Time passes by. We ask why
we are living in this world.

Resta Burnham now offers 13 volumes of songs of the spirit, each with approximately 3 hours of beautiful soul-enriching music and lyrics based on the teachings of "A Course in Miracles."

For more information contact: Resta Burnham, Remember to Laugh Productions, Inc., 7535 Higdon Court, Indianapolis, IN 46214 www.acimmusic.com restasmusic@mac.com (317) 354-3780

VOICE FOR LOVE MESSAGE

The following "Voice for Love" inspirational message is shared with you through Rev. Jill Carel. Jill has been sharing messages of comfort, healing, and guidance in private counseling sessions and via telephones. She now offers workshops to teach others to access this Inner Wisdom for themselves.

Greetings and Blessings to you, Dear One. Thank you for your willingness to receive this message today on the subject of "stories."

There are those who listen to stories with the objective of being entertained and receiving a diversion from what they consider a difficult or challenging life situation. There can be a gift in this despite the initial motivation to be entertained or

diverted. A new more positive purpose can be served when a little bit of willingness is added to the mix, and that willingness is for inspiration.

Divine inspiration is available in all places at all times, and yet it is your willingness that makes the difference to your receiving it. A little bit of willingness to receive divine guidance, comfort, or healing opens the door and invites this wonderful guest in.

No matter what story you are enjoying, a deeper lesson can be shared with you in this way. The elements of the story, the characters and the circumstances, can configure in such a way as to communicate a much needed lesson, a deeper understanding, compassion, or intuition. It is your receptivity that will notice that symbol which will lead to your knowing. While others may watch or read the same story as you, they will not (necessarily) notice the same elements or extract the same meaning.

You may wonder at your own experience of being exposed to a story that you already know and somehow this time a deeper meaning reaches you that you had not noticed before. It may seem miraculous, exciting, and new when you thought you were already familiar with the entire story.

Your willingness, that opens the door to deeper richer levels of truth, is a gift that is given to you and can be accepted or rejected in any moment. You are neither bad nor wrong when you do not accept the gift. You simply delay the joy that you could be experiencing in the moment.

It is wished for you to receive the gift of love, the gift of joy, the gift of peace, and all the gifts that flow from these. And the gift of free will allows you the choice of whether and when you will accept the many gifts.

They are freely offered to you. And when you are ready you will be surprised and delighted at the abundance that is ready to flow into your life.

You are much loved and deeply appreciated. And when you are ready to receive the gifts of love and gratitude, you will see, hear, and experience them through every story in your world.

Blessings, Dear One.

Amen

A Course in Miracles study groups and The Voice for Love workshops

Open your mind and heart to the consciousness and experience of miracles. Share in the peace and joy that results from changing your perceptions as you allow your Inner Wisdom to lead the way.

Spiritual study groups, individual sessions, and workshops are held in Northeast Philadelphia and South Jersey locations.

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

Daily Word

I share inspiration of the heart in blessing others.

I use my words as treasured, God-given tools of expression. As I do, the tone and passion of my words offer inspiration to those who listen to them.

The inspiration I share is not limited to the spoken word. I may record my thoughts and happenings for others to hear. I may write of feelings in letters, journals, or narratives. I may research family histories or build scrapbooks that trace details of the past.

As others read and take this information into their hearts, they learn, discern, and are inspired. What I have to share may be valued at the time or become a gem for posterity. History, artistry, emotion – my shared blessings for all.

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Blessings to you!

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.